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Milton and Moral Aesthetics

by

Robert Lee Entzminger

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INTRODUCTION:

Milton and Moral Aesthetics
The aspiring epic poet in the Renaissance adopted a vocation as exacting as it was exalted. Not only was he inviting comparison with the artistry of the classical models which defined the genre, he was also expected to surpass, because he enjoyed the advantage of Christian revelation, the moral content that theorists agreed was an attribute as essential to epic as its panoramic scope. However frequently lyric poets or popular dramatists might diverge from the path of rectitude in their efforts to be pleasing, the epic poet was required to keep both terms of the Horatian formula for art steadfastly in view, the dulce of the poem finding legitimation in the utile. But if the revealed religion conferred certain advantages upon the poet, it resulted in new problems as well. Homer and Virgil had simply to provide examples, as Spenser tells us, of "a good governour and a vertuous man," that is, models respectively of public and private virtue. Aeneas, Spenser finds, joins the qualities Agamemnon and Ulysses had represented separately, and in the Italian epics of the Renaissance he sees Ariosto's Orlando as the beneficiary of Virgil's synthesizing practice while Tasso "dissevered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons namely that part which they in philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a private man, coloured in his Rinaldo; the other named Politice in his Godfredo."¹ Spenser, of course, will
have it both ways: Arthur is to be the epitome of all virtue, but his admirable traits are also to be represented individually by twelve knights. Yet as is often the case, Spenser's theory is not adequate to describe his practice. For though he posits a bipartite structure which is horizontal, dealing with the affairs of this world—the focus for the most part of the classical epic—*The Faerie Queene* itself suggests a vertical division which is even more important, at least in the poem's incomplete form. As we note in the virtue the Red-Crosse Knight embodies, nature, the realm of reason and politics, is subsumed in the realm of grace, where the emphasis is primarily on the salvation of the individual soul and not simply on blameless conduct or political accomplishment.² It is this factor of grace that makes the problem of writing a Christian epic so complex. Example is not sufficient, because what is important is not simply action but the ground of action. Yet by definition this central aspect of the Christian experience is ineffable; incapable of being objectified and resistant to being communicated in poetry, however grand.

A part of the solution to the problem involves a close identification of the poet's virtues with those he is writing about. The premise is that only one who has experienced grace can communicate it. Poets who
inculcate only objectively demonstrable qualities need not claim that they possess those same virtues, but simply that they can recognize and praise them. It is not necessary that we believe Homer and Virgil capable of the same kinds of heroism as their central figures in order to accept the validity of the moral lesson. But in terms of an ethic whose central experience is transcendent, an ethic which seeks to establish its legitimacy not in behavior but in an ontology of the spirit, the poet must somehow include himself in the company of his heroes, at least implicitly. Elaborating upon the method Augustine employs in his Confessions, Dante makes the fictionalized pilgrimage of his prior self the subject of an epic journey to the illuminating experience which enables him to write the poem. In a less thoroughgoing way, Spenser depicts his poet-figure Colin Clout enjoying the vision of the Graces dancing to his music (VI,2). And Ben Jonson, appropriating a formula Quintilian had used to defend orators, argues "the impossibility of any man's being the good Poet, without first being a good man," an assertion Milton restates with explicit reference to Dante and his disciple Petrarch:

... if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves; or unchaste of those names which before they
had extoll'd, this effect it wrought with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplor'd; and above them all preferr'd the two famous renouners of Beatrice and Laura who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirm'd in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous Cities, unlessse he have in himselfe the experience and the practice of all that which is praise-worthy.  

The Muses, of course, are a classical metaphor for inspiration, and they continue to be invoked in the Renaissance. But in Christian poetry, particularly as Milton practices it, the convenient fiction acquires a new seriousness. A classical poet might invoke divine help in the service of his craft, but Milton's bardic voice repeatedly seeks, as the prerequisite to his art, the same spiritual illumination that constitutes the
paradise within, which as Michael informs Adam is at once the foundation and the goal of Christian virtue.\textsuperscript{5} The invocation to Book VII of \textit{Paradise Lost} illustrates this particularly Christian use of personified inspiration. Though the bard attributes to Urania the powers traditionally assigned to the Muses, his care in distinguishing her from her classical counterparts makes clear what he has implied in Book I, where he addresses Moses' "Heav'nly Muse" (I,6).\textsuperscript{6} Asserting that, following Urania's voice, "above th'Olympian hill I soar, / Above the flight of Pegasean wing" (VII, 3-4), the bard elaborates on the superiority of his Muse to her pagan sisters:

> The meaning, not the Name I call: for thou Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top Of old Olympus dwell'st, but Heav'nly born, Before the Hills appear'd, or Fountain flow'd, Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse, Wisdom thy Sister, and with her didst play In presence of th'Almighty Father, pleas'd With thy Celestial Song. \textsuperscript{(VII, 5-12)}

Certainly this is a request for artistic powers answerable to communicating "Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme" (I,16). But it is also more. Fearing that, abandoned by his Muse, he will plummet like Bellerophon to "th'Albian Field . . . / Erroneous there to wander
and forlorn" (VII, 19-20), the bard uses words which carry moral as well as poetic connotations, conveying an impression which the later repetition of "fall'n" (VII, 25-26) reinforces. A descent from inspiration is inevitably a fall from grace. Thus the invocation concludes with a passage asking the banishment of all that the bard as a true poet seeks to resist:

But drive far off the barbarous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his Revellers, the Race
Of that wild Rout that tore the Thracian Bard
In Rhodope . . . (VII, 32-35)

If Urania is to unite in the bard the beautiful and the true, she must first protect him, one of the just men beset by "evil days . . . and evil tongues" (VII, 26), from the threat posed by the dissonant and the false.

Milton, then, both in prose and poetry seeks to legitimize his claim to be an epic poet not simply in terms of his ability to follow the "grand style" nor even in his capacity to excite in his readers the desire to emulate the virtues he depicts. Rather, he validates his epic voice in terms of its source in a transcendent and incommunicable experience which, as grace, forms the substance of his address to the "fit audience . . . though few" (VII, 31).

But the poet's statement of intention and claim of divine inspiration are not sufficient indices to
his poetics. The insistence upon the potential correlation of truth and beauty is a constant; what changes is the way the correlation is perceived. And this, in turn, is predicated upon assumptions about language, Nature, man, and God which vary even within the context Christian doctrine provides.

The problem of reconciling truth with art has been a recurrent one in Western culture since Plato decided to banish poets from his Republic, but it acquired a new urgency in the Patristic Church. Like Paul, Augustine and Jerome valued learning and recognized the importance to the dissemination of the Gospel of language skillfully used, and they struggled to reconcile these inheritances from classical culture with the otherworldliness of Neoplatonized Christianity. For literature, the most important result of their effort was the development of an exegetical method based upon the imputation to Scripture of a fourfold allegorical meaning. Deriving in part from Augustine's commentaries, this exegetical method was turned upon classical authors by Fulgentius, and soon veiled moral lessons were being discovered in poets as unlikely as Ovid. But this aesthetic theory was not confined to redeeming the literature of the past. As D. W. Robertson has argued, it also nurtured contemporary literature throughout the Middle Ages.
Dante's claim that the *Commedia* will yield a fourfold allegorical meaning represents the high point of patristic apologetics in its influence upon the production of new works. By the time of the Renaissance, however, the interest in classical learning for its own sake spelled the end of the need for allegorization as a way to redeem pre-Christian literature, and partly as a result, a new ground for the critical theory governing contemporary poetry was also required.

Searching for a new way to demonstrate the morally edifying character of art, Renaissance theorists were led, as Rosemond Tuve has shown, to develop a poetics in which images are seen as logically generated by the Ideas at the upper reaches of the Neoplatonic hierarchy. As the reader of the Book of Nature was expected to infer the divine from the created universe, so in the poet's clarified "second Nature" one could discover the Ideal even more readily. Sidney's apologetics, then, is a refinement on the theory Robertson finds underlying medieval poetry, and it makes more extravagant claims for literature than the medieval allegorizers and exegetes ever did. But at the same time, the Renaissance solution assumes the cosmology of the Middle Ages, which posits a rationally knowable and essentially atemporal universe where "the invisible things . . . from the creation of the world are clearly
seen" (Romans 1:20). In the later Renaissance, however, the problematic character of this "sacramental" kind of universe, already noted by astronomers, was being acknowledged with increasing frequency in literature. The dichotomy between appearance and reality, one function of the dissolution of the medieval model, receives central treatment in both Spenser and Shakespeare, and the problem of time's ruinous force, resolved only with great effort and a lingering sense of contemptus mundi in the Mutability Cantos, is posed with renewed immediacy in Donne and the Jacobean drama.

One result of this changing world-view was Puritan iconoclasm, which denied to images the ability to manifest the divine. Even in its less extreme forms, radical Protestantism insisted that, while the universe might retain its Neoplatonic shape, from a human perspective it is more dynamic and temporal and less knowable than the traditional model. In the theology whose most systematic thinker was Calvin, the Fall has made the Book of Nature obscure, and the readiest gloss to its meaning is found in the Scriptures. As a Puritan and a poet, Milton was thus faced with a dual problem:

1) he had to assert once more the moral capability of poetry;

2) he had to find a new basis on which to make this claim, one consonant with a Calvinist epistemology and
view of Creation.

Students of the intellectual foundation of Milton's poetry are likely to claim that he was unable to discover the new poetics he required, and that his loyalties remained divided as a result. Assuming that Milton desired to write in the manner of Spenser and Shakespeare, Matthew Arnold defined the modern critical approach to Milton in his lament: "Milton was born a humanist, but the Puritan temper mastered him." Recent attempts to replace "Renaissance" with "Baroque" as the rubric adequate to define Milton's artistic sensibility have resulted only in widening the distance between the terms of Arnold's dichotomy, making Milton's conscious allegiances even more irrelevant to his poetry. Though as a theologian and politician Milton may have been a Puritan regicide, the argument runs, as a poet his temperament derives from the Counter Reformation's Council of Trent, the intellectual wellspring of the Baroque where, according to Wylie Sypher, "the flesh did not become spiritual— the spiritual became fleshly." The elements of classical, Renaissance, and Baroque aesthetics are powerfully present in Milton's poetry, and critics who have located their effects have performed a valuable service. But these approaches, however explicitly they acknowledge recent scholarship which proves that Puritanism and humanism or even sensuousness are not mutually exclusive categories,
still leave us with the impression that passages in which doctrine is most explicit are peripheral to an appreciation of Milton's poetry as poetry.

Particularly with a poet as concerned with theology as Milton, however, it is a mistake to exclude from aesthetic consideration those aspects of his verse which derive most clearly from his conscious allegiances. Erich Auerbach, writing nearly fifty years ago, argued against a similar trend in Dante criticism in terms that are equally applicable to Milton:

Of course the greatest creations of the human spirit are not tied inseparably to the particular forms of thought and faith from which they sprang; they change with every generation that admires them, showing to each generation a new face without losing their intrinsic character. But there is a limit to their power of transformation; where the form of admiration becomes too arbitrary, they refuse to go along. To put it very cautiously, it seems to me that with regard to the *Divine Comedy* such a limit has almost been attained when philosophical commentators begin to praise its so-called poetic beauties as a value in themselves and reject the system, the doctrine, and indeed the entire
subject matter as irrelevancies which if anything call for a certain indulgence.\textsuperscript{13} To subscribe to Auerbach's statement, of course, is not to limit the range of criticism to an enumeration of the relationships between dogma and explicitly doctrinal statements in poetry. Insofar as this is useful, Maurice Kelley has already performed the task for Miltonists.\textsuperscript{14} The more difficult, and more speculative, enterprise remains: to elucidate the way in which basic precepts determine poetic practice.

Milton, of course, was never wholly orthodox in any of his undertakings, and he was hardly a doctrinaire Calvinist. His poetry is as much a product of his unique genius as his political and religious tracts are of his unyielding individualism, and in minimizing the divergences from tradition C. S. Lewis misrepresents Milton's intensely individual vision.\textsuperscript{15} But Lawrence Sasek surely errs in the opposite direction when he denies to Milton any sense of tradition or milieu:

Shakespeare appears in Elizabethan drama as a mountain surrounded by numerous lower peaks and foothills. But Milton stands alone among the puritans. Inevitably we ask if Milton is not a great artist in spite of his puritanism . . . Milton, of all English writers, is \textit{sui generis}, and
his example can prove nothing about
his religious, intellectual, and
political allies.\textsuperscript{16}

This individuality itself is partly a function of radical
Protestantism's distrust of institutions, and it led
Milton often to differ with his fellow Puritans over a
variety of civil and religious issues. My point is
simply that as a poet his debt to previous and contem-
porary writers is synthesized, absorbed, and recreated
from a foundation for which Puritanism is the most
nearly adequate term. If his conclusions occasionally
diverge from those of Calvin or of the English propon-
ents of radical Protestantism, still his starting point,
his sense of man's relation to the universe and to its
Creator, is very much the same as theirs.

Like them, he interpreted the Fall as an event
whose moral significance is linked to the epistemological
problem it poses. As a result of Adam's disobedience,
the human mind is so perverted that it is unable to
initiate redeeming action. Salvation, rather, depends
upon grace, which can be accepted or rejected but never
earned. Thus Milton validates his bardic voice by
crediting its inspiration to the same source that
establishes the paradise within. Yet the emphasis on
Christ's immanence is combined with an intensely escha-
tological world-view. Finally, and most important for
Milton's poetry, is the thoroughgoing iconoclasm expressed in the elevation of the Word and the denigration of the image. Milton would perhaps not subscribe to so extreme a position as Charles Garside attributes to Zwingli: "The prime symbol of true belief is the Word, invisible and heard; the prime symbol of false belief is the image, visible and seen." Still, some sympathy with the feeling that images are inadequate to convey spiritual truth is revealed in Milton's ultimate rejection of the style of the earlier Renaissance. In its place he developed a poetics in which images are characteristically controlled by or explicated in terms of the concepts to which they refer. Milton's Puritan temper is least arguably present in the last books of *Paradise Lost* and in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, but I hope to show that its influence is pervasive and determinative from the very first.

To the end of outlining the criteria of Puritan aesthetics most relevant to Milton, William Haller's work has been helpful but not pre-emptive. U. Milo Kaufmann and J. Paul Hunter have progressed further in the direction I wish my study to take, but because their inquiries focus upon prose writers whose interests and problems are very different from those an epic poet faces, their work is of somewhat limited application. Among Milton studies, only William Madsen's book on typological
symbolism represents a serious attempt to relate poetic practice to doctrinal stance, but because we are interested in different aspects of the poetry, the actual intersection with Madsen in the following chapters is slight and is duly acknowledged where it occurs.

An exposition such as the one which follows cannot conform to the strict linearity of syllogism or chronology. Though with Comus, the focus of the first chapter, Milton seems to be engaging for the first time problems whose answers are reflected in Paradise Lost and the last poems, his practice actually reveals fewer real shifts of poetic sensibility than a cursory examination of, say, Comus, Paradise Lost, and Paradise Regained might indicate. To be sure, there is a progressive development, up to Paradise Lost, of the range of this poetics, a developing sense of what it facilitates and what it precludes, and there are differences too that are attributable to genre and subject matter. But the fundamental assumptions underlying the poetry and generating it are remarkably constant. The crucial question remains, throughout, how man acquires salvific knowledge of God, and all of the following chapters address to some extent each of the issues related to that problem, with each issue emphasized in the chapter which provides the most appropriate context. Thus though the educational progress of the Lady and of pre- and post-lapsarian Adam is traced in detail in successive essays,
the chapter on Comus deals at relatively greater length with grace as an enabling force, while the second and third chapters treat, from the respective viewpoints of Heaven and Eden, the relation between language and Nature and their function as pedagogical tools. The last chapter is concerned with the analogous relation of language to history, and Chapter IV examines the effect upon Milton's style of the epistemology he accepts.
Notes to Introduction

1 Edmund Spenser, "A Letter of the Authors ... to ... Sir Walter Raleigh ... ", in The Complete Poetical Works of Spenser, ed. R. E. Neil Dodge (1908; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936), p. 136. Subsequent references to Spenser will be cited from this edition, and quotations from The Faerie Queene will be identified parenthetically in the text by book, canto, and stanza number respectively.


