The Logical Poetics of *Paradise Regained*

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**Abstract** In this essay, Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler argues that the verbal exchanges in *Paradise Regained*—and thus the work’s poetics—are informed by Milton’s interpretation of the logic of the sixteenth-century scholar Pierre de la Ramée (Ramus), which had profound implications for the process of invention and thus for the creative process itself. Instead of regarding the encounter between the Son and Satan as a debate, she views it as the method by which, through Ramist logic, the Son uncovers the truth and intuits that he is the Son of God.

**Keywords:** logic of Petrus Ramus; Milton’s *Art of Logic*; verbal exchange and the classical divisions of rhetoric; intuition and dialectic; George Downman

**Even though it has received** less recent critical attention than *Samson Agonistes*, its partner in the volume of 1671, *Paradise Regained* has nonetheless been a victim of its own success. Outstanding and insightful scholarship has essentially set the boundaries of discussion. As a result, most critical work centers on theological and philosophical issues concerning the Son’s identity and what scholars contend is his process of self-discovery.¹ This perspective informs discussion of the language of the poem, which is typically characterized as debate or dialogue. As William Kerrigan has observed, however, many of these arguments depend on the assumption of a rational Milton, a Ciceronian rhetorician who was incontrovertibly master of all genres of discourse.² Recent work by such scholars as Gordon Teskey question this assumption,


arguing that Milton’s poetry and poetics may owe more to intuition and imagination than to classical humanism. Milton himself provided just such an avenue for study. This essay argues that the verbal exchanges in Paradise Regained—and thus its poetics—are informed by Milton’s interpretation of the logic of the sixteenth-century scholar Pierre de la Ramée (Ramus), which had profound implications for the process of invention and thus for the creative process itself.

This reorientation of perspective on Milton’s creative process—in which I follow the lead of Thomas O. Sloane, who has made the strongest case to date for Milton’s Ramism—brings into relief several current features of seventeenth-century and Milton studies. The approach asks us to reconsider Milton’s own understanding of the purposes of verbal exchange in Paradise Regained, which scholars traditionally have regarded as “debate.” Next, it puts serious emphasis on the relationship of intuition and reason, and on the issue of “uncertainty” in Milton’s late works. Finally, it allows for a view of Paradise Regained as an investigation into the problem of addressing the inner self in a way that has meaning in the world. Milton’s Art of Logic—his reading of Ramus—may, then, provide a key to what happens in Paradise Regained. From this perspective, Paradise Regained is a drama of invention, through which the Son actualizes his being in the world; that is, through his exchanges with Satan, the Son brings forth what he has already intuited within himself, but which requires shaping through verbal exchange.

As Milton understood the process, verbal exchange entailed considerable risk. People must speak (or write) to bring themselves forth, but must also listen, and that includes listening to opposing ideas, which may be wrong or even dangerous. Listening to them entails the risk of being persuaded and possibly harmed. As I have argued elsewhere,

this concern with the relationship between verbal exchange and risk runs throughout Milton's early political prose. The antiprelatical tracts contain numerous images of incompleteness and interruption, while *Areopagitica* reminds readers, "that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary." 7 But failing the trial is always possible, hence Milton’s exemption of “Popery, and open superstition” (565) from toleration of difference in public speech.

It was no accident that Milton was deeply aware of such concerns as he entered into public controversy, for at this time, he also began to teach his nephews logic, and that meant Ramist logic, with all its epistemological implications. 8 In brief, Ramus presented an overt and aggressive challenge to the traditional structures of and assumptions about discourse and understanding by radically reorienting the classical divisions of rhetoric. Classical rhetoric has five parts: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Invention is accomplished through *controversiae*, through *pro et contra* argumentation. 9 In *controversiae*, truth is contingent. A consensus about what is true emerges from the process of "dialogue" or "debate." However, as Plato observed in *Gorgias* and elsewhere, this part of rhetoric does not and cannot serve a quest for absolute truth. To address this problem, Ramus assigned invention and arrangement (and memory) to the realm of logic, leaving to rhetoric only style and delivery. 10 Following Rudolph Agricola, Ramus thus made invention independent of contingency—not a means of discovering arguments so much as a means of uncovering what the soul intuits as truth, of finding a way to inquire into the nature, the essence, of a subject. 11

Ramus also emphasized arrangement, which, as he presented it, became simultaneously a vehicle for effectively presenting the results of invention to an audience and a means of controlling for any errors that arose in the process of invention. Part of Ramus’s definition of arrangement, of course, was what became the most distinguishing

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9. My explanation follows that of Sloane, *Donne, Milton*. I am deeply indebted to Sloane’s work on classical rhetoric and Ramism, as well as to his conviction that Milton was a Ramist.


feature of his work—method. Method was the process of moving from the general to the specific, the abstract to the particular, a procedure built, as Timothy J. Reiss shows, upon a mathematical base. Moreover, this movement was chiefly accomplished through dichotomy, a practice that gained power and clarity from the fact that it could be, and often was, visually represented as an elaborate, right-branching diagram of dichotomies at the beginning of a discussion of the parts of logic and the parts of rhetoric.13

In teaching, Milton drew on his own education at Christ’s Church, Cambridge, where he would have learned from the many English Ramists who stretched in an unbroken line from Gabriel Harvey in the 1570s to William Perkins, to George Downname (whose commentaries provided the foundation for Milton’s Art of Logic), to William Ames, to Milton’s tutor William Chappell.14 In their discussions of form and method, Perkins, Ames, and Chappell in particular shared a view that the human mind was independent and capable of seeking out and knowing truth.15 As a student, Milton would have learned from Chappell’s teaching and Ames’s commentaries to regard Ramus’s work as a moral and ethical, as well as intellectual, practice. He would have seen it as something that was designed to be both accessible and useful. In writing The Art of Logic, Milton gives a distinctive form to existing ideas, thus rendering them his. In so doing, he reveals a mind revising its understanding of both logic and Ramism. It is important to note here that I am not saying there is a direct connection between Milton’s work and that of Perkins, Ames, or Chappell. I am also not debating the argument that many of these ideas can be found in the writings of Aristotle or St. Augustine. I am arguing that the works of Ramus and his English interpreters were those closest to hand when Milton embarked on both teaching and public engagement, and that their emphasis on the search for truth, epistemology, collaboration, and action continued to be in tune with Milton’s own interests as he came to write The Art of Logic and Paradise Regained.

