Essay 2:
Analyze a Short Passage from *Paradise Lost*

Choose a few lines from *Paradise Lost* — any not discussed in great detail in class — and write about what they offer a reader that a paraphrase of them would not and about what they offer a reader that a word-for-word substitution of synonyms for Milton's words would not.

Be sure that you write about the chosen lines — that you do not swerve from your topic to focus on the characters involved or the kinds of situations that involve them. Don't spend any time telling readers what the lines say; assume readers who understand the lines and who assume that you do. Don't speculate on what the lines might want to say but do not (that is, don't work them over to manufacture an interpretation).

The kinds of things discussed in the analysis of the sample sentence from *Paradise Lost* cited below (written by Stephen Booth) should show you the kinds of analysis I'm looking for. I hope the suggested methodology and detailed exemplification offered here proves helpful.

Your essay should be between 500–800 words. Quote the passage you select near the beginning of your essay. Use MLA Format for quotations and citations. (See drmarkwomack.com/mla-style/, especially "How to Quote Verse" and "Document Format.")

Submit your essay through the TurnItIn link on the class Blackboard Learn page labeled "Essay 2–Paradise Lost." You don't need to submit a hard copy version of your essay.

Due Dates:

- **Comments Deadline: April 17**
  If you want comments on your essay, you must submit it on or before Friday, April 17.

- **Final Deadline: April 27**
  Although I will make few or no comments on essays submitted after Friday, April 17, I will grade these papers just the same as those turned in by the earlier date.

Here is a paraphrase for the second of two sentences addressed to "wedded love" in Book 4 (753–57): "Marriage is an efficient remedy for lust, and it is the source of the non-sexual love among blood relatives."

This is the sentence:

> 753   By thee adulterous lust was driv'n from men
> 754   Among the bestial herds to range, by thee
> 755   Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,
> 756   Relations dear, and all the charities
> 757   Of father, son, and brother first were known.

This is one plausible word-for-word translation into other English words and syntax:

> You, marriage, banished the urge to fornicate from human society and left lust no province but lower animals; you, who are rationally based and are loyal, just, and pure, introduced familial affections and such benevolences as are typical between parents and children and among siblings.[1]

The substitute version can show us more about what goes on in and as a result of Milton's sentence than we would otherwise notice. For starters, the paraphrase makes obvious our achievement in accepting "Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure, / Relations dear" into our minds as if its relation to the rest of the sentence were apparent to us.

The translation doggedly reflects a positional signal: the adjectival phrase "Founded in reason" follows a "thing" (here the pronoun "thee") that it can plausibly describe: marriage is something that can be readily thought of as founded in reason (if the adjectival phrase had been "duty-free to travelers holding Irish passports" we would have balked and hunted for a noun or pronoun that could be plausibly described as "duty-free to travelers holding Irish passports").

I say "doggedly" because of the four apparently appositive elements that follow "Founded in reason": "loyal, just, and pure, / Relations dear." Although marriage and/or sexual intercourse between married pairs can plausibly be called just and pure, "loyal" doesn't quite make sense in the sequence; the partners' loyalty pertains, but it doesn't make much sense to call the institution of marriage "loyal." The general ideational pertinence of "loyal" to marriage and the power of a list to assure one that its elements are of a kind make readers' minds capable of seeming to grasp what they do not in fact grasp.

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1   Note that I did not try for synonyms for "loyal," "just," and "pure." I didn't readily see any; nor did I see that the three words did anything that, say, "faithful," "honorable," and "innocent" would not. It is never wise to be fanatic in following the letter of an assignment.

By the time we get to the fourth of the elements appositive to "Founded in reason" — "Relations dear" — we are, apparently, entirely free of the organizational system in terms of which we assume ourselves to be understanding the sentence. "Relations dear" can't continue the sequence in which we meet it. "Wedded love who are relations dear" doesn't make sense (something singular — "Wedded love"— can't be something plural — "relations"; one can twist sense out of it, but twisting is necessary). Therefore the translation jumps ship at this point and behaves as if "Relations dear" were obviously parallel with "charities" and joint subject of "first were known." The substitute phrase — "familial affections" — not only fails totally but testifies to the super-syntactic experience in which we effortlessly engage as line 756 dissolves from concluding a list of descriptive adjectives for marriage into a pair of subjects for "were known." The shift occurs at "and"; it weds "Relations dear" to "charities." But what does "Relations dear" signify as we read? Its ideationally pertinent senses reach out to us — sexual relations are certainly dear; so are our relatives (fathers, sons, brothers) — but I doubt that any sense attaches itself to our understanding of the sentence's delivered substance: another miraculous victory for us over the presumed limits of our understanding.

Note too that the translation obscures the paradox inherent in "adulterous": although "adultery," used loosely, can describe any illicit sexual intercourse, strictly speaking, adultery requires that one at least of the participants be married to a third party. The more precise term — "fornicate" — undoes the latent fact that marriage is an enabling necessity to the evil the lines say it prevents. On the other hand, the translation's use of "society" comes closer than Milton's words do to inviting consciousness of the typically Miltonic feat of thought by which we imagine adulterous lust driven out of humankind before there were any unmarried human beings to feel it.

The translation also removes the metamorphosis in our understanding of the sentence that occurs when — having, presumedly, understood "driv'n" as a purely metaphoric alternative to "forced out" — the introduction of "herds" causes our minds to behave as if they had taken "driv'n" literally in its drovers' sense. The translation also erases an alternative — a familial — holy trinity: "father, son, brother." Ditto for the root sense (love) of "charity," a sense that "rhymes" with the physical love that is the sentence's topic.

And so on ...