5 Adam's vision of the future qualifies him as a Christian.

7For an elaboration of this conflict in the early Church, see Erich Auerbach, Dante: Poet of the Secular World, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), Chapter I.


11Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature 1400-1700 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955), p. 188.

12The work of William Haller is especially important: The Rise of Puritanism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); The Elect Nation: The Meaning and Relevance of Foxe's

13 Auerbach, pp. 158-59.


15 A Preface to Paradise Lost (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), Chapter XII.


18 The Rise of Puritanism has been particularly useful.


CHAPTER ONE:

Comus and the Uses of Beauty
I

When in Comus Thyrsis ponders how to "free the Lady that sits here / In stony fetters fixt and motionless" (818-19) without the magic wand which the demon has employed to immobilize her, he confronts a problem central to the masque and to Milton's subsequent career as a poet. For the issue the Lady's predicament raises is the relevance of beauty, and of the senses through which beauty is apprehended, to the duties required of Virtue's "true Servants" (10). As the Second Brother has warned, even the Lady's innocent beauty can evoke an evil response, and Comus, appealing to the senses with his "dear Wit and gay Rhetoric" (790) in an effort to subvert reason, demonstrates that verbal beauty can likewise be appropriated for evil purposes. But in resisting his invitation to illicit sensual pleasure, the Lady adopts a stratagem that also entails problems. Accepting the mind/body dualism implicit in Comus' argument, she dismisses her body as "this corporal rind" (664) whose vulnerability to Comus' spells she finds insignificant compared to her intellectual freedom. With a wave of his wand, Comus makes the rigidity of the Lady's position a literal and apparently permanent condition, emphasizing its limitations as well as its security. Her safety is assured, but her abnegation makes her a figure of the "cloister'd vertue" Milton opposes in Areopagitica. Because so complete a
withdrawal renders all virtuous action, including poetry, impossible, she must somehow be released from the implications of her opposition to Comus’ seductions, even though the restoration of her mind to her body involves the potential for subsequent temptation. As Lorna Sage has said,

... the body's participation in the world of appearances and accidents makes it potentially an ally of Comus. Other Christians might solve the dilemma by separating the soul's fate from the body's, but this Milton will not do. In order, as it were, to have the possibility of a totally aesthetic universe, matter at the command of mind, he has to face the inverse possibility of mind corrupted by matter.¹

Comus has fettered the Lady, and he can therefore free her, but his magic is not the only antidote for itself. If Comus, using his metamorphosing powers to achieve debasing transformations, is the artist-magician at his most corrupt and corrupting, Thyrsis is the true poet "Who with his soft Pipe and smooth-dittied Song, / Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar, / And hush the waving Woods" (86-88). His ascetic life and his heavenly warrant qualify Thyrsis as a figure of the Orphic poet, who serves as a model for Milton's poetic aspirations,² and he will employ
his ability to master Nature to undo Comus' spell. Like Comus' inducements, Thyrsis' songs appeal first to the senses, but while the end of Comus' art is the victory of the passions over reason, Thyrsis' music is both aesthetically pleasing and in harmony with the verities to which the Lady adheres. The results of his song are similarly unifying. He invokes Sabrina, the goddess of the Severn, and she liberates the Lady with water from the river. As a symbol of grace, the water is sacramental, conjoining the spiritual and the physical in itself and performing that same office for the Lady. As Thyrsis unites the divine and the human in his present embodiment and in his music, so Sabrina, summoned by Thyrsis' song, re-unites the Lady's mind and body and makes each a complement to the other. Thus the "totally aesthetic universe" of which Sage speaks is shown to derive its aesthetic strength from its basis in moral truth. Like Christ, for whom Orpheus was thought to be a type, the Attendant Spirit subjects himself to the limitations of human existence not just to transcend the body but to reclaim it.

The Thyrsis we see in the masque exercises Orphic power which is a mundane manifestation of his spiritual role as the Attendant Spirit, an angelic servant to God. The abilities he commands by virtue of his real identity, however, are available to man only through discipline and the application of the intellect. Thus if Thyrsis
represents for Milton a fruition of his aspirations, the Lady pursues the ascetic ideal which best serves the poet as he seeks to realize his goal. John Steadman has studied Milton's views on the poet's qualifications and his arch avowal of youthful continence in the light of theories of inspiration promulgated by Minturno and Scaliger. "And just as Milton," Steadman concludes, "had insisted that the divinely-inspired poet must prepare himself for his task by a chaste and austere youth, Minturno had stressed the analogy between the poet's personal chastity and the purity of the powers who inspired him." The Lady, then, is analogous to the aspiring Orphic poet not just in her general adherence to an ascetic ideal but in her representation of its specific manifestation, chastity, the virtue which allows her to receive "something holy" (246) and to transmit "Divine enchanting ravishment" (215) in her song to Echo.

In addition to the physical austerity the aspiring poet must practice, a discipline which is one of self-denial, he must also undergo the more positive regimen of study. Milton was himself engaged, during the period in which he wrote Comus, in pursuing a self-designed course of study at Horton, and some ten years after the masque was first performed, he set forth his ideas about education in a letter to Samuel Hartlib. Though his chief concern in the treatise is how best to prepare men
for the virtuous performance of the duties of church and state, the importance of literature in his program and his later equation of the vocations of pastor and poet suggest that his curriculum might also provide a valuable background for literary endeavor. Significantly, the Lady's progress through the Wood is a survey of the Miltonic educational scheme. After instruction in grammar, which "is but the Instrument conveying to us things usefull to be known" (Of Education, CE, IV, 277), and once love of labor and virtue are firmly instilled, the student begins his study with Nature, first from books and then from practical experience. To supplement these studies he is to read the bucolics and georgics of classical writers, works which help define one of the generic traditions to which Comus belongs. Milton's masque is pastoral drama throughout, but for pastoral poetry devoid of the issues of good and evil, problems Milton reserves for more mature minds, we are restricted to the first section (93-330), where Comus is at his least threatening and the Lady is unaware of the moral context the Prologue has provided. There the Lady hails evening as "a sad Votarist in Palmer's weed" (189) while Comus, counterpointing her invocation just as L'Allegro counterpoints Il Penseroso, finds in nightfall the occasion to "welcome Joy and Feast, / Midnight shout and revelry, / Tipsy dance and Jollity" (102-4).
As her loneliness becomes oppressive, the Lady begins to find in darkness a malevolence twilight had not adumbrated, but she dismisses her fears as fantasies. Her altered view of Nature, she realizes, is due to the projection of her mental state onto the landscape, a process which imbues morally neutral topography with ethical import.

Given the Lady's virtues, Comus' desires, and their close proximity in the Wood, the idyllic pastoral of the first section is bound to yield to the moral problems which follow the study of Nature in Milton's curriculum. Of course, the Attendant Spirit has already described the setting in terms which prepare for the fuller exploration of the ethical dimension. Referring to the "smoke and stir of this dim spot" (5), the earth, he links moral perception to visual perception in a way neither Comus nor the Lady can initially appreciate. Subsequent to the idyllic interlude, the ethical issue resurfaces when, as Comus leads the unsuspecting Lady to what she hopes is safety, our attention is directed to her brothers. Though their respective philosophic positions have some relevance to the Lady's impending danger, at this point in the drama their disquisitions are merely speculative, with the Elder Brother placing too much faith in the unaided power of virtue and the younger emphasizing a vulnerability to evil that
underestimates the resources his sister does have at her disposal. The terms of their dialogue, however, are only tested indirectly, through the Lady's debate with Comus, where the combat between good and evil is waged in the arena of experience.

Critics have found the Lady's rejection of Comus' arguments arch and fastidious. Her unadorned style and her authoritative pronouncements certainly lack the insinuating charm of Comus' temptations, but her mode of expression is appropriate to the stage of education she represents here. Schooled in the doctrines which she recalls to answer Comus, she presents her arguments with the energy of righteous wrath and also with the clarity and precision requisite to the consideration of ethical issues. Confessing in secret fear "She fables not" (800), Comus points to a basic difference between the Lady and both her tempter and her divine guardian. Milton defers the study of rhetoric, the skill of moving men by words, until his pupils are fully trained in the proper use of the craft. Thus, Thyrsis enjoys the license to fable because, possessing the "universal insight" (CE, IV, 286) of the fully educated man and consequently the skills of the rhetorician, he will use his powers to move men to virtuous action. Comus, on the other hand, enjoys the ability without the desire to put it to good use, and he
assails the Lady, who adheres to the ethics her education enjoins while lacking the training necessary to compete with Comus on his own terms. True, Comus has found her song to Echo compelling and her remonstrances animated by powers he cannot understand, but he is nonetheless the more accomplished orator of the two, and if she cannot win him with the truth clearly put, she cannot hope to overpower him by resorting to weapons of verbal warfare in which he is more accomplished than she.

Despite the forthrightness of the Lady's speeches, critics have diverged widely over the meaning of Comus, and the uncompromising idealism those speeches evince has also raised questions about the masque's artistic success. Samuel Johnson called it "a drama in the epick style, inelegantly splendid, and tediously instructive," and D. C. Allen, noting its mixture of the Lady's asceticism with the expansiveness of Renaissance mythography, has pronounced it "an attempted reconciliation of opposites that failed." It is to Comus that critics commonly turn for an early example of Milton's conscience warring with his talents, and Laurence Lerner's remarks are illustrative: "That Milton was both Puritan and Humanist has become a textbook commonplace: for him it was no commonplace, but a long struggle between the deepest elements of his being." While the conflict
was often productive, Lerner argues, it leaves Comus fragmented: "The deepest paradox of Comus is that the moral rejects the poetry." 9

Clearly the elements of humanism are pervasive, and in praising the "renaissance calm and equilibrium" of Comus Wylie Sypher seems to find them controlling.10 E. M. W. Tillyard, however, has exposed the inadequacy of that position:

Milton in Comus resembles the greatest Elizabethans in giving us man in his cosmic setting, in his middle position on the great chain of being between the beasts and the angels and attuned in his own microcosm to all the great happenings of the enveloping universe. It is somewhat ironic that of all the characters Comus should do most to help this process . . . 11

Milton embraces the outlines of the Renaissance world-view both in Comus and in Paradise Lost, but in his concern with the Fall he is led to emphasize man's inability to see Creation clearly and whole or to derive sufficient knowledge from it alone to stand against his proclivities to pervert Nature and his willingness to let Nature pervert him. Making Comus the chief spokesman for what Tillyard has elsewhere called "the Elizabethan world-picture," Milton also presents him as a particularly corrupt poet of that milieu, one whose depiction of a
stable and rationally knowable universe is not only
over-simplified but, in its intent, debasing. To oppose
him he offers chiefly Thyrsis but also Thyrsis' pupil
the Lady, whose discipline suggests that the path to the
clarity Comus so facilely assumes is a much more rigorous
one than Comus can follow. And if Nature at last reveals
its true meaning to her, confirming what she asserts on
faith in her debate with Comus, it is by way of an elabo-
rate indirection and through the appeal to powers Comus
can neither understand nor appreciate. The central
clash in the masque, then, is not between poetry and an
asceticism that would deny poetry, but between a kind of
poetry at best inadequate to the realities of this world
and at worst a dangerous distortion of it, and another
kind of poetry altogether. The issue here is the terms
on which poetry is available as a useful moral agent,
and it is resolved not on the basis of the logical imagery
of Renaissance Neoplatonism, though of course Milton's
poetics assimilates vestiges of Spenser's. Rather,
Milton turns to the mysteries of grace to give foundation
to a poetry that will confront the problems of fallen
man more fully than its predecessors had done.

II

Under Comus' control, the Wood is primarily a place
of confusion and hostility. To the Attendant Spirit the
Wood, and the world for which the Wood is a metaphor, is
a "Sin-worn mold" (17) to which he would not descend had not God dispatched him to protect the Egerton children. Without Thyrsis' help they are trapped in a world which finds their virtue alien and, through the reigning demon, seeks their corruption. But even with the power he commands, Thyrsis can only frighten Comus, not vanquish him. The Lady freed and her captor in momentary retreat, Thyrsis hurries the children away from the Wood, which is no less dangerous for their temporary victory:

Come Lady, while Heaven lends us grace,
Let us fly this cursed place,
Lest the Sorcerer us entice
With some other new device.
Not a waste or needless sound
Till we come to holier ground.
I shall be your faithful guide

Through this gloomy covert wide . . . (938-45)

Yet despite this image of postlapsarian Creation threatening because under Comus' dominion, the Lady rebuts Comus' attempts at seduction largely by an appeal to Nature's laws. When he accuses her of being "cruel to yourself, /
And to those dainty limbs which nature lent / For gentle usage and soft delicacy" (679-81), she rejects not his logic but his assumptions. In place of his teeming Nature, in danger of being "strangl'd with her waste
fertility" (729), she offers a "good cateress" (764) who "Means her provision only to the good / That live according to her sober laws / And holy dictate of spare Temperance" (765-67). William Madsen has correctly observed that the Lady offers no evidence to support her position, even though Milton seems to be in sympathy with it.13 The reason is simple. Her argument, while vindicated at last, is based not on observation, for the guise Nature wears in the Wood hardly lends weight to her case, but upon her faith in the lessons she has learned prior to her encounter with Comus.

The purpose of education, for Milton, is to repair the ruins of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the neerest by possessing our souls of true vertue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection. But because our understanding cannot in this body found it self but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be follow'd in all discreet teaching.

(Of Education, CE, IV, 277)
But the Lady, whose education is not yet complete, must be wary of information the senses transmit. The darkness of the Wood incapacitates the Lady's sight, and her reliance on her hearing merely leads her to Comus, who will try to win her mind by an appeal to the weaknesses inherent in the "inferior creature." And so if the senses supply the mind with the data of experience, the mind must direct the senses, interpreting the contradictory mass of sensory material according to the traditions it has assimilated. Milton would not tempt his Lady without providing her with means sufficient to resist temptation, and he would not send his pupils into the Wood without providing them, through study, with the best that has been thought and said concerning the direction their lives ought to take, but whether to use this knowledge is a choice that must be left to them. Thus memory is a faculty of central importance to the Lady's resistance, and in clearing it "Of calling shapes and beck'ning shadows dire, / And airy tongues that syllable men's names / On Sands and Shores and desert Wildernesses" (207-9), she is preparing her memory for its crucial role in her debate with Comus. Comus' art deceives the eye and, conquering the will, debases the body, but it maintains its power by lulling the memory. His rout, having tasted intemperately, "Not once perceive their foul disfigurement, / But boast
themselves more comely than before, / And all their friends and native home forget, / To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty" (74-77). Their delusion is related to their loss of memory, but the Lady resists temptation in large part because her memory overcomes Comus' attempts to circumvent it. For as his cup is Lethean, so is his rhetoric. He makes a carpe diem appeal, urging that the auditor accept the present moment exclusive of past or future, and his argument is sophistical, based on assumptions whose falsity the rhetoric is designed to make the hearer forget. The Lady dispels Comus' vision of ephemeral pleasure with ease, but to do so she must rely on the authority of her schooling because in his realm there is nothing else to which she can resort.

Despite the soundness of the Lady's argument, she is not able to overcome Comus but only to reject his invitation. And given the limited efficacy of her virtues to subdue this confusing and deceiving world, the Elder Brother seems terribly naive, for his reassurances depend upon the clear perception of correspondences between the ideal and the real that are not actually so apparent. Believing her virtue contains in itself the means for her to destroy any evil which threatens her, he sees his sister not as she is, virtuous but frail, but rather with the powers ascribed to Diana and Minerva. He fails to recognize, in
the words of Brooks and Hardy, "that the real world does not square with that ideal one which he has constructed for himself."  