Milton scholars typically have discounted the profound epistemological implications of non-rhetorical invention and arrangement. This oversight is a consequence of depending heavily on the magisterial work of Walter J. Ong, whose overwhelming prejudice in favor of classical rhetoric permeates his Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue, and leads him to see Ramus’s project as a denial of the value of human interac-

13. Milton’s publications do not have such a diagram, nor do most of Ramus’s, but it is a common feature of Ramist texts. See Sloane’s useful comparison of the diagrams to a seeding chart in a sports tournament (Milton, Donne, 140).
tion and to denounce Ramus as a precursor of “dry-as-dust ‘technology’ and systematization.” Thus, Ramus’s devotion to Plato becomes merely a “varnish,” his commitment to actualizing intuitive truth “solipsistic.” One consequence has been that subsequent scholars have focused on the particulars of Ramist logic—analysis and application of the syllogism, for example—rather than the principles behind it. In contrast, Continental scholars have recovered and affirmed the distinctive qualities of Ramist invention. Nelly Bruyère, for example, provides a strong critique of Ong’s assumptions by meticulously reviewing the contents of Ramus’s published texts, documenting Ramus’s alterations and significant revisions. This work may bring us much closer to the qualities of Ramus’s understanding of the process that impressed Milton and informed both his polemics and poetry.

The particular implications of Ramus’s logical invention and arrangement hold paramount significance for Milton’s poetics. Ramus began with the assumption that all human beings possessed an essential connection with God—“la divinité de l’homme.” Following Plato’s myth of the cave (Republic, book 7), Ramus explained that the truth, embodied by the Forms that cast the shadows perceived in the cave, exists, but it is beyond our unaided understanding. The Forms dazzle us when we attempt to apprehend them directly, and yet, because they are true, some vestiges of them, some small forms, reside in our souls. Through these, our souls recognize “igniculos divinitus insitos” (little sparks divinely implanted) because we are linked to the mind of God, where the ultimate truth resides. The divine idea illuminates the small forms within us. In the world of Ramist dialectic, form is what distinguishes something from another, what makes something what it is and different from everything else (Dialectique 65). To comprehend the form is to know the thing itself. From this fundamental principle, Ramus derives his understanding of the definition and function of dialectic. Quoting Plato, Ramus explains in his Dialectique of 1555 that all doctrine is “invention de vérité” (63), that is, discovering what is already there, the truth that exists but is as yet hidden from our view. Because we possess the small forms within, we are capable of discovering truth. Ramus’s invention is thus powerfully connected to intuition, which may be considered a kind of natural dialectic. Thus, invention begins with a violent impulse—“Impulsion violente”—that needs to be tempered and directed by the test of use.
A crucial part of use—strengthening and sharpening intuitive invention—is judgment (the word Ramus prefers to arrangement, the more common term). What we uncover through invention must be arranged: the proper arrangement of words gives tangible shape to the forms, which in turn possess inherent qualities that dictate shape. Invention and arrangement are thus attributes of the selected subject. The subject has inherent qualities that dictate its form. Arrangement is natural, from the general to the particular, and the nature of each is inherent to the thing itself. Ramus's early discussions of judgment emphasize the intuitive qualities it shares with invention. Ramus's initial understanding of judgment was tripartite: he divided it into syllogism, method, and what he termed “third judgment,” which was the individual thinker’s reflection of the mind of God. Over the course of many revisions, Ramus's discussions of “third judgment” decline and eventually disappear completely. And yet his explanation of “third judgment” should remind us that Ramus understood invention and judgment to be deeply interrelated. As he saw them, both served the quest for truth, and the two parts of dialectic needed to function together to shape and render tangible and comprehensible the truth intuited within. Ramus's dialectic, then, was designed to connect the inner world with the outer.

Working together, invention and arrangement form what I call an invention loop, an essentially recursive process that aimed at overcoming the dangers of intuitive reasoning while elevating it to a position of fundamental importance. In place of the give and take of traditional invention, the invention loop begins with the “violent impulse” of intuition, which, via imagination, gives rise to the image. This image is subjected to what I call creative interlocution—reading, listening, editing, collaborating, and testing by example—a process that coalesces the image into the specific argument. As Ramus explains it, invention is the mirror that reflects universal and general images, but use, or usus in Latin, polishes the mirror:

And when he will have before his eyes the art of inventing by these universal kinds, which like a mirror presents the universal and general images of all things, it will be far easier for him to recognize singular species, and consequently to uncover what he will be looking for. But it is necessary, by many examples, by arduous practice and constant use to polish and burnish this mirror that it may reflect and portray these images. (Dialectique 100)

The specific examples presented in verbal exchange refer back to, and clarify or polish, the intuition, which may be confirmed, refined, rejected, or dissolved. The invention

27. I am grateful to Professor Jean-Pierre Metereau, Texas Lutheran University, for his help with this translation.
loop, then, is ordered intuition, a process that disciplines the imagination, which is stimulated by sense perceptions—especially hearing—and regulated by the testing of practical experience.\(^{28}\) Paradoxically, it is through encounters with others—even an enemy—that people are most likely to uncover what they already intuitively know, and therefore fully to bring themselves forth.

The process thus provides the link between intuition and action. However, once we consider the features of the invention loop, we may understand that *usus* is not merely an end in the process of invention. Instead, as creative interlocution, it becomes a crucial function of invention itself: the means by which the image created by the imagination becomes realized in action. Moreover, as part of a loop, it not only realizes the image but also deepens our understanding of it. Hence, the invention loop, and creative interlocution within it, enables us to realize the image because we profoundly understand it, and that is possible because we have polished the mirror within that reflects the divine idea.

However, the process still needs to occur within the human mind. Undergoing the process of necessity entails risk, the possibility that a thinker may fall into error through misperceiving or misjudging. Ramus knew that human beings were capable of error and that habits of mind could impede clear perception. That was why Ramus’s invention occurred in a loop. The process provided constant checks and tests in the form of creative interlocution. And yet, because it occurs in a loop, invention has no inherent end point. One must always act in medias res, as it were, and therefore must always confront the possibility that the mirror is insufficiently polished. While we may indeed uncover the truth, we also risk being wrong. Moreover, creative interlocution occurs only through reading and listening to others. Contact with others does polish the mirror, but it may also alter the image. As Ramus argues, reading affects the judgment while listening affects the imagination.\(^{29}\) The words of others can indeed clarify our own ideas, but they may also distort them. So Ramus’s revision of dialectic left an indelible message: while it is the only way to know truth, creative interlocution—indeed the invention loop itself—is not a guarantee that we will arrive there, and yet it is the only way to temper (but not eliminate) the risk of error. Ramus thus developed a vision and method that, while not contingent, did involve risk—the risk that the self could be altered or lost altogether. Yet it was a risk worth taking, as Milton would explore in *Paradise Regained*.

Milton’s reading of Ramus, as it appears in the *Art of Logic*, echoes Ramus’s assumptions about invention and use. Approximately 85 percent of the text derives from the final revision of Ramus’s *Dialecticae libri duo* (1572), with most of the examples

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\(^{28}\) James J. Murphy explains that Ramus and his colleagues often worked as a team to produce his published works, to the extent that it is not always possible to discern individual authorship of some texts; introduction to Ramus, *Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian*, 1–76 at 25–26. As many scholars have noted, collaborative writing, editing, and annotating the works of others were characteristic Ramist practices (see esp. Meerhoff, “Pédagogie et rhétorique”). Further, as Bruyère shows, Ramus himself refined and developed his method through the thinking and reading he needed to do to answer attacks: without incorporating or synthesizing them, he used them to clarify his own thought (*Méthode et dialectique*, 85–114). See further Meerhoff, “Ramus et Cicéro.”

\(^{29}\) Fumaroli, *L’âge de l’eloquence*, 454–61; Meerhoff, “Ramus et Cicéro.”
and commentary adapted from George Downname’s *Commentarii in P. Rami . . . Dialecticam* (first edition 1601) and several other sources. *The Art of Logic* is a significantly shorter book than Downname’s commentaries. This severe editing reveals what in Ramus was most important to Milton.30 Milton’s changes, although minor, are revelatory. First, Milton insists on describing the art as “logic” rather than “dialectic,” terms that in 1572 Ramus uses almost interchangeably. As Milton explains, the end of logic is thinking, while the end of dialectic is debating. Also, with an approving reference to Sir Francis Bacon’s *De augmentis scientiarum*, Milton clearly distinguishes judgment from arrangement, in contradistinction to the classical rhetorical tradition, which tended to conflate the two terms, and to Downname. Milton explains that judgment is properly allied with both invention and arrangement, as it is active in both processes. As we have seen above, this perspective aligns Milton with Ramus’s own early view of the nature of judgment. Milton’s specific reference to *De augmentis* is to Bacon’s thoughts on induction, which saw method as a means of overcoming the distortions arising from the mind of the individual perceiver. Milton agrees with Bacon and Ramus that method, and indeed proper reasoning in general, will lead one to truth.31 Any thinker may apprehend it, if the thinker is guided by method rather than emotion or prejudice.

It is striking that Milton’s alterations actually bring him close to the Ramus of 1555. A close examination of Milton’s condensation of Downname, then, reveals what Milton considered most important in Ramus’s work on invention and judgment. As we have seen, to Ramus the point of invention was to discover arguments by determining what something is. That discovery, or, more accurately, uncovering occurred within the invention loop. Milton’s preface, editing Downname, emphasizes these crucial ideas and explains the basis for the invention loop. As Milton explains, knowledge may truly be called an *encyclopedia*—a “kind of circle of knowledge closed in on itself and thus in itself complete and perfect” (AL 212). Because all knowledge is a closed circle, the invention loop works. The body of what is possible to be known exists already, because it exists in the mind of God, although that is not to say that it ever will be or could be completely known to finite human beings. But everything that may be known does exist and therefore must have examples.

And the importance of examples is paramount: examples are the key to the stability of Ramist logic. To Milton, “Examples are those things by which the truth of precepts is demonstrated and their use shown. As Plato nicely observes, they are guarantees, so to speak, of our assertions, for what is taught with regard to the genus by the precept is confirmed with regard to the species by the example” (AL 213). “Guarantees” is a particularly crucial term. Milton’s Latin original reads "obsides

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sermonum”32—a security or pledge of our language, or of our words themselves. That is, a pledge that the words represent things that exist. The examples provide the assurance that what we speak is true. The invention loop thus yields the proof that the idea or thing exists. Milton sees this process applying to all reason, all logic (terms he treats as synonymous), both “natural” and “artificially trained,” and cites in support the “four helpers” of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics: sense, observation, induction, and experience* (AL 213). All are interrelated and work together to confirm precepts. Precepts are general so “they can be gathered only from singular instances, and singular instances can be gathered only from sensation. And sensation is useless without observation, which commits to memory the isolated singular instances; observation useless without induction, which from as many singulars as possible sets up a general rule by an induction; and induction useless without experience, which judges the common agreement” (AL 214). So practice (or actus) itself—in the gathering of singular instances and in the confirmation by experience—becomes part of the guarantee.

This explanation reveals why the subject is a matter of concern for Milton: by extension it provides an important perspective on the process of self-knowledge. In *Areopagitica* Milton describes pamphlets on issues of public concern as “the living labours of publick men” (CPW 3:493), living as the writer is living. The truth or falsity of the one is inseparable from the truth or falsity of the other. So, to seek guarantees of our ideas is to seek guarantees of ourselves. To find those guarantees is to find the essence of who we are.

This assumption provides the foundation of Milton’s discussion of form and its expression. Form is necessarily apprehended by inquiry. The questions who are we?, what do we know?, and how do we know it? apply to both the self and everything else. To uncover form is to attempt to attain surety in confusing times. As Milton’s discussion shows, form is a factor of causality: “A cause is not badly defined as that which gives existence to a thing,” and “A cause is efficient-and-matter, or form-and-end” (AL 222, 223). In a manner similar to Ramus’s discussion of the reciprocal relationship of form and shape, Milton describes the relationship of essence and form. Essence precedes existence, so to know the essence is to give something existence. That is, knowing essence makes something real in the world of human beings; it already always exists in the mind of God. Matter is ”the materialized effect” (AL 230) of the thing, and the matter makes the thing evident.

If matter is closely related to human perception, form is deeply connected to human understanding. Appropriately, Milton devotes more extensive discussion to form-and-end, and form itself, than to matter. Form and end are interrelated: “the end is nothing other than a certain result of the form” (AL 232). All distinctions of species are given by form: “its proper essence, through which it is what it is, the species has from its proper form” (AL 302). Therefore, to know the essence of something in particular, we must identify the form, and everything has its own proper form, even though

we may not know it (AL 233). To know what something is in its profoundest sense, we
must seek its form: “a thing can indeed be said to be through other causes, but only
through form to be that which it is” (AL 234, italics in original). As one’s essence is given
by form, inquiry into the nature of one’s essence should lead to a direct apprehension of
form. Inquiry, of course, requires the discovery of examples and employment of observation,
both of which one uses in testing and evaluating the results of one’s inquiries.