Though the beauty of his description momentarily comforts the Second Brother, Thyrsis' arrival is disquieting, and he begins to disabuse the Elder Brother of his easy idealism much as the Lady, when the shepherd she has trusted leads her to an opulent palace, drops her own reliance on simple correspondences and direct heavenly interventions without abandoning the faith that reliance has expressed. Describing the situation as it really exists, Thyrsis rouses the Second Brother to question his elder's confidence, and the Elder Brother's reaffirmation is likewise qualified by Thyrsis' greater knowledge. Enraged by Comus' perfidy, he sounds very much like the traditional courtly defender of feminine virtue, vowing "I'll find him out, / And force him to restore his purchase back, / Or drag him by the curls to a foul death, / Curs'd as his life" (606-9). But Thyrsis restrains his rash courage with a warning:

    ... here thy sword can do thee little stead;
    Far other arms and other weapons must
    Be those that quell the might of hellish charms.
    He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,
    And crumble all thy sinews. (611-15)

Under Thyrsis' tutelage, the Elder Brother begins to
surrender his heroic but over-simplified view of the world, and he at last follows in trusting submission: "Thyrsis, lead on space, I'll follow thee, / And some good angel bear a shield before us" (657-58).

If the Elder Brother defines his world by drawing on an allegorical mode that proves inadequate to the complexities he encounters, he nonetheless gives this sort of expression its noblest form. Comus, on the other hand, serving as the spokesman for a universe totally explicable and alive with pagan gods and Longaevi, offers us the Renaissance world-view at its most trivialized and Renaissance imagery at its most destructive. Yet both their attempts to reduce Creation to comprehensible proportions, employing allegory, mythology, and folklore, are congenial to the masque, the most typically Renaissance of genres. In its allegorical resolution the masque customarily gives all truth a visible form, and it sorts out the elements of local reality under the appropriate universal rubrics. Having posed as ideals, the masquers at the climax disclose their identities, but just as in the ideal world of the masque they have observed the decorum of the actual court, so they become courtiers again without surrendering altogether the ideal identities the masque has conferred upon them. As in Spenser, the ideal and the concrete interpenetrate with a thoroughness that gives pageant, visual and ceremonial, a validity
which is absolute as well as aesthetic—or aesthetically pleasing because it is also absolutely true. Milton's contribution to the genre, however, lacks this quality of spectacle. The only real epiphany occurs at Comus' palace, where the Lady sees Nature not in ideal but in perverted form. We are never allowed to see the higher reaches of reality, and the Attendant Spirit's often sketchy description of them, particularly in that part of the Epilogue referring to the birth of Youth and Joy, suggests that he knows regions so ineffable he can only hint at their nature.

Rosemond Tuve has speculated that the limited facilities at Ludlow prevented Milton from utilizing the masque convention of an "unveiling or discovery of the true nature of things through images."¹⁶ True, Milton did not have at his disposal the stage at Whitehall and the Stuart treasury, and he collaborated not with the architect Inigo Jones but with Henry Lawes, a musician. But in turning to poetry rather than to machinery to resolve the action in Comus he was not simply bowing to exigencies he would have preferred to escape. Rather, he was designing a masque appropriate to his sense of transcendent reality and of man's relation to it. By limiting the communication of that reality to the words of the Attendant Spirit, he emphasizes first its ultimate inexpressibility, for in a manner characteristic of apocalyptic writings the
Attendant Spirit becomes more vague as he describes the regions above the Garden of Adonis; and second, he demonstrates its radically internal nature, since the words impress an image on our minds that our eyes cannot confirm. And finally, in his exploitation of the dramatic potential of the form he stresses that the vision must be prepared for with strict discipline, though it is conferred as a gift, not as a reward. Stephen Orgel has observed that the Jonsonian masque required the masquers to acknowledge their audience, indicating that they are aware from the first that they are at once concrete and ideal and thus precluding any real development of character. The Lady and her brothers, unlike conventional masquers because they speak, are unlike them also because they begin in ignorance that they are acting parts in a performance. Tracing their progress through the Wood, Milton reveals them in the arduous process of attaining detachment from their roles, and they acquire it only at the end, when they join the audience to attend to the Epilogue. But except for the power of grace, which releases them from Comus' domain, they would be as trapped as he is within the ephemeral dramatic form. Experience is a necessary part of their education, for it tests and confirms the virtue which is education's goal, but virtue is brought to fruition only when it is "united to the heavenly grace of faith" (Of Education,
III

In Of Education Milton sees grace as the means for man to perfect his virtues, but in his poetry he acknowledges that it is grace which impels one to follow virtue at all. Conscience, fallen man's spur to the virtuous life, is a function of the "Prevenient Grace" (PL XI, 3) that moves Adam to prayer, and it is the "strong siding champion" (212) that sustains the Lady in her steadfastness and lends her a heavenly aura. She knows that Heaven must preserve her in any encounter with evil, but she implicitly admits that even the limited powers she enjoys are derivative. The Elder Brother sees his sister as herself a personification of Chastity, a youthful Diana whose power is intrinsic rather than deriving from Heaven, but like the Lady's constant deference to the ultimate source of her delivery, the symbol which his descriptions recall contradicts this view. For the moon, Diana's sphere, sheds only reflected light; like Chastity it is "Sun-clad" (782) but not light-generating. Robert Adams has argued that Milton, facing a problem of tact, limited the Lady's reliance on divine help to the end of the masque because "One simply does not tell an earl's daughter that she is chaste only by the grace of God." But the emphasis on divine sustenance is pervasive, and from Milton's point of view the highest
compliment he could pay the Lady would be to show her acting in cooperation with God.

Even though its original source is in grace, the Lady's virtue is powerless to do anything more than preserve itself, and the paralysis to which she is forced is the culmination of a process of narrowing that has begun with the Prologue. From "the starry threshold of Jove's Court / . . . where those immortal shapes / Of bright aërial Spirits live insph'er'd / In Regions mild of calm and serene Air" (1-4), the Attendant Spirit descends to earth, a smaller and dimmer sphere. The progressive confinement continues, but the moral connotations of contraction are reversed, for within "this pinfold" (7) constriction and seclusion characterize those inhabitants who are most noteworthy. Thus we survey earth's expanse, then narrow our focus to one pre-eminent island and then to one estate of particular distinction. And finally the Lady, who is an emissary from her father's moral oasis, is forced to retreat even from her own body to protect her mind from the incursions of Comus' world. But withdrawal can only be a preparation, never a culmination, for the execution of one's moral mission involves participation in the world. Thus beyond the natural and ethical phases of Milton's educational program is the political,¹⁹ and likewise Comus has political overtones which are inextricable
from its moral concerns. The masque was first produced as a part of the festivities celebrating the Earl of Bridgewater's investiture as Lord President of Wales, and like the Lady, who is expected to marry, or like Milton, the poet who aspires to speak to and for a nation, the Earl must be involved in the world's affairs. It is not enough that he is virtuous; he must strive to make virtue current, to extend its domain. Appropriately, the Lady upholds the personal integrity of her family,\textsuperscript{20} while her brothers perform the more public duties, but all three depend upon Heaven for their direction and their success.\textsuperscript{21}

The brothers' efforts to conquer Comus and to supplant his chaos with virtuous order are aided by Thyrsis' magic herb. Most critics agree that haemony has something to do with grace, but Thyrsis' elaborate testimonial for the plant's efficacy has proved troubling.\textsuperscript{22} He vouches for it by an appeal both to tradition, comparing it with Homer's moly, and to experience, claiming he has tested it himself. But its real significance resides in its effect on the brothers. Despite its veneer of rationality, the plan requires most of all that the brothers trust Thyrsis, whom we know to be divine and they know to be at least good and wise. God works most frequently through his agents on earth, and when they are efficacious, even though it is with the power he lends them, there is usually a rational explanation.
Thus when God becomes a strategist in the Old Testament, his maneuvers are both successful and, in retrospect, explicable: the confusion Gideon caused by leading his men to the Midianite camp at night, breaking pitchers, blowing trumpets, and waving torches, resulted quite logically in an Israelite victory (Judges 7); and perhaps it was vibration after all that razed the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6). But these strategems produce explanations which do not satisfy. We call them daring, rather than foolhardy, only because they worked. Milton surely did not have these incidents in mind when he was considering how to save the Lady, or if he did he failed to make the association available. But the Biblical accounts are analogous to the invasion of Comus' lair, for in them we see that faith, when it must be translated into action, looks to God for its success. Milton's emphasis on the obscuring of the herb's virtues when it is transplanted to earth indicates the impossibility of knowing how to prevail without God's assistance, and the whole episode is consonant with this effort to stress man's dependency on God for the prospering of even his most righteous ventures. Like the Lady, her brothers proceed with a complete faith in the validity of Thyrsis' lesson, but the unfavorable odds suggest that not simply knowledge or even faith assures their victory, but the grace which underlies and interacts with both of
these. With rather elaborate indirection, Thyrsis has enlisted man in God's cause for man's sake, but the partial nature of their success underscores their own shortcomings even as it allows the necessity of grace to become as apparent to the brothers as it has been all along to Milton's audience.

Typically, Milton views one's responsibility in the political arena in terms less of physical combat than of speech. The last grade of his curriculum includes the learning of logic and rhetoric, and once that is completed, the study of poetic theory is to acquaint the pupils with "what despicable creatures our common Rimers and Play-writers be, and shew them, what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of Poetry both in divine and humane things" (Of Education, CE, IV, 286). Having cultivated virtue to the fullest extent, the scholar enjoys a "universal insight" which qualifies him to exercise his skills in the arts of persuasion, dangerous tools in frivolous hands, for the public good. But, as in Comus Milton suggests that public action, if not public speaking, must be aided at least indirectly by God, so he indicates that poetry of the kind he aspires to write likewise depends upon inspiration, which is analogous to and probably synonymous with grace. It is a step beyond insight and involves re-creation. The Lady's education aids her
right reason in penetrating Comus' designs, but in the harshness of her rejection she separates truth from beauty as she severs mind and body. And it is only Sabrina's dispensation of grace which allows her truth to reclaim the beauty which is its due, and thus to enjoy the possibility once more of participating in the world to which she belongs.

The Lady's education persuades her that chastity is temperance, the law Nature means her to follow and the culmination of the human quest for excellence. Her trinity of virtues, Faith, Hope, and Chastity all anticipate Charity but cannot result in charitable action without the accompaniment of a further act of grace. But in Comus' Wood, chastity is vulnerable, for even the temperate use of the pleasures he can provide would debase her. And so the Lady, guided by the stricter regimen that also disciplines the aspiring poet, abandons her commitment to chaste temperance and affirms instead "the sage / And serious doctrine of Virginity" (786-87), which frightens Comus even though he cannot understand its mystery. The two have disagreed over Nature's intent without resolution, but in raising the discourse to a level Comus cannot attain, the Lady suggests the real grounds of her steadfastness and the source of her hope. Because Comus' intentions are suspect, she cannot use with moderation what he offers, and so she will, like
Jesus in the wilderness, take nothing at all. In denying him she may, through an act of divine intercession, regain all that she has surrendered and more. But even if that never comes, she will retain what he cannot touch except at her invitation. Her faith turns out to be justified, the sign from Heaven realized in a roundabout though efficacious way.

For though the heavenly guardian she expects finally appears, he must turn to yet another divine agent to effect the Lady's release. Sabrina is, as Franklin Baruch has said, an "extension of the Attendant Spirit" in her role as protector, but she is also like him in her unity of body and spirit, and her distinguishing virtue makes her an extension of the Lady as well. Allen complains about Milton's enhancement of the Sabrina myth to fit the moral of his masque, but he clearly performs the alteration in order to make Sabrina's parallels with the Lady more apparent. Like the Lady, Milton's Sabrina has preserved her virtue only by negation because malevolence interrupted the course of innocent Nature. And she revives her human counterpart in a way analogous to her own resurrection. After the "mortal change" (10) which she had already suffered, Sabrina underwent an "immortal change" (841), becoming a goddess so airy that the flowers do not feel her tread. She was restored by the administration of "Ambrosial Oils" (840)
"through the porch and inlet of each sense" (839) much as her water revives the Lady. Thus her reward for refusing to permit her body to be corrupted is, as the Lady's will be, the restoration of sensual delight to innocence through heavenly intervention. The degree to which Sabrina succeeds in transmuting the beauties that are available to her is indicated in the Song which accompanies the Lady's release. Though its imagery, like Comus!, is primarily visual, its descriptions of Nature are sparkling and open, while his are customarily dark and therefore threatening.

Thyrsis has been the figure of the Orphic poet from the start, accommodating his divine message to human perceptions through his disguise much as Raphael will resort to similes to explain to Adam the Battle in Heaven. Sabrina assumes a role analogous to Thyrsis' at the end, both in order to make explicit the heavenly source of his power and to make more apparent the relationship of the Lady's predicament to the artist's. The remaining business is dominated by sensuous imagery which looks forward at once to the pleasures of true marriage, for the Lady, and to the vision that comes to the poet through divine inspiration; and her release begins the conditional and anticipatory mode which characterizes the end of the poem.
IV

The fruition of virtue on Milton's terms may be difficult to attain, but it does not justify the charges of anti-poetic asceticism critics have levelled at Comus, for the pleasure to which the masque looks forward is ultimately more generous and expansive than, say, Jonson's version in Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue, a source for Milton's masque. Like the spectacle of the court production itself, Jonson's pleasure is ephemeral, a respite compatible with virtue only because man in his weakness needs refreshment. In the final dance, Mercury makes this lesson explicit:

An eye of looking back were well,
Or any murmur that would tell
Your thoughts, how you were sent
And went,
To walk with Pleasure, not to dwell.
These, these are hours by Virtue spared
Herself, she being her own reward,
But she will have you know
That though
Her sports be soft, her life is hard.
You must return unto the hill,
And there advance
With labor, and inhabit still
That height and crown
From whence you ever may look down
Upon triumphèd Chance.  

As the Elder Brother represents the Spenserian mytho-
graphic and allegorical mode common to the court masque,
so the Second Brother represents the view of pleasure
Jonson's Mercury expresses. He initially desires com-
forting sounds to offer him "some solace yet, some little
cheering" (348) in the Wood, and when his thoughts turn
to his lost sister his first concern is that she will
be in physical distress:

But O that hapless virgin our lost sister,
Where may she wander now, whither betake her
From the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistles?
Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,
Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad Elm
Leans her unpillow'd head fraught with sad fears.
What if in wild amazement and affright,
Or while we speak, within the direful grasp
Of Savage hunger or of Savage heat?   (350-58)

And later, when he is reassured of their sister's safety
even from "the rash hand of bold Incontinence" (397), his
response indicates he is settling for aesthetic satis-
factions that obscure rather than address the hard truth
he has attempted to face:

How charming is divine Philosophy!
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns. (476-79)

As Comus trivializes the Renaissance world-picture the Elder Brother assumes, so he corrupts the view of pleasure the Second Brother shares with Mercury. Seeing the night and the Wood as an occasion for holiday, he later urges the Lady to drink from his cup by appealing to her need for reprieve. Everyone, he argues, requires "Refreshment after toil, ease after pain, / That have been tire'd all day without repast, / And timely rest have wanted" (687-89). In prompting her to indulge the physical to the exclusion of the spiritual, he invites her as well to accept the easy and ephemeral beauties of his palace and of his speeches, which are a sort of rhetorical Bower of Bliss that the Lady's stridency shatters much as Guyon destroys Acrasia's alluring trap. And his fear suggests that he realizes, as Jonson does, the fragile and fleeting nature of the delights he advances.

Milton, on the other hand, does not reconcile virtue to pleasure in the Jonsonian manner. His resistance to dualism leads him rather to posit a pleasure appropriated by virtue through the freedom grace affords. And the poetry this view entails has been adumbrated in Comus' response to the Lady's song. He admiringly compares it to the singing of Circe and the Sirens, whose music has
an effect of ease-making similar to the one Jonson offers:

... they in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense,
And in sweet madness robb'd it of itself,
But such a sacred and home-felt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never heard till now. (260-64)

His own rhetoric, designed to suspend the function of memory and thus, almost literally, to rob the sense of itself, is fashioned after his mother's example. But as an alternative he hears the Lady's song, whose divine source leads to higher pleasures because the "waking bliss" it produces is a result of the mind and the senses engaged in unison.

This song anticipates the Epilogue, where all the senses are satisfied in a transcendent vision of delight. Though some critics have stressed the idealism of the passage, finding it to confirm the Lady's asceticism by alluding only to a mystical, spiritual fulfillment, its obvious eroticism also suggests the promise of earthly fruition. A. S. P. Woodhouse offers the best corrective:

... the conclusion mitigates the austerity, though not the strictness of Milton's doctrine. He repudiates false pleasures, but not joy; wantonness, but not the spirit of youth. The quest is arduous, he would seem to say, and demands renunciation, but among its rewards
may be reckoned not only virtue and knowledge, illumination of mind, peace of mind, but the very things that the adversary would declare to be taken away: life and youth and joy. And to these the final lines of the Epilogue will add one further note: freedom. 28

The image of the Garden of Adonis would not really fit at the beginning, though Milton placed it there for the performance. Rather, the Garden's sensuous pleasures must wait until the end, where virtue has earned the perception and grace has re-established the delights as innocent and worthy. But the vision finally points toward a promise still to be fulfilled.

Though Cupid and Psyche are reconciled, their offspring are yet to be born, and Adonis, while reunited with Venus, is still convalescing from his wound. And the vision confers its anticipatory mood on the progress of the masquers. For while grace has first led the children to follow virtue and then freed the Lady, the social role she resumes is not the one she is to expect. The erotic pleasures of the Garden in the purified context of the Epilogue seem to prophesy for the Lady a consecrated marriage in which body and mind are alike united. But nothing is masked in Comus so much as Milton's own poetic aspirations. Despite the vagueness of the description of the realms above the Garden of Adonis, the Epilogue
resembles the Renaissance mode which I have suggested Milton is in the process of transcending. Yet as the Attendant Spirit recurrently creates new myths out of old, so Milton discovers and articulates a new grounds for poetry without rejecting what he can use of the traditions available to him. While in Comus as in Paradise Lost he gives us the totality of the Renaissance world-view, he stresses the obscurity rather than the availability to fallen man of the vision of wholeness he presents. In emphasizing the role of grace in the redemption of beauty, he indicates the source of the inspiration he needs in order to write poetry of the exalted kind he describes in Of Education. In Paradise Lost God's act of creation is preceded by an act of withdrawal, and for Milton the poet must recapitulate this movement. As B. Rajan has said of Milton's style, "fertility is made possible, and not merely assisted by, restraint."^29 His asceticism, like the Lady's, is not negative but preparatory, awaiting the fulfillment the Epilogue seems to promise.
Notes to Chapter One


2 For Milton's use of the Orpheus myth, see Caroline W. Mayerson, "The Orpheus Image in Lycidas," PMLA, 64 (1949), 189-207.

3 For an elaboration of this point, see A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Comus Once More," The University of Toronto Quarterly, 19 (1950), 221-2.


5 Both the Attendant Spirit and Comus are guilty of considerable fabrication. Stanley Fish, in an informal talk to the Milton Seminar at the Rice University Department of English in the spring of 1973, has suggested that the two are to be differentiated solely in terms of intent. Philip B. Rollinson, on the other hand, in his article "The Central Debate in Comus," Philological Quarterly, 49 (1970), 481-8, suggests that result is the chief criterion on which to distinguish them. Both critics, it seems to me, are partly right.

9 Ibid., 630.
12 For the Neoplatonic and logical basis of Renaissance imagery, see Rosemond Tuve, Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947). Sears Jayne, in his article "The Subject of Milton's Ludlow Mask," has uncovered a good deal of Neoplatonic lore whose relevance to Comus I would not deny. I am simply arguing that Milton's use of this material is on other terms than the one Tuve sees as characteristic of Neoplatonic imagery. I do feel, moreover, that Jayne's philosophical interpretation slights both the drama and the religious issues Milton is confronting.


19Prior to politics Milton places the study of economics, or as Merritt Hughes says, "administration of a household or community" (*John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, p. 635, n. 60), which is clearly a transitional grade from ethics to political management on a national scale.

20See Barbara Breasted, "Comus and the Castlehaven Scandal," *Milton Studies*, 3 (1971), 201-24, for the context of the masque. According to Breasted, the Lady in representing chastity was reaffirming her family's possession of an aristocratic virtue which some relatives had recently abandoned.
21 Jackson C. Boswell, studying Book XI of *Paradise Lost*, makes a useful distinction between prevenient grace, "a temporary aid or assistance given by God enabling man to exercise his free will and to accept the gift of salvation," and subsequent grace, which "accompanies his free acts, preserves and reinforces the holy habits which render man's actions more pleasing to God;" see *SEL*, 7 (1967), 83. In terms of Boswell's categories, the Lady owes her opportunity to follow virtue to prevenient grace, but her brothers owe their victory, and she her release and future joy, to subsequent grace.

22 The most important separate discussions of this problem include the following: Edward S. Le Comte, "New Light on the 'Haemony' Passage in *Comus,"

23 For the equation of inspiration with grace, see William B. Hunter, Jr., "Milton's Urania," *SEL*, 4 (1964), 35-42. Hunter shows that all the invocations in *Paradise Lost*, even the one ostensibly to Urania, are in fact addressed to the Son of God.

describes Calvin's attitude toward using pagan authors in terms that are relevant to the Lady's use of philosophy: "Calvin . . . did not care whether the enlightenment came from Cicero or Plato or Aratus for use against 'gentile' polytheism and idolatry," but he "does not regard this approach as a positive contribution to faith, a foundation for it or a base under it, but he attributes to it an exclusively negative function . . . It is not a bridge to truth faith, but a battering ram against false 'faiths!'" (pp. 84-5).


26 Allen, pp. 34-5.


28 "The Argument of Milton's Comus," The University of Toronto Quarterly, 11 (1941), 69-70. Readers familiar with Woodhouse's essay will probably detect a parallel between his Nature, Nature-and-Grace, and Grace, and my idyllic, ethical, and social-assisted-by-grace as definitions of the sections of Comus. The latter has two advantages: it accounts more fully for the element of divinity present from the beginning; and, in focusing on the Lady, it reveals the movement as dramatic rather than merely conceptual.
CHAPTER TWO:

The Creative Word
In *Comus* Milton had begun to articulate a poetics sufficient to his sense of the truths he wished to convey. For the paradisiacal vision that concludes the masque, however, he reverted to the sharply defined iconographic and mythographic images of the Spenserian mode. Given the strictures of the genre and the pervasive emphasis on the discipline necessary to achieve this vision, the poetic idiom of the Epilogue is defensible, but it is not entirely adequate to render the regions transcending the Garden of Adonis. The Attendant Spirit points to but does not describe in detail the realm where Cupid and Psyche anticipate the birth of Youth and Joy; the names themselves are expected to evoke in the minds of Milton's spectators an image of the setting which iconographic tradition had made current.

Likewise, in *Paradise Lost* Milton's use of mythology and iconography is considerable, but the subject matter of his epic did not allow him to resolve the problem of representing worlds so different from his own in such a summary fashion. Because it deals so completely with the prelapsarian world and the Heaven for which Creation is a "shadow," the two realms must be presented in greater detail. At the same time, Milton's sense of God's essential unknowability, as well as his Calvinist emphasis on God's activity as the vehicle of His revelation to man in Nature, precluded his dependence
upon the vivid but static imagery of his poetic forebears.¹

Yet despite Milton's resistance to traditional poetics, Eden and even Heaven contain very real sensuous delights. The combination of the sensuous and the dynamic in Paradise Lost has prompted many critics to describe the poem as "Baroque," and the term, though some ambiguity has resulted from over-application, can be illuminating.² But the Baroque style has more elements than those it shares with Paradise Lost, and to apply the label as an aesthetic norm results inevitably in disappointment at those parts of the poem which are austere and quiescent. Rosemond Tuve's critique is incisive:

Milton's Eden certainly reminds us of baroque rather than Renaissance or medieval painting. Yet when the classification 'Baroque,' instead of giving us a name for certain indefinable likenesses, imposes upon an author a pattern of thought derived from other examples in the classification, our poems have become tools to protect our categories.³

As Tuve warns, criticism of this kind moves very easily from poem to poet. Thus Milton has been described as tortured throughout his life by an unresolved conflict between an expansive humanism and an ascetic Puritanism, with the former urge producing Baroque poetry and the latter allegiance recurrently marring the artistic product.
Milton diverges from the Baroque most clearly in his refusal to allow the body to subsume the spirit. Wylie Sypher has traced the genesis of the style to the Council of Trent, where the Counter Reformation doctrine of transubstantiation was promulgated with the result that "the flesh did not become spiritual -- the spiritual became fleshly." The architectural corollary to this development is the tendency to obscure structure in favor of decoration. But Milton's poetry works always in the opposite direction. As a theologian, he had asserted, "Spirit . . . contains within itself the inferior substance; as the spiritual and rational faculty contains the corporeal, that is, the sensitive and vegetative faculty" (Christian Doctrine, CE, XV, 25). His poetry manifests that same belief. In passages of local description his decorous restraint, his persistent indication of the moral reality underlying the physical, affords no opportunity for the rapturous contemplation of icons that stimulates the verse of Crashaw, whose poetry is more thoroughly a product of Baroque sensibility. Milton's treatment of prelapsarian Nature celebrates God's Creation less as an image than as a process whose continuity with divine movement he repeatedly emphasizes.

In a similar way, Milton's overall plan makes explicit the dependence of Creation upon the Creator. In order to stress the spiritual foundations of earthly delight, Milton reveals Heaven to us prior to conducting us to Eden. In
the Heaven of Book III we see the structural basis on which the Creation and its inhabitants depend, but it is not realized in terms of a static image. Rather it involves a complex pattern of reciprocity and exfoliation that can best be suggested in speech and movement. The colloquy between the Father and the Son represents this activity at its most abstract, but the same movement also animates Creation and finds its most concrete expression in the nuptial concord that Adam and Eve enjoy. Juxtaposed to this divine process is Satan's parodic imitation of it. For him, hypocrisy takes the place of authentic reciprocity, and his purpose is not to bring Creation to an ever more glorious fruition but to wither it. Paradise Lost, then, represents the culmination of the quest to which Milton had committed himself in Comus. In the epic, the mythographic and iconographic tradition is fully assimilated, the visual imagery altered to conform to an aesthetics whose essence is movement and abstraction.

I

Even to the angels, God is suffused in a light which obscures his features, but he manifests himself in sound and movement. Begetting the Word makes him even more accessible. As God foresees Satan's success on Earth and promises to temper Justice with Mercy,

Beyond compare the Son of God was seen

Most glorious, in him all his Father shone
Substantially express'd, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appear'd,
Love without end, and without measure Grace.

(III, 138-42)

The movement that animates and defines Creation receives its most abstract treatment in the colloquy which God's prophecy initiates. His pronouncement that "Man therefore shall find grace, / The other none" (III, 131-32) implies all that the subsequent dialogue will make explicit. But the process of articulation, like the manifestation of the Son and the creation of the world, elucidates God's essential goodness, making it clearer to lesser beings without altering its nature.

The exchange is first of all ceremonious. Apostrophe characterizes all the conversations in Paradise Lost, and the effect may be comic when the vocative is used inappropriately, as in Satan's reconciliation with Sin and Death (II, 817ff.). But when it is used correctly, the vocative, as J. B. Broadbent says of the "true courtliness" of the human couple, "realise[s] the highest purpose of politeness, to recognise and celebrate the precise nature of the being addressed." Using the titles "Father" and "Son" throughout, however, the participants in the divine colloquy not only disclose the nature of the one addressed, but they also indicate the nature of the speaker's relation to his respondent. Thus the ceremonious use of the vocative case
shows that the fuller articulation of the divine plan is a function of relation, of dialectic between discrete beings who know both self and other. 8

As the divine scheme is elaborated, the Logos grows to appreciate more fully what it means to be the Son of God. His initial praise and rhetorical questions show his full understanding of the Father's plan, intuiting His reasons without actually having heard them articulated. To the Son's perception that withholding grace would be to allow Satan his triumph, the Father responds, "All hast thou spok'n as my thoughts are, all / As my Eternal purpose hath decreed" (III, 171-72), concluding with the corollary to His decrees of Justice and Mercy for man: "He with his whole posterity must die, / Die hee or Justice must; unless for him / Some other able, and as willing, pay / The rigid satisfaction, death for death" (III, 209-12). The Son's voluntary offer to sacrifice himself for man, and the Father's indication that "Humiliation shall exalt / With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne" (III, 313-14), completes the outline of divine intention, and at the same time it brings the Son to a total appreciation of his own role. Unlike Satan, who in Paradise Regained calls himself the Son of God because "relation stands" (IV, 519), the Logos is "By Merit more than Birthright Son of God" (III, 308). As Irene Samuel has said, "beyond working out a plan for man's redemption, the dialogue of the council
in Heaven has shown in dramatic process the Son's growth to what the Father himself calls virtual equality. But the plan, like the Son's sacrifice, is to be implemented in the still-unrealized future. We are given the complete and abstract statement of purpose which contains both all that is to come and yet only the beginning of a process which will take an often oblique course before fruition. As God's initial decree has implied all that the dialogue makes explicit, so the fully elucidated plan contains only incipiently everything for which history itself will supply the elaboration.

God's "passionless logic," as Samuel calls it, establishes an abstract context within which the Son's compassion can assume a purposive direction. For similar reasons, the Son's initial act at Creation involves not animation but rather geometry accompanied by a verbal command:

... in his hand
He took the golden Compasses, prepar'd
In God's Eternal store, to circumscribe
This Universe, and all created things:
One foot he centred, and the other turn'd
Round through the vast profundity obscure,
And said, Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,
This be thy just Circumference, O World. (VII, 224-31)

Once the boundaries are established, the Son's infusion of
"vital virtue" (VII, 236) will allow matter to burgeon into the varied and complex forms of life we find in Eden.

In the poem, the act of Creation is described subsequent to the colloquy over the imminent fall of man. The effect of this displacement is to provide the reader with a more gradual sense than Raphael's narrative suggests of the descent from spiritual to physical. The movement that in the colloquy had been manifested only in verbal and intellectual terms is for the reader first translated into sensuous experience and physical activity as the angels overhear the Son's offer and then respond to the proposed sacrifice. Accompanying the heavenly council is an "ambrosial fragrance" (III, 135) which enhances the angels' pleasure at what they hear, and they respond "With Jubilee, and loud Hosannas" (III, 348). At the same time they recapitulate with physical gestures the ceremonious quality which the use of apostrophe has lent to the conversation: "Towards either Throne they bow, and to the ground / With solemn adoration down they cast / Thir Crowns inwove with Amarant and Gold" (III, 350-52). The process becomes more physical and elaborate without losing the reflection of divinity which gives it life, for the presentation always resists the fixity of the sharp image and the individual form while retaining an overwhelming sense of light, sound, and movement.