Behind Milton’s adaptation of Ramus we may see the optimism that we can attain
intellectual stability. Form can be determined; essence may be knowable if not already
known. From these assumptions, Milton derives three major conclusions. First, “form
is the source of all difference”; it is what makes anything distinct. Second, “if the form is
posited, the thing itself is posited, and if the form is taken away the thing is taken away.”
Third, “Therefore, just as there is a proper nature of things, so will there be an explanation
of them, if the nature can be discovered” (AL 234). Find out what something truly is and
you will understand it. Hence, accompanying the invention loop is attention to preci-
sion in observing (AL bk. 1, chaps. 9 and 11), naming (bk. 1, chap. 24), and defining.

Proper observing and naming lead to correct definition—the aim and purpose
of the entire inquiry. In his chapter on defining (AL bk. 1, chap. 30), Milton explains
how achieving a definition is the outward reflection of having apprehended form:
“Definition occurs when it is explained what a thing is” (AL 310). He continues his dis-
cussion with two important distinctions. First, a perfect definition occurs when we
express the essence of something, derived from its form. Second, an imperfect defini-
tion is a description. In his discussion of definition we may see Milton’s belief in the
potential stability of intellectual inquiry. It is possible to achieve a perfect definition.
However, behind the discussion is Milton’s apprehension that logic is only a poten-
tial guarantee of surety. Form may be fully understood “if the nature can be discov-
ered” (AL 234, emphasis added); a name can be fully expressive of a thing “if the
name” derives from “true notation” (AL 294, emphasis added); definitions may be
incomplete. There is less supreme confidence than may at first appear in Milton’s
Ramist logic. For inherent in Ramist structure is the acknowledgment of instability,
indeed the assumption of risk—the risk that one’s intuition, reasoning, and perception
may be wrong and may be shown to be wrong.

The means to remedy this situation, at least in part, is the challenge of differ-
ce: the creative interlocution that is an essential part of the invention loop. Milton
explores the challenge in his discussions of disagreeing (AL bk. 1, chap. 12) and
description (bk. 1, chap. 31). Chapter 12 bears the title “On the Disagreeing” in Ong’s
English translation. The original reads “De Diversis,” a term that literally means
“different directions” but may carry the connotation of hostility. Diversis thus may
mean either friendly disagreement, as Milton describes it in Areopagitica, or hostile
contention—the challenge of meeting a true enemy. Here, Milton recognizes the
value of both. Arguments of agreement (consentanea) may indeed sharpen one’s own
ideas, but the same may be said for challenges: arguments of disagreement (dis-
sentanea) “are equally manifest: and each is argued equally by the other; yet by their
disagreement they show forth more clearly” (AL 250). It is possible that two divergent
ideas may be “simultaneous” in disagreeing, and may be “equally well-known and equally strong among themselves” (AL 250). 

Dissentanea have an important use. One may not be equal to the other; “nevertheless from their disagreement—or, as others say, by their juxtaposition—they do show forth more clearly” (AL 251), as for example in a comparison of sickness and health.

To Milton, this careful consideration of diversis is what makes Ramus more important than other logicians, as he is the only one to discuss the “doctrine of the diverse” (AL 252). Most logicians do not discuss dissentanea at all because those are weaker arguments than consentanea. However, dissentanea may be effective when all else fails: “one who refuses to be taught by an argument of agreement is reduced by the absurd consequence of an argument of disagreement to the point where, even though unwilling, he cannot but assent to the truth” (AL 251). Milton pursues this point further in his discussion of disparates (AL bk. 1, chap. 13), or things that do not fit “in their very reality” (AL 254), pointing out that “opposites eliminate each other” (AL 253). Meaning and understanding may thus arise out of “conversation” of disparates. Reflecting Ramus’s vision, then, Milton’s version of Ramist logic clearly recognizes that invention may demand creative listening to other arguments, and even developing other arguments, both consentanea and dissentania, to advance one’s own apprehension of the essence of things and even truth itself.

Milton’s Art of Logic shows that users of Ramist invention could indeed develop supreme confidence in the validity of their own intuition, even, as Ong has argued, to the point of self-righteousness, but any thoughtful reader or practitioner could also become aware of—or never forget—that Ramus’s vision explicitly acknowledged some weaknesses. The guarantees are the examples, we recall, but examples only work as guarantees if they are correctly applied to the original insight. They may also refine or correct the original. Moreover, invention occurs in a loop. It is not a linear process inevitably leading to a determined point. In adopting the invention loop, Ramus and Milton enable us to visualize a structure that attempts to reconcile absolute truth with the insecurities of human perception, something that scholarly attention to method has obscured.

Milton’s Art of Logic represents well the tension between stability and risk inherent in Ramus’s vision. Because we carry within us reflections of the form of the divine, our intuition apprehends truth, but our perception of it may be obscured. The process of invention clarifies the perception. Within the invention loop, our small form of truth may be shaped and polished by the process of creative interlocution. Such practice may allow one to bring what is inside out, providing a link between intuition and use. In assuming that a truth exists that is not contingent and that a person may employ logic to attain it, Ramist logic does encourage the individual, instilling confidence in that individual’s own powers of thought. And yet, Milton, like other Ramists, recognizes that a person’s listening or perception of examples may not be clear. The intellect may fail. We may become caught in the invention loop, unable to determine whether the mirror is truly polished, or we may terminate the process too soon, before the image is sufficiently clear. While engaged in creative interlocution, we may lose sight of our initial
intuition and thus become the object of our interlocutor. Therein lies the risk inherent in Ramist logic. And in that risk lies drama.

Such is the challenge the Son faces in *Paradise Regained*. If we assume that a Ramist perspective governs the framing of the central issues in the poem, we may see that *Paradise Regained* is less about self-discovery or the redemption of language, characterizations that presuppose a rhetorical orientation, than it is about efforts to actualize the self in the face of opposition. Through the crucial agency of an adversary, the Son attempts to speak the form-giving words that move his identity from the abstract realm of ideas to practical, efficacious existence in the world and to his full comprehension of who he is.