For the Father and Son, who are "simple," i.e.,
indivisible, pleasure seems purely an intellectual matter, and divine love seems to find its most characteristic expression in words. But angels, like human beings, receive stimuli in ways which are both various and partial. Not only do they appreciate the visual, aural, and olfactory delights that accompany their perception of and response to divine beneficence, they also share with their human counterparts the capacity to enjoy sexual experience. Thus in explaining the process of Creation in a way Adam will find comprehensible, Raphael resorts to sexual and generative metaphors as an area of common experience. In addition to making available to Milton an extensive tradition of myth, the analogy indicates that Nature's fecundity is an appropriate way of responding to God's goodness, for it imitates the divine and angelic patterns of relation and development on its own terms. Joseph Summers' description of Nature is illustrative:

... from the beginning of the poem Milton has done everything possible to make us realize that within his universe nothing is self-sufficient and immutable except God; that life is conceived as action and process rather than as static being: that any action or quality achieves value for good and evil only by means of its relationship to an all-embracing order which proceeds from God...
Raphael's use of generative and sexual metaphor grows more explicit as Creation becomes more particularized, and it finally ceases to be metaphor at all. From the Spirit of God's "brooding wings" (VII, 235), Raphael moves to "The Earth . . . in the Womb as yet / Of Waters, Embryon immature" (VII, 276-77), and at last he repeats the divine injunction "Be fruitful, multiply" (VII, 396). But this expansion and concretion does not indicate distance from God. Despite the greater particularity, the force that animates Creation continues to be apparent. As in Heaven, "Motion and light, not color and shape, make the portrait of Paradise."^{12}

Finally, Raphael's use of procreative metaphor suggests a corollary to God's revelation to man in Nature. As it does with all of Creation, God's spiritual force informs and defines the physical relationship of Adam and Eve. Adam's dignity and sovereignty are the stamp of his Creator, and Eve's beauty and her ability to delight him suggest an aspect of God in Creation: He is the source of both truth and joy, and He appeals not just to man's intellect but to all his senses. Man can never fully comprehend Him, but in experiencing His power in ongoing Creation, human sensibility is sustained and renewed continuously. Analogously, Eve elicits Adam's pursuit and then in submitting provides him with "ever new delight" (V, 19), a phrase that might also summarize Adam's experience with all of
Creation. For fallen man, to whom mutability is a burden, this sense of incompleteness is frustrating, but in the prelapsarian Garden change brings only a perpetual exfoliation which in itself contains no necessary withering. Because "Universal Pan / Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance / Led on th' Eternal Spring" (IV, 266-68), Creation always exists as potential as well as actuality.

II

The divine pattern of speech and movement that defines and animates Creation finds its richest concrete restatement in the nuptial concord Adam and Eve enjoy. "Imparadis't in one another's arms" (IV, 506), they are joined in a marriage which is an "infolded" version of all the themes and motifs that are "unfolded" in the description of the Garden, from sensuous pleasure to an acknowledgement of divine sustenance.13 As Milton's treatment of Creation, emphasizing its verbal source and its ongoing character, is attributable to a Calvinist interpretation of the Book of Nature, so the importance of marriage as a theme also ratifies the poem as "Protestant."14 In the treatment of prelapsarian marriage Milton makes us continually aware of the priority of spiritual concord and the need for the continued blessing of God, and through the negative example of the Fall he shows that human relationship is meaningful only when it also involves a dialectic with God. Finally, the marriage-figure becomes a pivotal point
in the divine plan. It provides the means whereby the process of Creation can continue, through the descendents of Adam and Eve, to unfold not in space but in time.

Prior to infusing matter with life, the Son circumscribes the arena in which he wishes to work. Similarly Milton infuses his description of Adam and Eve with terms which are abstract and moral, providing his readers with a context within which to judge prelapsarian delight. After having seen the lower creatures, Satan notices Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native Honor clad
In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all,
And worthy seem'd, for in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shown, Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't.

(IV, 288-94)

Here, Milton supplants effictio with notatio, and when he considers physical details, he focuses on their hair, an aspect of their appearance that acquires symbolic import in Milton's treatment. Yet existence in Paradise is quite sensuous. Eating the "supper Fruits ... which the compliant boughs / Yielded them" (IV, 331-33), they "recline / On the soft downy Bank damaskt with flow'rs" (IV, 333-34); and as if in logical escalation, "Nor gentle purpose, nor endearing smiles / Wanted, nor youthful dalliance as beseems /
Fair couple, linkt in happy nuptial League, / Alone as they" (IV, 337-40).

A later passage reduces to a few lines the same lesson Milton unfolds at length in introducing the human couple. Eve, Milton tells us,

... half imbracing lean'd
On our first Father, half her swelling Breast
Naked met his under the flowing Gold
Of her loose tresses hid: hee in delight
Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
Smil'd with superior Love, as Jupiter
On Juno smiles, when he impregn's the Clouds
That shed May Flowers; and press'd her Matron lip
With kisses ... (IV, 494-502)

Alluding both to a relationship between mythic deities and to a natural phenomenon for which the myth is an explanation, Milton makes of human concord a perfect synthesis of the divine and the natural. The conflation suggests that the three strata are inseparable because they are all a part of the same process. Further, by conjoining cause (impregnating the clouds) with a result at least once removed (May flowers), Milton indicates that the process continues as an effect not just of God's initial but of His perpetual animation of Nature and its inhabitants.

At the same time, Milton emphasizes the distinctions that exist between divine expansiveness and human love.
In the passage just quoted, the repetition of the word "half" provides a hint of the lesson both Eve and Adam learn at their first awakening. Eve has already recalled how a voice had interrupted her narcissistic fascination with her own image, bringing her to Adam who wins her with the words "Part of my Soul I seek thee, and thee claim / My other half" (IV, 488-89). Their subsequent relationship convinces her that marriage to Adam fulfills her nature in a way solitude would not, but Adam does not need the experience of fulfillment to sense his own incompleteness without a mate. Requesting that God create a wife for him, he has acknowledged that his need springs from the difference between his limited humanity and divine perfection (VIII, 415-19), and he sees the end of propagation as an attempt to emulate infinite Unity with an endless succession of incomplete beings (VIII, 419-26).

But propagation for Protestants was not the primary end of marriage, though it was an expected result. When Adam tells God he needs a mate with whom to "converse" (VIII, 396), as opposed to the Deity, whose perfection does not require "Social communication" (VIII, 429), he is doing more than resorting to euphemisms for sexual intercourse. John Halkett, the most recent expositor of the divorce tracts, has shown that Milton uses the word "conversation" to describe all he expected ideal marriage to be. By that term Milton means primarily spiritual
concord, but also a willingness to assume one's appropriate domestic role and to participate in physical love-making as an expression of spiritual communion. "Conversation," then, points to the continuity between body and spirit much as the actual dialogues between Adam and Eve include caresses as well as words. Thus the sensuous delights Adam and Eve enjoy in Eden are finally, like the ideal marriage they share, grounded in a spiritual reality which ratifies, makes innocent and even sacred, their physical pleasure.

However, if Milton intends more by "conversation" than simple verbal exchange, he clearly means that as well. It is the pattern of heavenly dialogue that informs their marriage, and the entire Creation continues to be responsive to the Word that brought it into being. For these reasons, the verbal expressions of Adam and Eve, with accompanying motions and setting, provide the clearest evidence for the recapitulation of heavenly movement in earthly marriage. As Milton emphasizes in his invocations (and also in the Nativity Ode), expression depends upon grace and ultimately returns to its source in thanksgiving. Thus, at their most intensely "marital," as they enter or emerge from the bower which God has sanctified for their use, Adam and Eve perform vespers or orisons whose ceremonious quality derives from, and is grounded in, the same movement through which divine purpose becomes manifest in natural fecundity
and human love.

Courtly gestures augment the dignity of the worshipful language that characterizes their evening song. Arriving "at thir shady Lodge... both stood, / Both turn'd, and under op'n Sky ador'd / The God that made both Sky, Air, Earth and Heav'n" (IV, 720-22), while in their matins the following day they urge the rest of Creation to join them in their praise of God's "goodness beyond thought, and Power Divine" (V, 159). The ceremonious quality of both these songs, of course, as well as Nature's responsiveness, is an elaborate, various, and more concrete version of the courtly ceremony suggested by the use of apostrophe in the colloquy between Father and Son in Heaven.

Spenser, in attempting to realize a similar sense of the divine foundation of human love, appropriated the Neoplatonic Graces from Renaissance iconography. Milton alludes to the Graces in other contexts, but they cannot convey the full sense of the interactions in his garden. Because they dance in a circle, the Graces suggest a completeness which Milton's Paradise does not possess. Further, Spenser's explication indicates that the image is centripetal and anthropocentric. As Colin Clout explains to Calidore, "That two of them still froward seem'd to bee, / But one still towards shew'd her selfe afore; / That good should from us goe, then come, in
greater store" (VI, x, 24). Milton's pattern, however, is theocentric and centrifugal, with more goodness emanating from the divine center than immediately returns. In turning to God before retiring, Adam and Eve acknowledge His sovereignty as a condition necessary to the full enjoyment of the pleasures of the marriage bed, but the explicitly sexual nature of "the Rites / Mysterious of connubial Love" (IV, 742-43) indicates that the circle of gift and thanksgiving which seems at least momentarily complete in the morning hymn also has the potential for further exfoliation through the children Adam and Eve expect to have.

But even as Milton makes explicit the ceremonious aspects of prelapsarian worship, he also stresses the resistance of the truly worshipful attitude to prescribed formulae, a point Puritans would make repeatedly in their arguments against Catholic and Anglican forms of worship. Like his own "unpremeditated Verse" (IX, 24), their orisons are "unmeditated" (V, 149) and employ a "various style" (V, 146), a description which applies as well to Milton's epic of celebration as to the morning song of Adam and Eve. At its most authentic, the ceremony involves God and the human participants in a complex relationship of reciprocity which is both fulfilling and open-ended. Deriving ultimately from the colloquy in Heaven, the movement animates and directs the ongoing
Creation and receives elaborate and concrete restatement in the figure of human marriage which occupies the center of the epic. But Satan's intrusion in the bower between vespers and matins is proleptic, indicating to the reader if not to Adam and Eve that their continued experience of God's beneficence must soon assume a form that they are not yet capable of apprehending. Milton has already shown us Satan's parodic use of ceremony and his appropriation of the icons of majesty, and the dissolution of their nuptial concord despite their continued but debased physical union will soon acquaint Adam and Eve as well with the problematic character of physical glory and sensuous delight.

III

The fallen angels enjoy a recollection of the divine pattern sufficient to enable them to approximate its form, but their refusal to acknowledge the centrality of God to the design renders their imitation hollow, devoid of the love that gives the pattern meaning. Speaking to the demonic council, Belial urges his fellow rebels to reconcile themselves to their present condition rather than renew their war only "To perish . . . swallow'd up and lost / In the wide womb of uncreated night, / Devoid of sense and motion" (II, 149-51). His characterization of non-being as the absence of sense and motion is revealing. As long as the fallen angels enjoy any kind of existence at
all, it is owing to, and thus imitative of, the divine movement that sustains all life. But Satan's company is at such a moral and physical distance from the source that suffers their continued being that the attempts to reduplicate Heaven in Hell are parodic. If their reasoning is often impressive, it is also sophistical; and of the other senses they seem to prefer the visual, though the sham splendor of Pandemonium is only a facade, for it lacks the suffusing glory God's presence lends the heavenly city. When Satan encounters the authentic beauty of Adam and Eve, on the other hand, he can only desire to corrupt it. Motion likewise characterizes Satan and his followers, but instead of joining in the emanation from the divine center, their purposes run counter to the holy current. Satan's journey from Hell to Eden resists the force of the decree that cast him onto "the burning Lake" (II, 169), even if his apparent success is overwhelmed by the corresponding descents of Raphael, the Son, and Michael.

The motion that has its source in divine relation is parodied most revealingly at those points where Satan's solipsism is most evident. We have seen the divine colloquy move from the Father's summary statement through the elucidating process the dialectic with the Son affords, to a celebration both of culmination and of the glory that is yet to come. The Son gains in stature as he becomes
increasingly aware of the meaning of his Sonship, and he is hailed as both the actual and the future Messiah. The demonic parliament inverts this pattern. Satan knows the outcome because he has prearranged it, but he pretends that the method of claiming "our just inheritance of old" (II, 38) is a matter for free inquiry: "by what best way, / Whether of open War or covert guile, / We now debate" (II, l.40-42). There is no real development in the exchange. Each speaker presents his position in refutation of his predecessors', with little attempt to reconcile opposing views. Thus Beelzebub's artful synthesis comes as something of a surprise. It subsumes the other positions without having grown out of them, and we soon learn why: "Thus Beëlzebub / Pleadeth his devilish Counsel, first devis'd / By Satan, and in part propos'd" (II, 378-80). The plan has been secretly predetermined, and the debate, unlike the real dialectic between Father and Son, is a mere formality.

Satan's hypocrisy, his reluctance to be known, is the devilish counterpart to God's partial revelation, the wish to be known by degrees. And where an important result of the latter is freedom for rational creatures, the goal of the former is the power to manipulate others. Satan's exaltation is one manifestation of this egoistic urge. He legitimizes his reign through his "heroic" offer to renew the strife between God and the rebel angels, while the Son,
who has already distinguished himself in battle, is celebrated not because of his willingness to face danger but because of his offer to be humiliated. He volunteers in order to re-establish relations between man and God, while Satan's design is to remove the possibility for reciprocal relation at any except the physical level. Satan's progress toward solipsism begins when the Father introduces the Son, and the War in Heaven makes his breach with the loyal angels irrevocable. The verbal exchanges invert heavenly ceremony. The elaborate and complimentary apostrophes Father and Son employ are here greatly reduced. Abdiel's use of the vocative is clipped but accurate—he calls Satan "Proud" (VI, 131), "fool" (VI, 135), and "Apostate" (VI, 172). Satan, on the other hand, uses no apostrophe at first, then resorts to the misnomer "seditious Angel" (VI, 152) to describe the loyal Abdiel. As verbal reciprocity is transformed from the courtesy of the divine dialogue to the flying of Satan and Abdiel, so the angelic gestures accompanying the colloquy become the blows of battle, described in terms of the verbal exchange for which they are an extension: Abdiel initiates the hostilities with "This greeting on thy impious Crest receive" (VI, 188).

Satan not only inverts heavenly courtliness; he can also imitate it, convincingly with Eve but with cloying and grotesque effect as he accepts his paternity of Sin and Death. This infernal Trinity is rich in thematic resonances. As
allegorical figures, Sin and Death are the appropriate products of the Satanic mind, where ideal and concrete—and truth and beauty—appear as dichotomized.  

But Sin at least is also a kind of metaphysical conceit, a "harsh yoking of opposites" whose joining is possible because of some points of similarity. Milton rejects this poetic mode as he does allegory, preferring to develop the ambiguous relation between woman and serpent more fully than the compression of the conceit will allow him to do. In terms of the Satanic version of the creative movement, however, the violence of the various relationships between Satan and his offspring extends to sexual intercourse the aggression that had transformed social intercourse to open conflict, the words of Satan and Abdiel to the blows of battle. And the incestuous nature of their copulation turns the pattern of augmenting creation into a closed circle, with Death raping his mother Sin to produce

These yelling Monsters that with ceaseless cry
Surround me, as thou saw'st, hourly conceiv'd
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite
To me, for when they list, into the womb
That bred them they return, and howl and gnaw
My Bowels, thir repast.  

(II, 795-800)

That this gruesome cycle has its source in Satan's mind is not surprising, for his thoughts are characteristically inward-turning, feeding on the hate that animates
him. The mobility that allows him to fly through Chaos to Eden is not matched with intellectual freedom. His mind remains figuratively imprisoned behind the gates Sin opens to facilitate his flight: "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell; / And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide, / To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n" (IV, 75-78). His soliloquies are similarly revealing. Wounded so deeply with "deadly hate" (IV, 99) that he can embrace only absurdity—"Evil be thou my Good" (IV, 110)—he initially responds to Eden with cold detachment: "the Fiend / Saw undelighted all delight" (IV, 285-86). But his response to Adam and Eve is more complex. He enters the Garden as the rapist, the destroyer, but he is momentarily overcome with awe at the beauty and innocence of the human couple. Recovering, he renews his determination, rationalizing his destructive urges much as he has tried to justify his initial rebellion and to obscure with saccharine cant the real nature of his relation to Sin. He ironically argues that his temptation is really the gift of "mutual amity" (IV, 376), but he concludes by showing that his desire is not to join with Adam and Eve but to subject them to the extension of his realm:

And should I at your harmless innocence
Melt, as I do, yet public reason just,
Honor and Empire with revenge enlarg'd,
By conquering this new World, compels me now
To do what else though damn'd I should abhor.

(IV, 388-92)

He can only achieve this goal by practicing deceit, by turning the pattern of exfoliating Creation to an involuted design whose intricacy obscures its source and purpose. Creation is complex and various, and if Milton's description of the prelapsarian serpent adumbrates the use to which Satan will put the beast, still its unfallen shape is in one sense only an indication of the ongoing richness and beauty of Nature which prevents boredom in Eden: "close the Serpent sly / Insinuating, wove with Gordian twine / His braided train, and of his fatal guile / Gave proof unheeded" (IV, 347-50). When Satan enters the serpent, however, the intricately wreathing body signifies the purpose about which Milton has already warned us. He becomes "a surging Maze" (IX, 499) whose intricacy does not serve to enlarge good but to keep evil secret. His circular folds no longer suggest divine augmentation but rather an ingenious puzzle aimed "To lure her Eye" (IX, 518). Yet it is his speech that finally leaves Eve "amaz'd" (IX, 614). Kathleen Swaim's description of Eve's entrapment makes explicit the parallel between Satan's rhetoric and the form he has assumed: "Eve is caught in the mazy folds of Satanic design, circularity, dark complexity, and subtly self-centered and self-generating thought and energy."
IV

Eden and its inhabitants shadow forth the pattern of reciprocity and exfoliation that has its inception in Heaven, but the Fall indicates that this metaphoric relationship is not a necessary attribute of human life. Rather, it is a condition of the willingness of Adam and Eve to respond appropriately to divine love. This response is spontaneous and as "various" as the style of their orisons, but it always participates in the same divinely-originating motion. When Satan effects their divorce from this movement, however, the behavior of Adam and Eve is absorbed into the pattern of Satanic parody, and their "happy rural seat" similarly falls before the advance of discord. Because, as Halkett says, "Milton sees true marriage as a final expression of the divine harmony inherent in the composition of things, the capstone of the universal order,"19 the jarring effects of the Fall find a natural expression and summation in the false marriage that obtains during the period between disobedience and contrition.

Like Satan, Eve after her disobedience must conceal her motives. Coaxing Adam to join her, she stresses the selflessness of her sin: "for thee / Chiefly I sought" (IX, 877-78); but that her motives, like Satan's, are selfish has been revealed earlier: "what if God have seen, / And Death ensue? then I shall be no more, / And Adam wedded to another Eve, / Shall live with her enjoying,
I extinct; / A death to think" (IX, 826-30). Despite her dissembling, Adam is overcome not by her arguments, but by his attraction to her person: "The Bond of Nature draw me to my own, / My own in thee, for what thou art is mine; / Our State cannot be sever'd, we are one, / One Flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself" (IX, 956-59). Yet in a sense, Eve's attractiveness is related to her argument. The misleading verbal facade she presents is analogous to the physical form of a marriage that lacks spiritual foundation, a union which is, as Milton had argued repeatedly, no marriage at all.

Thus the subsequent recapitulation of nuptial rites mocks their initial concord. While Nature had originally celebrated their union, here, as Adam eats, "Earth trembl'd from her entrails, as again / In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan" (IX, 1000-1). Where the marriage rites had originally been celebrated in language exalted and dignified, the Fall is anticipated by language in the process of becoming bathetic, a rhetoric without meaning. And of course the "marriage feast" and subsequent consummation are reduced to the companion sins Gluttony and Lechery. Like the relationship between Satan and Sin, a sexual union based on appetite ends in loathing. Halkett observes of Milton's argument for divorce,

Milton's myth—and his argument is almost that—is an inversion of the spiritual ascent of the
platonic lover . . . . Unlike the platonic lover who passes from Eros to Agape, the mismatched husband passes through Eros to Ate. If the object is unsuitable the sensuous experience which can produce spiritual insight can also kill the spirit in a furious kind of revenge. 20

In the accusatory scene between Adam and Eve, Milton gives that thesis dramatic restatement. And as an expression of bitter discord the verbal abuse foreshadows the advent of Sin and Death, who extend the dissonance throughout Creation:

. . . Discord first
Daughter of Sin, among th'irrational,  
Death introduc'd through fierce antipathy: 
Beast now with Beast gan war, and Fowl with Fowl,  
And Fish with Fish; to graze the Herb all leaving,  
Devour'd each other; nor stood much in awe  
Of Man, but fled him, or with count'nance grim  
Glar'd on him passing . . . (X, 707-14)

In Eve's deception and in the desire "to hide / The Parts of each from other, that seem most / To shame obnoxious, and unseemliest seen" (IX, 1092-94), the couple adopts the Satanic urge to self-concealment just as their apparently incessant "mutual accusation" (IX, 1187) provides a verbal analogue to the disharmony that pervades Chaos. Yet though they are fallen, they are not demonic. Satan has mimicked the extension of divine goodness with his urge to enlarge
the empire of Hell. Adam and Eve have no desire to counter the augmentation of divine goodness, but, no longer able to understand that it will continue despite their sin, they seek to end the unrelieved misery into which they feel their existence has been transformed. Eve proposes that they cheat Death of his right over their offspring, or, if Adam finds abstinence from sex too difficult,

Then both ourselves and Seed at once to free
From what we fear for both, let us make short,
Let us seek Death, or he not found, supply
With our own hands his office on ourselves.

(X, 999-1002)

But God will obviate the attractiveness of this proposal by removing the despair that gives it rise.

In Comus the Attendant Spirit shows the Lady's brothers that their faith will be answered in a more oblique way than they had anticipated. Similarly, Adam's recollection of the curse placed on the serpent, that "Her Seed shall bruise thy head, thou bruise his heel" (X, 181), restores their hope, but it remains for Michael to show how that prophecy will be fulfilled. The Paradise Adam and Eve may reclaim is far different from the one they have enjoyed, and once more the marriage-figure becomes a crucial index to the nature of man's altered attitude toward Creation, his companions, and God.

William Haller has said,
Man's fall ensues when the harmony and order of marriage, the reciprocal rule of love and obedience, freedom and responsibility, reason and conscience, is broken. His redemption is foreshadowed when woman, upon their expulsion from the earthly paradise, declares her renewed loyalty and obedience.21

But this reconciliation expresses itself in a more muted way than prelapsarian marriage did. Nature is fallen along with man, and man's fall obscures even the evidence of God that remains in postlapsarian Creation.22 Thus Adam and Eve can recapture a "paradise within" (XII, 587), but the Creation without may not always reaffirm their internal reconstruction of it. It was this assumption that underlay Puritan opposition to Hooker. Like many of the defenses of monarchy, Hooker's argument for prelaty rested on the hierarchy the law of Nature seemed to prescribe, while his antagonists countered with the law of "nature within," which reduced to blasphemy all external attempts to mediate between God and man, whether through elaborate ritual or church officers.

The original act of Creation resulted in the ordering and filling of space. The divine colloquy at the beginning of Book XI provides the basis for the redemption of mankind through time. But even the historical process lacks the clear mark of divine direction that had characterized Eden.

As A. S. P. Woodhouse has said,

Milton's view of history is essentially revolutionary, Platonist, and Puritan. It can best be characterized as the direct antithesis of Burke: history is not the 'known march of the ordinary providence of God'; it is a protracted wandering from the way, relieved by sudden interventions of God's extraordinary providence. 23

For this reason the reconciliation of Adam and Eve receives understated treatment. Satan has appropriated the courtliness of prelapsarian nuptial rites for his own purposes (XI, 575-636), and so in contrast, the reaffirmation of the marriage between Adam and Eve at the end of the poem is accomplished in a muted gesture which acquires meaning through Milton's elaborating description. Wandering through Eden "hand in hand" (XII, 648), they indicate the renewal of their concord, but in calling their way "solitary" (XII, 649), Milton suggests what the image alone is not capable of conveying. Their physical conjunction insufficiently signifies their spiritual oneness, and Milton, as he has recurrently, must therefore supplement the image with explicit reference to the concept on which it is founded.
Notes to Chapter Two

1 See Edward A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952): "It is the work, power, activity, or will of God rather than his being or essence that we know, and then only in so far as it is directed toward us" (p. 6). In the Christian Doctrine Milton considers both the essence and operational existence of God, but he stresses that, particularly in the case of the former, "It is impossible to comprehend accurately under any form of definition the 'divine nature!'" (OE, XIV, 39).


3 "Baroque and Mannerist Milton?" *JEGP* 40 (1961), 830.

4 Sypher, p. 188.


the chief English poet of the Counter Reformation. His poems do not usually invite us primarily to rational understanding or even the appreciation of a performance, but to rapt participation in ecstatic joys and sufferings or delight in decorative and sensuous ornament." (p. 105).

7 Some Graver Subject: An Essay on Paradise Lost

8 For several of my observations on the colloquy, I am indebted to Stewart A. Baker's lecture on the subject.


10 Ibid., 603.


13 The terms "infolded" and "unfolded" are Edgar A. Wind's translation of the concepts complicatio and explicatio, which he borrows from Cusanus. See Pagan


15 Ibid., p. 58.

16 Summers sees the morning hymn as a microcosm of the whole poem (The Muse's Method, p. 71).

17 In Milton's Epic Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), Anne Davidson Ferry observes, "Satan is the father of lies, the father of Sin, and, in a special sense, the father of allegory. The nature of his offspring which broke 'violent away' from him is a revelation of the division in his fallen experience, and his history in the poem is his disintegration under the pressure of the widening division within him" (p. 133).


19 Halkett, p. 53.

20 Ibid., pp. 93-4.

21 "'Hail Wedded Love,'" ELH 13 (1946), 97.

22 Milton's emphasis on the effect of the Fall in Creation is in conflict with Calvin's view: "God did not stop revealing himself in nature at the Fall. The actual guilt of man in Calvin's theology is the result of actual rejection of an actual revelation that remains clear" (Dowey, p. 73). However, the practical result is
the same: the 'Fall limits man's capacity to recognize God's revelation to him in Nature, and he must turn to alternative modes of revelation.

CHAPTER THREE:

The Hermeneutics of Creation
Creation derives from the Word, and its verbal source continues to inform the metaphors used to describe it. Raphael calls the universe "the Book of God" (VIII, 67), and Adam also ascribes verbal actions to natural phenomena. Of the stars, he observes that "Spaces incomprehensible . . . Thir distance argues" (VIII, 20-21), and he repeatedly refers to God's authorship as he relates to Raphael what he knows about his own creation. While these usages are figurative commonplaces, their denotations indicate the signatory properties that Nature and language share. Stanley Fish has summarized the parallel, widely accepted in Milton's day, between Biblical and phenomenal signs:

The words of scripture are the signs of God, invested with his meaning which is available to those who are willing to search for it; the phenomena of experience are his signs also, the words of the book that is his universe and they too must be diligently scrutinized before their true meaning emerges . . .

Normal language as well as inspired poetry is also signatory, and in one of two ways: either it is indicative, pointing to a reality not yet known, or it is commemorative, evoking a prior experience. Thus words, like all signs, do not constitute reality; at best, they point to or evoke experience which verifies the aptitude of the
sign.

In Augustinian/Calvinist epistemology, God is the ultimate goal of the quest for knowledge, and He is communicated through signs both indicatively and commemorative. God reveals Himself in Creation and in Scripture as parallel ways of accommodating Himself to man's limited powers of perception, and these external revelations are in part indicative, leading man to an ever fuller experience of his Creator. Accommodation is in the first instance condescension: God initiates His revelation to man in the external world. But signs are always inadequate to their significata, and the disparity is greatest when the reference is to God. Thus the corollary to condescension is reticence. Even the angels cannot know God in His essence, but only as He chooses to manifest Himself. Similarly, man knows of God no more than is useful, with the result that he is always seeking yet never (or only rarely, under special and transitory circumstances) achieving total harmony with God.

But the signs of God have also a commemorative aspect. Even fallen man has, from birth, the same "sense of divinity" that leads Adam initially to infer a Creator from the Creation. Through the action of grace, this intuition is reinforced by Christ, the Interior Teacher, who confirms from within the reality to which the external signs of God point. Acting commemoratively, the signs
evoke this internal confirmation, but they can never produce it or create it. And for Augustine and Calvin, this operation of the indwelling Christ is the crucial aspect of all learning. As Edward Dowey has shown, Calvin applied Augustine's concept even to the Scriptures:

True enough, the Bible has intrinsic validity. But this does not constitute its authority or even one source of its authority. The authority derives solely from the inner witness of God himself through which the intrinsic validity or inherent truth of the sacred oracles is recognized and confirmed.\(^5\)

The sign theory of epistemology, then, places a great burden on the memory. This faculty is first engaged by the signs functioning commemoratively, evoking and in turn being confirmed by the Interior Teacher in a kind of dialectic between internal and external revelation. Further, subsequent knowledge of God subsumes yet never really transcends earlier experience, and so education is cumulative, ever augmenting like Creation itself.

In Adam's discourse with Raphael, particularly in Book VIII, the nature of signs, their relation to God and to human psychology, is most apparent. But the subject is relevant to Milton's poem as a whole. Unlike the Adam of Book VIII, Milton's readers are fallen, and this condition implies a radical diminution of prelapsarian man's
facility with signs. Reducing his powers of perception, however, only makes his dependence upon signs more crucial, for even less than Adam is fallen man able to sustain a direct encounter with divinity. As a gloss on the now-problematic Book of Nature, he has Scripture, and as another means of illumination Milton provides his own text, aiming to "justify the ways of God to men" (I, 26). Adam displays both a growing facility with signs and a recognition of their limitations, and in a parallel development he shows an alteration in his use of language, from his apt naming of the animals to his fruitless search for a name worthy of the Creator. Finally, at the Fall his language becomes perverse, and the terms of its redemption become relevant to the bard's inspiration and the poetry that it produces.

I

Because, as Calvin had said, God is within man as well as external to him, "the knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him." Adam at first perceives the Creation, but his facility with signs leads him to appreciate their, and his, limitations, and this development in self-knowledge also brings him to a fuller apprehension of God. The first time he sees the sky, he springs erect "By quick instinctive motion" (VIII, 259), intuitively distinguishing himself from the other animals in posture as
his capacity to speak distinguishes him in constitution. His first recollections are of sensory experience, but he soon comes to reflect on himself, and he poses the ontological problem, "But who I was, or where, or from what cause" (VIII, 270), to a universe that cannot help him. Unlike Satan, who argues that he is "self-begot, self-rais'd" (V, 860) because he is unable to recall an existence prior to himself, Adam surveys the cosmos and acknowledges his own contingency:

Ye Hills and Dales, ye Rivers, Woods, and Plains
And ye that live and move, fair Creatures, tell,
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
Not of myself; by some great Maker then,

In goodness and in power preëminent. (VIII, 275-79)

But even though it is a sign of divinity, Nature, as William Madsen has said, "is witness to its inability to reveal the will of God." 7

If Adam's reading of the signs of God in Creation brings him to acknowledge his contingency, so his verbal precocity leads him to acknowledge the limitations upon his ability to rise above the signs without divine aid. His knowledge of external Nature manifests itself in his ability to name what he sees. Jackson Cope has noted, "The hexamerist commentators had long insisted that Adam's naming of the animals was a special function of his insight into their essential natures." 8 Adam supports this
thesis, though he is careful to give credit to God for his clarity: "I nam'd them, as they pass'd, and under-
stood / Thir Nature, with such knowledge God endu'd / My sudden apprehension" (VIII, 352-54). But his powers of language falter when he first meets his Creator, and as God supplements Nature with a direct revelation, so in introducing Himself when Adam cannot provide a suitable name, He extends human language beyond its normal limita-
tions. The lesson, however, is primarily one in self-
knowledge. If, as God explains (VIII, 343-45), the naming of the animals seals Adam's lordship over the rest of Creation, then his fruitless search for a name when he encounters God indicates his own subordination to the beings higher on the Great Chain.