In *Paradise Regained*, one crucial question is how the Son is to act as a vessel of divine power in the world, knowing already that he in fact *is* a vessel of divine power. In *Paradise Regained*, this question is tested in part through analogies to Job, made both by all the principal speakers in the poem and, as Barbara Lewalski shows, through the choice of the “brief epic” genre itself. In both the book of Job and *Paradise Regained*, Satan appears as an “adversary” who challenges the identity of his opponent, Job as a righteous man, the Son as Messiah. In both, Satan’s actions go only as far as permitted by God. The biblical Satan must spare Job’s life, while the Satan of *Paradise Regained* is told by the Son himself to “do as thou find’st / Permission from above; thou canst not more.” But, most important, in both works the testing of identity is one-sided. It is Satan who doubts and must test. Neither Job nor the Son is ever in doubt of who he is; Job’s “integrity” (2:3, Authorized Version) consists in maintaining his faith in the face of great pain and loss, and despite the explosion of the belief that his own righteousness will spare him or that repenting for sins he knows he has not committed will relieve him. Job’s reward is direct apprehension of the godhead: the immediate experience conveyed through the distinctly nonrational words of God. And in *Paradise Regained* God himself states unambiguously that he is sending the Son into the wilderness to “exercise” (1.155) rather than test the Son’s identity. Testing in this context would imply the possibility of success or failure, but “exercise” from a Ramist point of view may suggest the kind of “use” that is an integral part of judgment as it works to refine what invention is uncovering.


This is not to say that only Satan doubts in *Paradise Regained*. The work is permeated by doubt, especially in its first half. Satan, of course, initially has no idea that Messiah and the Son are the same: “His first-begot we know, and sore have felt, / When his fierce thunder drove us to the deep; / Who this is we must learn, for man he seems” (1.89–91). But others are also confused. At the beginning of book 2, the Son’s closest associates question the meaning of his absence. Andrew and Simon

Began to doubt, and doubted many days,
And as the days increased, increased their doubt:
Sometimes they thought he might be only shown,
And for a time caught up to God[.]

(2.11–14)

Specifically, they wonder how Israel is to be delivered with the Son gone. Their concern is echoed by Mary, who momentarily has “Some troubled thoughts” (2.65) about the Son’s disappearance after baptism. Their confusion, unlike Satan’s, does not involve the Son’s identity, but rather the specific unfolding of God’s plan through the Son: what deliverance is going to look like when it happens.

This is, of course, exactly the question the Son himself is trying to resolve. In his first appearance in the poem we see him

Musing and much revolving in his breast,
How best the mighty work he might begin
Of savior to mankind, and which way first
Publish his godlike office now mature.

(1.185–88)

That this work will probably not explicitly involve the “winning words” of “persuasion” (1.222, 223) is made clear by his recollection of how he learned his identity. His childhood desire to serve the “public good” (1.204) through persuasion, the role of the classical statesman and orator, arose before the conversation with his mother that revealed his parentage (1.227–58). It is this vision that Mary’s information is designed to correct. Yet her words are insufficient to reveal to the Son “[h]ow best” to be the “savior to mankind.” He continues the process of uncovering the form within through study:

straight I again revolved
The law and prophets, searching what was writ
Concerning the Messiah, to our scribes
Known partly, and soon found of whom they spake
I am[.]

(1.259–62)
Not even his baptism, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and “my father’s voice, / Audibly heard from heaven” (1.283–84) communicate in full who he is, for being the Messiah requires action: the Messiah must save. And it is this dimension of actualization that is at stake as the Son enters the desert. Hence, as Fish observes, language becomes a “vehicle for non-communication” in the poem. The Son is never out to persuade or communicate with Satan, nor does the Son need practice in rhetoric, for which, as he makes abundantly clear in book 4, he has many models. It is not language that matters. What the Son seeks is the process to draw out that which is already within him, as he suspects even before his first encounter with Satan. Acknowledging that the “authority” he has is “derived from heaven” (1.289), he resolves to let the question of action unfold:

And now by some strong motion I am led
Into this wilderness, to what intent
I learn not yet, perhaps I need not know;
For what concerns my knowledge God reveals.

(1.290–93)

The “strong motion” is, of course, the divinity within him, and yet at this point the Son does not and cannot articulate this idea. Yet fully knowing himself is the answer to the Son’s question about what he should do. It simply needs to be put into words and given form.

Satan’s presence and efforts provide the opportunity to do so. Fish is right to argue that Satan’s various challenges to the Son are all essentially the same temptation: the temptation to assign vital significance to adiaphora, or, in Fish’s terms, “things indifferent”—food, earthly power, rhetoric, even scripture itself (“Things and Actions”). But more, each temptation involves a particular kind of action, and each of Satan’s challenges is an effort to prompt the Son into a premature and incomplete articulation of what he must do. Each of the Son’s responses, his dismissals rather than refutations of Satan’s arguments, enables him to unfold more fully the form of his divinity, paring away extraneous and inessential ideas.

An early example of this process occurs in book 1 when Satan acknowledges the Son’s recognition of him. Satan’s speech, professing goodwill and curiosity, invites conversation: “What can be then less in me than desire / To see thee and approach thee, whom I know / Declared the Son of God” (1.383–85). It is an ostensibly friendly overture, and convention surely requires a similar response. Yet the climax of the Son’s reply does not involve the main matter of Satan’s speech, but a remark Satan has made in passing about his communicating to human beings through oracles (1.393–95):

No more shalt thou by oracling abuse
The Gentiles; henceforth oracles are ceased,
And thou no more with pomp and sacrifice

Shalt be inquired at Delphos or elsewhere,  
At least in vain, for they shall find thee mute.  
God hath now sent his living oracle  
Into the world, to teach his final will,  
And sends his spirit of truth henceforth to dwell  
In pious hearts, an inward oracle  
To all truth requisite for men to know.  

(1.454–64)

The “strong motion” of earlier lines is now more sharply defined as the “inward oracle” of divine truth. The Son accomplishes this clarification through the testing of Satan’s words, even though that clarification is not a direct, rational reply to the substance of Satan’s speech. If this exchange were a classical debate, the Son’s response would appear clumsy or evasive, as he does not address Satan’s main point. However, as creative interlocution, the Son’s words further the process of invention by clarifying to himself what he needs to examine further—the inward oracle and what it says about the nature of his divinity.

Yet the definition of the inward oracle is only a first stage in the longer process of creative interlocution in *Paradise Regained*. At the close of book 1, the invention loop temporarily stops at a difficult point for the Son. He is alone in the dark, as “wild beasts” (1.502) come forth to roam. Readers know that Satan’s tests will continue, but in *Paradise Regained* the drama lies in the process of invention rather than in the outcome of the challenges. What is in question, then, is how the Son will actualize the form within. By opening book 2 with many evocations of doubt, Milton emphasizes the tenuous position of the Son at this point in the poem. The Son himself does not doubt who he is—he never suffers an identity crisis—but he makes no progress in his own thought once Satan departs:

The while her son tracing the desert wild,  
Sole but with holiest meditations fed,  
Into himself descended, and at once  
All his great work to come before him set;  
How to begin, how to accomplish best  
His end of being on earth, and mission high;  
For Satan with sly preface to return  
Had left him vacant[.]