Adam's subsequent dialogue with his Maker elaborates the relation of language to self-knowledge, and of self-
knowledge to the knowledge of God. As the Logos grows to an increased awareness of the terms of his Sonship through the colloquy in Book III, so Adam gains Eve only when he is capable of articulating what his need for a mate signifies. God has condescended to speak with Adam in response to the queries he directs to Creation concerning the Creator, but in His reticence, withholding from Adam His intention to provide a mate, He allows Adam to discover for himself the differences between man and God. In reply to God's feigned puzzlement at his discontent, Adam reminds Him,
Thou in thyself art perfect, and in thee
Is no deficiency found; not so is Man,
But in degree, the cause of his desire
By conversation with his like to help,
Or solace his defects.  (VIII, 415-19)

Providing the occasion for this process of self-discovery,
God prepares Adam to accept Eve as a reminder of his own
incompleteness, so that he will not fail to remember what
Satan, arguing himself his own creator, willfully forgets.

Both Adam and Eve are intrinsically valuable, and
their value is enhanced by the reciprocal love they share,
yet each is also a sign to the other of his mate's identity.
Because each needs the other to fulfill his own role, both
are aware of their incompleteness as individuals. Raphael
suggests the possibility that their relationship, as well
as their appreciation of all Creation, may continue to
develop without end:

. . . Love refines

The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heav'ly Love thou may'st ascend,
Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause
Among the Beasts no Mate for thee was found.

(VIII, 589-94)

Thus the particularly human nature of Adam's need for a
mate is a reminder of his human responsibility to exercise
his reason, controlling his fascination with Eve and
directing it to spiritual ends in a straightforward Neo-
platonic progression from earthly to divine love. Eve,
on the other hand, has Adam's more dignified presence to
remind her of his sovereignty in this process of exaltation.

But their development is not as linear as Raphael's
description of love's refinement suggests. The free and
joyous play of the exploring prelapsarian mind must occa-
sionally reach an educative cul-de-sac. Some critics have
taken these Edenic false starts as an indication that Adam
and Eve are fatally flawed from the outset. Certainly
the reader, aware of the story, can detect in the couple
characteristic tendencies which, when yielded to, will
prove disastrous. But for Adam and Eve they are no more
ominous than the tumble of the speaker in Marvell's "The
Garden," who confesses "Ensnared with flowers, I fall on
grass." What keeps their errancies within bounds is the
persistent, tutoring voice of God and his agent Raphael,
whose response to the propensity of the human mind to
educate itself is to explicate the signs which are most
crucial or most unyielding to human attempts to probe their
mystery.10 As Barbara Lewalski has said,

Adam and Eve, like the Garden, have natures
capable of a prodigious growth of good things,
but which require constant pruning to remove
excessive or unsightly growth, constant
direction of overreaching tendencies, constant propping of possible weaknesses, and also, one supposes, further cultivation through art. 11

Typically, as with Adam's initial encounter with his Creator, this elucidating voice evokes self-reflection which ends in acknowledgement of human contingency and God's sovereignty. Once explained, the Tree of Knowledge becomes a reminder of Adam's subordination just as Eve is a reminder of his incompleteness. These signs are provided before he has the opportunity to deviate from the divine plan, to take their meaning amiss. But in his later experiences, and in Eve's, human development is manifested in pursuits which need pruning to improve their yield. Eve's "narcissism" is the first of these incidents. Citing Peter Sterry as an authority, Lee Jacobus defends Eve's fascination with her own image as an attempt, laudable in aim if faulty in method, at self-knowledge. 12 If Jacobus is right, it seems further significant that it is a divine voice, a direct revelation, which leads her from an image inadequate to communicate her identity, and that the voice urges her with an apostrophe which describes the purpose of her creation: "Mother of human Race" (IV, 475). But it is Adam, replacing the epithet with the synonymous name "Eve," who persuades her to accept the role and the subordination it entails. Though her
reflection is attractive, Eve admits, her marriage has shown her "How beauty is excell'd by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair" (IV, 490-91).

To Raphael, the lesson Eve offers here is one Adam seems in danger of forgetting. Though the process of articulating his need for a mate should define his response to her, in fact her person seems nearly as arresting to him as her image had been to the less well-informed Eve. His doting praise elicits from the angel a stern admonition to remember the hierarchy of values implicit in his narration of Eve's creation:

... be not diffident

Of Wisdom, she deserts thee not, if thou
Dismiss not her, when most thou need'st her nigh,
Less excellent, as thou thyself perceiv'st.

(VIII, 562-66)

Adam responds, assuring Raphael that despite his confession he knows enough to "Approve the best, and follow what I approve" (VIII, 611). And if subsequent events show him abandoning that pursuit, still there is no reason here to doubt Adam's steadfastness.

The educational process that Adam undergoes in pre-lapsarian Eden reveals him to be in a state of "improvable perfection." His experience with the signs of divinity in Nature allows him to grow in self-knowledge and in knowledge of God. While pursuing this course, he must necessarily
probe less rewarding ways in order to be surer of the right one when he is led to discover it for himself. Adam is as free to make false starts as he is to fall, but the former freedom, as it increases his knowledge of self and God, is actually a safeguard, though of course not an absolute bar, against the latter. Thus Milton avoids the problem of embarrassingly primitive innocence, on the one hand, and a static but dull completeness, on the other, in his depiction of Adam and Eve; and he accomplishes the resolution in a way which harmonizes poetry and theology.

II

The pressure Adam's probing mind exerts in exploring the world about him, supplemented as it is with divine guidance, leads to knowledge. But each advance is premised on what has gone before, and typically every sign that functions indicatively, leading Adam to new experience, has also a commemorative dimension, evoking and augmenting his prior discoveries about himself and God. Thus even when he is unable to resolve a problem that presents itself in external Nature, the attempt leads him to appreciate more fully his own place and his relationship to Creation and Creator. This is the case when, in his discussion with Raphael about astronomy, he infers worth not from beauty, as he has with Eve, but from size and luminosity. Raphael's gentle reproof serves to correct this tendency to over-simplify. Even though Adam's facility with signs
and Raphael's superhuman knowledge both falter before the problem of the universe's precise shape, the angel's admonition to "be lowly wise" (VIII, 173) is a positive lesson, for if it does not provide Adam with the answer he seeks, it nonetheless reminds him of the address to all the signs of God appropriate to human epistemology, a review his doting on Eve shows he needs.

Because of the clear relationship of Adam's unfallen uxoriousness to his later sin, his false start regarding his identity and his mate's has been generally accepted as relevant to the drama of the poem, even when it has raised questions about Milton's doctrinal consistency. The earlier discussion of astronomy, however, has drawn more serious criticism. Howard Schultz excuses it, noting that for the seventeenth century, "In contrast to self-knowledge, astronomy became a favorite symbol of idle curiosity." In "Vanity (I)," for example, Herbert uses the astronomer's probing as an instance of man's distraction from God: "Poor man, thou searchest round / To find out death, but missest life at hand." But to an age which values disinterested scientific inquiry with fewer reservations, lowly wisdom sounds suspiciously like blissful ignorance. Arthur Lovejoy has urged the impropriety of the passage, objecting that the angel's equivocal reply to Adam reveals Milton's illiberalism to the poem's detriment.
For the dialogue between Raphael and Adam, in so far as it relates to seventeenth-century astronomy, obviously had no natural place in an epic of the Fall of Man; it was not a part of the 'plot' of the poem nor of the dramatic characterization of the human protagonist. The subject was violently introduced—'dragged in'—because Milton had in mind his contemporary readers and wished to bring them to accept a theorem of his own. . . .

Milton's position, in short, is pragmatic, in the most vulgar sense of that ambiguous term, the sense in which it designated an obscurantist utilitarianism hostile to all disinterested intellectual curiosity and to all inquiry into unsolved problems about the physical world. 14

But in terms of Adam's education, the passage on astronomy is parallel to the dialogue about Eve. In both cases, Adam seems about to lose himself in external Creation when, properly regarded, all of Nature, including Eve, is a reminder of his own place in the divine scheme, and Raphael's purpose is less to circumscribe the range of man's inquiry than to recall to Adam what sort of knowledge is most valuable and how it is acquired.

Even for fallen man, knowledge begins with the senses. After the Fall, this epistemological prerequisite is fraught
with danger, as Satan demonstrates when, in preferring Eden to Heaven, he chooses the corporeal sign over the spiritual reality to which it points. But for Adam, provided only that they are subject to restraint, the senses are a medium through whose transmission knowledge is virtually equated with delight. In conversation with the angel, Adam enjoys the sensuosity of the words as well as their meaning, hearing Raphael "With wonder, but delight" (VIII, 11). Only in the rapture that attends direct revelation from God is Adam completely exempt from recourse to sensory perception, and he collapses as a result of the strain this kind of learning places on him:

   My earthly by his Heav'nly overpower'd,  
Which it had long stood under, strain'd to the hight  
In that celestial Colloquy sublime,  
As with an object that excels the sense,  
Dazzl'd and spent, sunk down, and sought repair.  
(VIII, 453-57)

Adam's speculations about astronomy remove him from this important first source of knowledge without the warrant of ecstatic communion. Noting that the immense distances involved make certainty impossible, Raphael points out to Adam that he is proceeding on the basis of inadequate data:

   God to remove his ways from human sense,  
Plac'd Heav'n from Earth so far, that earthly sight,  
If it presume, might err in things too high,
And no advantage gain. (VIII, 119-22)

And despite Lovejoy's charges, Adam's over-hasty leap from a few observable phenomena to a theory that will save those appearances is a violation of the scientific methodology Milton is said to be scorning. If contemporary issues are at all relevant, the choice seems to be not so much between Ptolemy and Copernicus as between the empirical, Baconian method of inquiry and the speculative, Cartesian one.15 Raphael, speaking for Bacon as well as for Milton and God, seems to get the better of the argument.

But the issues of seventeenth-century science, while vital to history and no doubt engaging to Milton, are peripheral to the major current of the poem. What is significant is the belief Milton shared with Bacon, which is manifested in the latter's inductive methodology, that to man truth is partial and is to be pieced together only gradually. Bacon's religious avowals notwithstanding, he was mainly concerned with the application of perception and reason in the realm of natural philosophy, and his mammoth projects give evidence that he believed man capable of completing the puzzle. Milton, on the other hand, addresses the Creation chiefly as a means to know God, and his emphasis on man's fallenness makes him skeptical that the novum organum is capable of being completed in any meaningful way. As Frederick Plotkin has said,

Milton . . . holds little stock in the value
of any method which endeavors to deduce truths from phenomena as an instrument for completing the external renovation and reformation of the world before 'one greater Man' accomplishes that deed at his Parousia.16

The same sort of leap Adam fails to negotiate here Eve will later attempt, but with disastrous results. Without Adam, her reminder of the limitations of being human, Eve accepts Satan's argument to taste the fruit. In effect, he convinces her on the one hand that it is just an apple, without significatory value, and on the other that it has magical properties which will allow her to by-pass the process whereby the human ascends to the divine only by stages. Geoffrey Hartman notes of Eve's yielding to temptation,

For her the forbidden fruit is like a drug, a hallucinogen that holds out the promise of jumping several rungs in the Scale of Nature, even of transcending from human to divine. . . . There is a small margin between vision and ecstasy, which is the educable margin; and Eve fails to respect it. She tries to go straight up, and falls.17

Adam's fall is more damning, in part because he does it willfully, in part because he has Eve there as a tacit
reminder that he should know better. But he ignores the truths about himself he had acknowledged when he requested a companion. They are both unfinished, in the process of attaining their potential, and hence they must accept the guidance of their Creator. Yet he takes Eve, as he has said earlier, to be "in herself complete" (VIII, 548), and as a result he precipitates the poem's climactic episode.

Adam's fall, like Eve's, is partly an epistemological lapse. The delight Eve provides for Adam begins to overcome his reason, and he is limited at the Fall to the sensory and passionate faculties as he has been limited in the dialogue on astronomy to the purely intellectual. But as both Raphael and Eve demonstrate, the dualism which separates delight from reason and spirit is false. Earlier, Adam's precocity has led him to criticize Nature's apparent prodigality in apportioning the universe. She has, Adam observes, appointed bodies of greater magnitude "merely to officiate light / Round this opaceous Earth" (VIII, 22-23). Raphael's reply suggests Adam's theories result from a twofold failing: his speculations separate truth from delight, and he refers what he observes not to God but to himself. Adam's impatience with empiricism, discussed above, is an aspect of the former mistake, and Eve's departure anticipates the angel's judgment at a dramatic level. Eve, Milton tells us, is as capable of purely speculative discourse as Adam is, but she prefers to receive her lessons from her husband, who
will "intermix / Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute / With conjugal Caresses" (VIII, 54-56).

Adam's second failing follows from the first. As he is temporarily limited to his intellect in trying to dissect what he should simply appreciate, so he is unable to rise above reason to apprehend what intellect cannot fathom. Like the human figure in da Vinci's squared circle, who really is the measure of all things, Adam, as Joseph Summers has said, "assumes . . . his own central importance in the scheme of things." Or, at the very least, he assumes his reason is sufficient to discover the precise nature of that scheme. But Raphael must provide him with a gloss on the Book of Nature more adequate than the one he is able to imagine. The angel approves Adam's inquisitiveness, but he makes clear that no value attaches to magnitude for its own sake: "Great / Or Bright infers not Excellence" (VIII, 90-91). As phenomena, the heavenly bodies are important to man only insofar as they serve his life, and as signs only as they lead the observer to God. Whatever their other purposes may be, Adam is in no position to detect them. Viewing the universe, man must admire its beauty, recognize his own contingency, and celebrate the Creator. In Raphael's words,

And for the Heav'n's wide Circuit, let it speak
The Maker's high magnificence, who built
So spacious, and his Line strecht out so far;
That Man may know he dwells not in his own;
An Edifice too large for him to fill,
Lodg'd in a small partition, and the rest
Ordain'd for uses to his Lord best known.

(VIII, 100-106)

Raphael, then, does not place arbitrary limits on human inquiry. Rather, he reforms Adam's attitude toward inquiry. God's book communicates God, points to Him, but the meaning cannot be grasped by any one faculty. For Milton as for Calvin, knowledge of God engages the whole personality,¹⁹ and Adam's address to Creation should approximate that of Erasmus' pious Epicurean, who advises,

... the godly man beholds with reverent,
innocent eyes, and with surpassing inward
delight, the works of his Lord and Father,
marveling at every one, finding fault with
none but giving thanks for all, since he con-
siders them all to be created for man's sake.
And so in individual things he reveres the
Creator's omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness,
of which he discerns traces in created objects.²⁰

Thus Eve's withdrawing when Adam and Raphael begin to discuss astronomy is not Milton's way of belittling feminine mentality. Instead, it represents in dramatic terms the same lesson Raphael has tried to make clear: Creation is to be both enjoyed and understood as a sign of God; to examine it
critically is to forget man's place in it.

But Raphael's reasons for advising Adam to "be lowly wise" leave Lovejoy sceptical. To him, Raphael's ignorance or indifference at the answer to the question is another trick of Milton's insufferable God: "It is even suggested that the stellar system may have been so constructed as to be an insoluble enigma to astronomers in order that the Creator may chuckle over their blunders."²¹ To one who approaches Creation in the attitude Raphael and Erasmus enjoin, however, Lovejoy's objection would not occur. Even though God is the referent for all inquiry, one should not expect that the process implies a goal man can reach. God condescends to man, revealing Himself partially in Creation, and man is expected to answer this accommodating movement with spiritual striving. But the corollary to condescension is reticence, which makes the process of exaltation unending.