(2.109–16)

In the dark, literally and figuratively, the Son is still thinking that the answer to his question, “How to begin,” involves devising a plan of action to accomplish his mission rather than discovering the words that will give him form as Messiah. In effect, he is applying the wrong set of assumptions to his efforts at invention.
The reason for this impasse is manifest. Milton tells us that, after the departure of Satan, the Son “Into himself descended.” Lacking an interlocutor, the Son is thrown out of the invention loop, back to his own intuition, without alternatives to test what he senses. Even alone, of course, the Son could find other means of measuring his intuition—his past experiences and visions and memories of his conversations with others, for example—but “Satan with sly preface to return / Had left him vacant.” Satan’s “preface” carries with it the suggestion, or threat, that he may interrupt at any point the Son’s efforts at finding an alternate route to invention. He leaves the Son with a significant mental distraction. Hence the Son is “vacant.” Recent editors have glossed the word as simply “unoccupied” or “at leisure.”37 If, however, we are seeing the exchanges between the Son and Satan as a process of creative interlocution, we should consider that vacant might also retain its root meaning of empty. In intellectual and intuitive suspension after Satan’s departure, the Son cannot engage himself in the process of invention. His “meditations” do not lead anywhere, except to hunger and dreams of food that mirror his inventive status by emphasizing physical emptiness. The content of the dreams reminds readers that it is form, not identity, that the Son does not yet grasp. His psyche at work in sleep, the Son dreams of eating with Elijah and Daniel, prophets whose food is a manifestation of their faith in God. The dreams assure the Son—and the readers—that his intuition is correct, but also that he has yet to understand the how of his mission. He reveals no anxiety about his situation, but his hunger does not disappear.

The dreams and the hunger do play an important role in the process of the Son’s self-actualization, but that role is undefined until the reappearance of Satan and the repetition of the temptation to eat that he offered in book 1. Before the dreams, the Son did not apprehend the function of his hunger. Milton reminds us that the Son is speaking “to himself” (244) when he realizes that, for the first time since he went into the wilderness,

I feel I hunger, which declares,
Nature hath need of what she asks; yet God
Can satisfy that need some other way,
Though hunger still remain: so it remain
Without this body’s wasting, I content me,
Nor mind it, fed with better thoughts that feed
Me hung’ring more to do my father’s will.

(2.252–59)

His conversation with himself declares his trust in God, a thought affirmed by the dreams. But this conversation and the dreams merely reinforce that which the Son already knows about himself. He knows what he has been told by Mary, and what he has learned through study and had revealed at his baptism. But, as Ramus and Milton

understood, there is a profound difference between knowledge that is learned and the
deeper knowing that comes from the actualized form within. The exchange with Satan continues because, as yet, that form has not been fully invented. The polishing of the mirror continues, and Satan ironically becomes its instigator.

The Son’s words contrast sharply to the response he gives to Satan when he refuses Satan’s banquet:

Said’st thou not that to all things I had right?
And who withholds my power that right to use?
Shall I receive by gift what of my own,
When and where likes me best, I can command?
I can at will, doubt not, as soon as thou,
Command a table in this wilderness,
And call swift flights of angels ministrant
Arrayed in glory on my cup to attend.

(2.379–86)

In the act of answering Satan, the Son gives form to his own power in a way wholly different from his response to the temptation in book 1 to turn stones into bread, and to his meditations to himself about the meaning of his hunger. In book 1, when, as readers have learned, he was not truly hungry, the Son dismisses Satan’s challenge by redefining food and thereby reaffirming his faith, an act echoed in his subsequent meditations and dreams. But here his language has radically changed. It is active and forceful as he speaks of “my power” (emphasis added), uses the word command twice in three lines, and affirms his ability to “call swift flights of angels” to his aid. In speaking these words, the Son breaks with the example of the prophets about whom he had dreamed, declaring himself to be something radically different, even from Job. He is not another witness to faith, but someone and something utterly new. There is nothing in his previous meditations to suggest that he arrives at this point through careful reasoning or even through prayer. This articulation arises simultaneously from and in the response to Satan, as the Son evades Satan’s efforts to shape the way the Son understands himself.

But, at this moment, does the Son himself fully grasp what he has just accomplished? In his manner of speaking those words, the Son has not yet fully discerned his form. A stubborn auditor or reader could well see the response as simply a defiant taunt that the Son can do magic as well as Satan can. Moreover, the Son’s declaration could also reflect a desire to prove himself to himself, which would indicate insecurity, or to prove himself to Satan, which would be an act of pride. His understanding of his own power is therefore incomplete. It requires additional polishing of the mirror, further clarification and sharpening—a process Satan unintentionally provides when he attempts to shape the Son’s understanding of power by challenging him to accept conventional definitions of wealth and greatness.
Before the conversation shifts, the Son has rightly asked, “with my hunger what hast thou to do?” (2.389). His question shows that the Son is highly doubtful of the motives behind Satan’s questions. And yet he chooses to continue the exchange, and it is in answering Satan’s rejoinders that the form of how to be the Messiah begins to appear. The Son’s response looks like a simple dismissal of the importance of riches and an endorsement of self-rule, a declaration that Satan’s understanding of power is worldly, not spiritual, and hence irrelevant to the Son’s purpose. But the Son’s speech discloses more than he himself apprehends:

What if with like aversion I reject
Riches and realms; yet not for that a crown,
Golden in show, is but a wreath of thorns,
Brings dangers, troubles, cares, and sleepless nights
To him who wears the regal diadem,
When on his shoulders each man’s burden lies;
For therein stands the office of a king,
His honour, virtue, merit, and chief praise,
That for the public all this weight he bears.
Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules
Passions, desires, and fears, is more a king;
Which every wise and virtuous man attains[.]  

(2.457–65)

The Son never reflects back on these words during the course of the poem. Furthermore, the passage appears in the middle of the response, not the end, which is the position of power in a speech. It is not a peroration. It is not part of a rhetorical progression. But the specific language is impossible for readers to ignore. Such phrases as “wreath of thorns,” “dangers, troubles, cares, and sleepless nights,” and “king” inevitably invoke the Son’s future: Easter week, the garden of Gethsemane, and the Crucifixion. The speech itself emphasizes inner qualities, but the Son has spoken the how of his purpose without realizing it. Yet his words enter readers’ awareness and create dramatic tension as readers wait for an acknowledgment of their meaning that does not come. Prompted by Satan, the Son has made a significant movement toward actualizing the form within, but the process is incomplete. The structure of book 2 emphasizes this point because, like book 3, it has no formal closure. The action and the verbal exchange continue directly into book 3.

As the book begins, the conversation of the Son and Satan is still focused on self-rule and the proper qualities of the soul. The Son has not yet actualized his form and, of course, Satan has no idea of what that form might be. But if Milton is presenting their exchange as creative interlocution, he has Satan do a curious but significant thing: Satan attempts to create closure, to stop the process of the invention loop. Milton tells us that Satan is “confounded” by the Son’s speech, aware of his own “weak arguing” (3.2, 4). So instead of simply presenting another argument, he offers praise:
Recalling Milton’s explanation of form in the *Art of Logic* (“if the form is posited, the thing itself is posited”), we see that Satan is implying that, by using proper words, the Son has already actualized himself. Because the Son has not actualized himself, we understand that those words do not present “the perfect shape.” They are perfect only from Satan’s point of view because, should the Son accept Satan’s sly interpretation, the Son would in effect stop himself at Job, able to govern his passions and “worship God aright” (2.475), but not to move in a totally new direction.

Indeed, the model of Job indicates where the Son stands in his process of invention, as Satan begins the temptation to glory by invoking Alexander the Great, Cyrus, Scipio, Pompey, and Julius Caesar. Job is the Son’s obvious counterexample, which readers have borne in mind from the beginning of the poem, both alluded to in the generic choice of the brief epic and explicitly referred to by God (1.147), Satan (1.369), and the Son (1.425). Here in book 3, the Son explains in detail what Job represents (60–99): the redefinition of glory as the embodiment of the virtues approved by heaven, including wisdom, patience, and temperance. However, the Son recognizes as he speaks that Job is not a unique example. He concludes his speech with mention of Socrates, “For truth’s sake suffering death unjust” (3.98). In a moment recalling the “wreath of thorns” speech in book 2, the Son’s words here remind readers of the long-standing tradition of finding a parallel between the trial of Socrates and the Son’s interrogation by Pilate, dramatically lying in the Son’s future. Again, there is no indication in the text that the Son of the poem makes any personal application of the idea. However, prompted by the image of Socrates, readers realize that the Son and his mission are unique. He must be different from his own example of Job. To stop at Job, as Satan desires, would mean that the Son would not actualize himself. By moving away from Job and Socrates, and simultaneously rejecting Satan’s examples of achievement, the Son has further separated himself from several existing models of glory, both worldly and spiritual, and moved closer to a deep comprehension of who and what he is. Ironically, Milton reminds us of that point by giving Satan an introspective moment:

> and here again
> Satan had not to answer, but stood struck
> With guilt of his own sin, for he himself
> Insatiable of glory had lost all.

(3.145–47)
The Son’s words reflect back to Satan his own core as, temporarily silent, he hears a reminder of his own form, eternally actualized and fixed at the moment of his rebellion.

The exchange turns away from Satan’s vision of glory and back to the process of invention when Satan shifts the grounds of his argument to politics (3.150–80). The presentation of this subject is particularly significant because it is not yet another specifically satanic vision. Rather, it is one that the Son himself (as related in book 1) and the apostles (in book 2) have considered. Therefore, it marks another crucial embodiment of how the Son must engage. There is no clear good / bad dichotomy in this discussion, easily perceived by the Son and quickly surmounted. Because this is an idea that the Son himself has held and a strategy he has used, Satan’s challenge forces the Son to regard his own earlier self and put into words his separation from it. Appropriately, his response is not a refutation but a presentation of alternatives:

To whom our saviour answer thus returned.
All things are best fulfilled in their due time,
And time there is for all things, truth hath said:
If of my reign prophetic writ hath told,
That it shall never end, so when begin
The Father in his purpose hath decreed,
He in whose hand all times and seasons roll.
What if he hath decreed that I shall first
Be tried in humble state, and things adverse,
By tribulations, injuries, insults,
Contempts, and scorns, and snares, and violence,
Suffering, abstaining, quietly expecting
Without distrust or doubt, that he may know
What I can suffer, how obey? who best
Can suffer, best can do; best reign, who first
Well hath obeyed; just trial ere I merit
My exaltation without change or end.

(3:181–97)

The “what if” (3.188) may be a rhetorical question, but it is equally possible that the Son does not already know the answer. Readers do, so we may see the emerging form of the Son’s self. But in this verbal exchange, if we regard it as part of the invention loop, we should see this articulation of the Son’s vision as developing in him at the moment he speaks it. It occurs as he responds to Satan’s echo of a vision he himself once had. In the process of responding, he now sees why he cannot continue to hold it.

This is one reason why the Son is “unmov’d” (3.386) by all of Satan’s efforts to tempt and deceive him. The exchanges do not challenge the core of a self-constructed identity—as they do to Satan’s when he is “struck” (3.146) by his recognition of his own desire for glory. The Son in fact willingly moves away from previous ideas—Job, Socrates, political action—as his exchanges with Satan bring him closer to realization.
of his essence. His tacit temptation throughout the poem (the source of its implicit dramatic tension) is to resist Satan’s attempted form-giving by attaching prematurely to an incomplete version of his own, another construct rather than an authentic actualization of essence. In discussing the hero’s challenge to live an authentic life, Walter A. Davis writes, “an answer to the question ‘what is to be done?’ begins only when we know what is no longer possible.” At this point in the poem, at the close of book 3, the Son cannot yet begin to regard the how of his mission. Hence, book 3 ends with no formal closure. The “inward oracle” is not yet actualized, so the “exercise” continues. The Son chooses to remain inside the invention loop, resisting closure as he moves forward.

The pivotal articulation of the inward oracle occurs in the temptation of wisdom in book 4. This is the temptation that has famously vexed Milton scholars with its alleged rejection of ancient learning and its overt rejection of the model of civic humanism. The Son is direct in his condemnation of reading earthly wisdom to learn about ultimate truth:

Much of the soul they talk, but all awry,
And in themselves seek virtue, and to themselves
All glory arrogate, to God give none,
[. . .] Who therefore seeks in these
True wisdom, finds her not, or by delusion
Far worse, her false resemblance only meets,
An empty cloud. However many books
Wise men have said are wearisome; who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A spirit and judgment equal or superior
(And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek),
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself[.]

(4.313–15, 318–27)

The Son condemns here not reading and learning in themselves, but as what they are usually considered—sources for learning about the self. They cannot supply the idea that is the spirit within. That would be to imply that spirit is an extraneous quality, something that may be acquired, a commodity. This is exactly the position Milton himself takes in Areopagitica when he declares, “Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste, that came not thither so” (527). Thus, books in themselves cannot corrupt, but neither can they redeem. And yet, they may serve. Just as in Areopagitica, where Milton urges trial “by what is contrary” (515), so in Paradise Regained the Son extends trial to everything—what is contrary and what may not be. That which is not

contrary is not therefore true in itself, nor the source of truth: it serves to clarify and articulate that which is already within. The Son therefore responds to Satan with a logical fallacy—shifting the grounds of argument—that illustrates a higher, nonrational truth. Satan challenges him to accept or reject earthly wisdom. The Son speaks of a use that Satan cannot anticipate, something that is beyond his understanding. And in so doing, the Son has further clarified the inward oracle as pure intuition of the godhead within. And he represents that form in words at Satan's prompting. Of course, after that “all [Satan’s] darts were spent” (4.366).

Still, the Son’s question about action remains, a doubt exploited by Satan when he sends him “ugly dreams” (4.408). Satan’s persistence confirms his importance to the Son’s invention and serves as a sign that, despite all the Son’s efforts, the Son has yet fully to manifest to himself who he is. At this point, he has not spoken the words that will signal his step out of the invention loop. That moment arrives through his final exchange with Satan, as Milton gives to Satan the articulation of the problem that the Son has not posed to himself:

Then hear, O Son of David, virgin-born;
For Son of God to me is yet in doubt,
Of the Messiah I have heard foretold
By all the prophets; of thy birth at length
Announced by Gabriel with the first I knew,
And of the angelic song in Bethlehem field,
On thy birth-night, that sung thee savior born.

(4.500–506, emphasis added)

The problem is, in essence, what does “son of God” signify? As Satan explains, he is aware of all the details of the Son’s life on earth, including his baptism and the appearance of the Holy Spirit. He also has heard the pronouncement of the Holy Spirit. So he knows all the Son knows and has described up to this point.

But if the Son understands his identity, he does not yet grasp its meaning: that the Messiah is not simply an exceptionally blessed human being, but in fact the Son of God, created in heaven by the Father to become human and redeem mankind. Again, it is Satan who articulates the issue, thereby giving it form:

Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view
And narrower scrutiny, that I might learn
In what degree or meaning thou art called
The Son of God, which bears no single sense;
The son of God I also am, or was,
And if I was, I am; relation stands;
All men are sons of God; yet thee I thought
In some respect far higher so declared.

(4.514–21, emphasis added)
Satan, of course, is simply calling into question the specific meaning of the phrase “Son of God,” precisely because it “bears no single sense.” But his statement carries profound implications of which he is unaware. He is a son of God, and he began his existence in heaven. Therefore, if he is a son of God from Heaven, could the Son—as Son of God—also have begun in heaven?

As if to emphasize the connection, Satan repeats his understanding of the trials to which he has subjected the Son:

> And opportunity I here have had  
> To try thee, sift thee, and confess have found thee  
> Proof against all temptation as a rock  
> Of adamant, and as a centre, firm  
> To the utmost of mere man both wise and good,  
> Not more; for honours, riches, kingdoms, glory  
> Have been before contemned, and may again:  
> Therefore to know what more thou art than man,  
> Worth naming Son of God by voice from heaven,  
> Another method I must now begin.

(4.531–40, emphasis added)

Ironically, Satan’s goal is the same as the Son’s: he seeks to discover the Son in full. In speaking, he mirrors the Son and clearly articulates the Son’s own questions. The Son intuits but has not shaped the form within, but his intuition is gradually being given form through creative interlocution with Satan. The Son needs to listen to Satan to continue the process and reach his moment of pure, actualized intuition.

Satan prompts that moment at the pinnacle: “if not to stand, / Cast thyself down; safely if Son of God” (4.554–55). Because he believes that standing is impossible, Satan challenges the Son to trust his Father to save him, an assumption that would bring forth a Son who is simply, like Satan, a mere son of God, albeit an unusually valuable one. That assumption would imply some separation between God and son. But that challenge itself provides the last, necessary polish of the mirror. As Lewalski notes, the Son’s standing is a moment of pure being, totally removed from Satan’s ability to tempt.39 At that moment, the Son is completely the instrument of God. His answer to Satan is also an answer to his own question about action and about his being: “Also it is written / Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood” (4.560–61). Satan has tempted God with challenges to prove himself, but the Son must also realize that his question about what he should do is perhaps a temptation of God also. He has initially expected to find an answer, a logical plan of action. But, with no conscious or rational effort, with no process of debate or explicitly redeeming language, the Son has at that moment spoken himself into existence as Messiah. The heavenly choir confirms the moment with its repetition of the word “now”: “now thou has avenged / Supplanted Adam,” “A fairer Paradise is founded now,” “Now enter, and begin to save

mankind” (4.606–7, 613, 635). With his full apprehension through speaking the form of Messiah, the Son is Messiah, the incarnation of the Son in Heaven. The process of creative interlocution has brought him to full self-actualization.

In *Paradise Regained*, all language—even Satan’s—is redemptive, properly understood as testing to shape the articulation of form. Job’s reward for his integrity is a verbal vision of God. God is the Word, and he conveys himself to Job through words that make no logical sense but that do convey omnipotence beyond human understanding. In *Paradise Regained*, all language may lead to truth eventually. The Son’s task is to keep speaking, and especially to participate in creative interlocution, rather than to urge a particular course of action. As the heavenly choir declares, there is power in “the terror of his voice” (4.627).

The Son’s moment of bringing forth the form he has intuited within is truly distinctive. It is precisely a moment. It has not emerged through a process of traditional debate. Nor has it been learned through study, or from his visit to the Temple, or from his mother. He has not uncovered it either in private meditation or even in baptism. The Son uncovers that he is *the* Son of God by engaging with Satan in the Ramist process of invention. While the Son is divine, the process is human, and therefore it is open to humanity in general. While we shall not discover our pre-existence in heaven, we can uncover who we *are*, the divine form within. As with the Son’s encounter with Satan, the process entails risk. As *Samson Agonistes* may demonstrate, Ramist invention can be short-circuited or remain incomplete. And human beings often need to invent “In darkness, and with dangers compassed round” (*Paradise Lost* 7.27). But the risk underscores the value of the endeavor.

Readers who complain that there is no drama in *Paradise Regained* are looking for it in the wrong place. *Paradise Regained* is a drama of invention. It demonstrates the power of Ramist logic, which provides a bridge between intuition and action and a means by which a person may maintain both faith and integrity while living in unstable times.

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