Yet the process is pleasurable, offering rewards of delight which are not separable from the goal the process contemplates. Lovejoy's use of the term "enigma" is revealing in this context. In Ciceronian rhetoric, aenigma refers in general to a way of approaching a difficult subject through similitude. To a Christian, God is the ultimate difficult subject, and with Augustine the Christian rhetor, the rhetorical concept acquired new importance. As Marcia Colish has said,

While literal signification is a suitable way
to express fairly straightforward realities, metaphorical signification is far better suited to express realities that are themselves intrinsically obscure and difficult to understand. 22

For Augustine, however, metaphoric language is appropriate even where discursive language is adequate. Discussing a passage from Canticles that he has just allegorized, he admits,

But why it seems sweeter to me than if no such similitude were offered in the divine books, since the thing perceived is the same, is difficult to say and is a problem for another discussion. For the present, however, no one doubts that things are perceived more readily through similitudes and that what is sought with difficulty is discovered with more pleasure. 23

Extrapolating from Scripture to the Book of Nature, Adam's only text, the cosmic enigma that annoys Lovejoy is really presented as an opportunity for growth and pleasure. The simile is a recurrent technique for Milton, who uses it often as a way to indicate the ineffable. The device is one of overtopping, leading us from a reality with which we are familiar to one for which our world is only a shadowy type. To accommodate his readers, whose
medium is more fully time than space, Milton draws his examples from history. But Adam has no history in this sense, and so Raphael uses space as the bard uses time. Adam's problem with astronomy, then, functions as a cosmic epic simile, carrying Adam from his relatively simple theory to a reality beyond the capacity of even prelap-
sarian ratiocination. In his precocity he offers a Ptolemaic model, only to have Raphael suggest the more elaborate Copernican theory and finally to offer a further complication, the possibility of multiple creations. Given this progress towards an 0 altitudo, Adam's sub-
sequent humility is both proper and understandable.

III

Adam's speech evinces what Jun Harada has called "the monolithic honest quality of Edenic language," and his facility with God's signs suggests that he is able to understand, at least with the help of divine guidance, the absolute signatory system Raphael calls the "Book of God." But the shortcomings of perception his humanity imposes upon him are always met and resolved with a further complication, one not available to reason but only to celebration and obedience. To take account of this complexity in simplicity that defines Creation, Milton has recourse to a language more subtle than the one Harada attributes to Adam. It involves a kind of punning, in which dual meaning is mutually supportive,
in contrast to the tension arising from, say, Donne's sexual/religious puns. Anne Ferry calls the device "sacred metaphor" and describes its effect in this way:

We are made to feel that this world, and everything with which God filled it in the six days of creation, has the reality and meaning of divine truth in itself as well as metaphorical value for the abstract or inward meaning of the epic argument. 25

Like the bard, Adam uses this kind of trope, but before the Fall his usage seems unself-conscious. Adam is intuitively a monist, but in having him speak in this way, Milton can create the effect Ferry describes, for the reader knows monism only as an alternative to the dualism the metaphor overcomes. The felix culpa, then, which is the theme and focus of Paradise Lost, is reduplicated in Milton's styles: Adam's "pure" language assumes, in the few hours between the Fall and the Judgment scene, "the hypocritically ambiguous quality of our fallen language," 26 but through the intercession of the Word, language is redeemed as a medium to overcome the Fall, converting the response to ambiguity from frustration to awareness of possibility.

The progress of language from unfallen through fallen to redeemed is traceable most clearly in Adam's relationship with Eve, which has been defined from the first in
verbal terms. Confessing man's incompleteness, Adam says he needs a companion "By conversation with his like to help, / Or solace his defects" (VIII, 418-19), and his response to God's gift, characteristically, is to name her:

... I now see
Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh, my Self
Before me; Woman is her Name, of Man

Extracted ... (VIII, 494-97)

Similarly, when he learns later what she has done, Adam says he cannot "forgo / Thy sweet Converse and Love" (IX, 908-909), and he repeats the naming process he has described to Raphael. As "conversation" suggests all the kinds of proper, loving intercourse between man and woman, so fornication is a traditional metaphor for the mind's attachment to false ideas or to incomplete goods. About magic, for instance, Augustine observes to God, "A soul that pants for such figments of the imagination is surely committing fornication against you, is putting its trust in falsity and feeding upon the winds."27 Conversation subsequently turns to sexual incontinence and to verbal abuse, and Adam begins his most vitriolic tirade against Eve with the abusive and inappropriate apostrophe "thou Serpent" (X, 867).

Their regeneration is likewise traced in verbal terms. Repentant, they decide to confess, a verbal process stimu-
lated by God's "Prevenient Grace" (XI, 3) and relayed to the Father through the Logos:

. . . Now therefore bend thine ear
To supplication, hear his sighs though mute;
Unskilful with what words to pray, let mee
Interpret for him . . . (XI, 30-33)

Partly restored through prayer, Adam recalls God's promise "that thy Seed shall bruise our Foe" (XI, 155), and he promptly renames Eve:

. . . Hail to thee,
Eve rightly call'd, Mother of all Mankind,
Mother of all things living, since by thee
Man is to live, and all things live for Man.

(XI, 158-61)

Ultimately, it is Michael's words that teach them how to regain Paradise and in what way Eve's motherhood will provide the means to vanquish Satan. But Adam's regeneration, of which his renaming Eve is an index, does not eradicate the Fall, and recovered speech is likewise not Edenic language. In Paradise, words have no real etymology, just as Adam has no real history, and so even when speaking "sacred metaphor," Adam's use of language is unself-conscious, unaware of the dualism which makes the expressed unity all the more striking to Milton's readers. After the Fall, words, like man, acquire a history, making them ambiguous. Thus though Adam replaces "Serpent" with "Eve,"
he cannot forget the complex associations with the serpent that his wife now evokes. If he infers "Serpent" from "Eve" he must recall both the Fall and the promised victory. And so redeemed language exploits the ambiguities the Fall interjects into human existence, turning tragic implications to hopeful ones.

Calvin held that God's revelation in Creation remains constant; fallen man is simply unable to draw from it conclusions adequate for his salvation. Milton, on the other hand, asserts that Nature falls along with Adam and Eve. Thus "the Book of knowledge fair" (III, 47) is obscured both objectively, with reference to the perceived sign, and subjectively, with reference to the perceiver. The practical results of Milton's view, however, are much the same as Calvin's. For both, fallen man requires, more urgently than Adam, supplementary revelation. Further, redeemed inward vision, like unfallen physical vision, is at least partly constitutive of the paradise that is available to it. Adam owes his perceptual and verbal clarity, his capacity to see and tell accurately, to providential sustenance, but while he is unfallen, he possesses his acumen by right. After the Fall, he and his heirs must depend more explicitly and more tenuously on divine aid.

The narrator of Paradise Lost is one of Adam's progeny, and his blindness is a sign of his first father's disobedience. The bard begins Book III with an invocation,
asking that

... Celestial Light

Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight. (III, 51-55)

Milton's own loss of sight has prompted some critics to
treat the entire passage as an embarrassing autobiographical
digression, but Ferry has shown its metaphoric significance
to be integral. The bard's quest for a style answerable
to his yet unattempted task leads him to recall the "Orphean
Lyre" (III, 17) that he had temporarily abandoned in his
survey of Hell, and he credits God with the prophetic
powers that secure him a place in the tradition of blind
seers.30 All this tends to exalt Milton's narrative per-
sona, allowing him to sustain a level of oracular delivery
which the reader can accept more easily because it is im-
personal. Yet the bard never totally transcends the
humanity he shares with his audience. If we are neither
literally blind nor frequenters of Sion, nonetheless,
according to orthodox Protestant theology, our sight is
dimmed by the Fall, and our only hope for even partial
recovery lies in the operation of the Christ within.31
Invoking his "heav'nly Muse" (III, 19) to compensate for
his blindness, then, the bard asks for inward eyes "that
I may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight"
(III, 54-55).

Even more than Raphael, who calls attention to the inadequacy of even prelapsarian discourse to convey divine reality (V, 563-76), the bard must use a medium which, rendered problematic by the Fall, is incapable of communicating its subject directly. As God's Creation is ultimately verbal and signatory, so is Milton's poem. John Steadman has observed of *Paradise Lost*,

For its author it was essentially an "imitation" of reality. It was, as he conceived it, less an object in itself than a reference to an object. Far from existing in and for itself, it pointed to an ideal order outside and beyond itself. Implicit in its very nature was its epistemological character, its reference to external—and eternal—truth.\(^32\)

To Steadman's adjectives we should add "internal," implying cognition which depends on recovery as well as discovery. The most crucial aspect of religious knowledge is the awakening of the memory. Raphael's mandate is simply to bring Adam to know himself and thus his value and his contingency. Responding to the angel's discourse, Adam's recollection of his "birth" and education, progressing from an intuitive "sense of divinity" to an encounter with the true God, accomplishes that end and makes his sin indefensible. Similarly, grace subsequent to the Fall is first
manifested in Adam as the restoration of memory, for he begins to overcome despair only when he remembers the prophecy in which the hope of mankind resides. But as Adam cannot forget his sin even when he is redeemed for it, neither are Milton's readers asked to recover Paradise on the same terms our first parents held it. Rather, the sinuosity and ambiguity of the language, the overtopping use of similes, evokes a sense that the Fall is ultimately fortunate, and the acceptance of that paradox forms the basis for the recovery of an internal Eden "happier far" (XII, 587).
Notes to Chapter Three


The sign theory of language is given seminal treatment in Augustine's De magistro. The terms "indicative" and "commemorative" are borrowed from Marcia L. Colish, The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

Calvin's reliance on Augustine in this matter is explicit in much of his writing. Particularly relevant to this chapter is Calvin's conviction that "The commonest phenomena of the world are not self-explanatory, and we must rise above them to their Author." See Edward A. Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 75.

The sense of divinity is one internal sign of God common to everyone. The other is conscience, the moral sense. See Dowey, p. 50.

Dowey, p. 108.


William G. Madsen, From Shadowy Types to Truth: Studies in Milton's Symbolism (New Haven: Yale University


10 On God's willingness to explain his signs, Calvin commented, "Whenever God gave a sign to the holy patriarchs it was inseparably linked to doctrine without which our senses would have been stunned in looking at the bare sign," (*Institutes*, IV, xiv, 4, p. 1279).


15 For the affinity between Bacon and the Puritans,
see R. F. Jones, "The Background of the Attack on Science
in the Age of Pope," in Pope and His Contemporaries:
Essays Presented to George Sherburn (Oxford: The Claren-

16 Milton's Inward Jerusalem: Paradise Lost and the

17 "Adam on the Grass with Balsamum," ELH 36 (1969),
180.

18 Joseph H. Summers, The Muse's Method: An Intro-
duction to Paradise Lost (Cambridge: Harvard University

19 Dowey, pp. 24-31.

20 "The Epicurean," in The Colloquies of Erasmus,
trans. by Craig R. Thompson (Chicago: University of

21 Lovejoy, p. 140.

22 Colish, p. 79.

23 On Christian Doctrine, trans. by D. W. Robertson,
p. 38.

24 "Self and Language in the Fall," Milton Studies 5
(1973), 222.

25 Anne Davidson Ferry, Milton's Epic Voice: The
Narrator in Paradise Lost (Cambridge: Harvard University

26 Harada, p. 222.

28 See D. C. Allen, "Milton and the Name of Eve," MLN 74 (1959). Allen cites the etymology of Clement of Alexandria to show that, in the Hebrew, "if the name of Eve is aspirated it is the same as the feminine of serpent" (p. 682).

29 See Geoffrey Hartman, "Milton's Counterplot," ELH 25 (1958), 1-12, in which Hartman suggests that Milton's similes often have this effect.


31 The metaphor of sight dimmed as a result of the Fall is one Milton shares with Calvin: "... for Calvin only the Christian can see the true God in creation, and then only by the aid of the 'spectacles' of Scripture, not as if his 'sight' had been perfectly restored" (Dowey, p. 248).

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Poetics of Repetition
The effective absorption of myth into poetry requires that patterns of general experience constitute the substructure of the finished work. *Paradise Lost* is a mythic poem. Not only does it recount a story that, reduced to its essential elements, is virtually universal, it is also composed of an interlocking set of mythic epicycles which, as Isabel MacCaffrey has shown, recapitulates the form of separation, initiation, and return that is integral to the narrative as a whole.\(^1\) Cyclicality, however, is of limited relevance to the Christian reader, who perceives time to be eschatological and therefore possessing a linear dimension.\(^2\) Both these views of time are integral to Milton's poem, but the teleological interpretation is the one that is controlling, individuating his style and constituting a crucial aspect of his moral aesthetics.

The Puritan emphasis on the Word generates Milton's poetics. The creative Logos controls and defines the nature of the universe it brings into being, and God's tutelary agents gloss those hieroglyphs in the Book of Nature which resist Adam's attempts to interpret them. But the Word is realized in time as well as in space: Christ redeems history, making it meaningful, just as the Son creates and then recovers Paradise for man. In fact, it is this temporal dimension of the activity of the Logos that Calvin and his disciples chose to emphasize. Comparing the Calvinist doctrine of the sacraments with
that of his Lutheran opponents, Ronald Wallace concludes, "One of the great merits of Calvin's doctrine . . . is the fact that he leaves room for a more significant eschatology."3 And in Milton's poem, one result of the Fall is to transfer the metaphors of salvation from spatial to temporal vehicles.4 The eschatological focus of Paradise Lost, then, exists in tension with the mythic substructure. When time is organized mythically, it is fixed in a pattern which is both spatial and perpetual. But it is time's end no less than its shape that gives it meaning in Christian theology, and particularly for Puritans one's involvement with the unfolding of God's plan is essential. However much the Christian is urged to resist the attraction to mutable goods, his detachment is not so much ecstasis as it is patience—a willingness to stand and wait—reinforced by faith in the workings of Providence.

Typology is an exegetical method particularly amenable to the Puritan world-view, for it conflates repetitive form and teleological time. In Frank Kermode's terms, it is a way of dealing with the disconfirmation of the simple Apocalyptic myth without accepting its discreditation.5 Despite the practical difficulties involved in trying to segregate the typological interpretation of Scripture from other approaches, typology is the only non-literal method of exegesis Calvin approved,6 and William Madsen
has recently shown how integral this kind of symbolic thinking is to *Paradise Lost.*

But the use of typology in simile and allusion is only one manifestation of a viewpoint pervasive in Milton's epic. Reiteration is a technique fundamental to Milton's art, and he employs it either structurally or rhetorically. The relevance of the former use to typological thinking is clear: episodes and words acquire added significance as they recur during the poem's progress. Repetition of this kind is part of Homer's legacy to the epic, for it answers the need of the chanting bard to refresh the memory of his listeners with some frequency. But the device is also functional in "secondary" epic. Edward Le Comte finds the patterns working for the unity and solidity of the poem.

In this quite simple way Milton makes the world (in *Paradise Lost* the universal setting) and the style of his poem familiar. There are things that are the better said for being said more than once, a practice which is consonant both with purposes didactic (he has much to teach, much that we have forgotten or never knew to describe) and architectonic: not every joist and lath and filigree can or should be different. The poem stands firmly, is mortised and tenoned, at fixed points.
In addition to these architectonic echoes, Milton also uses reiteration stylistically, repeating a word or phrase over a few lines, where the structural effect is minimal and the need to refresh the reader's memory is slight. At times the device is used simply for emphasis, or because the limitations imposed by vocabulary or the need for clarity do not admit the use of a synonym. More often, critics find the technique to be "ritualistic," exalting the language much as the mythic return is said to detach the reader. But Milton's usage is much more flexible than these explanations suggest. This repetition of diction over a brief passage relates to the tension between linear and cyclical time, and depending upon the spiritual state of the speaker it serves either to harmonize mythic return with eschatology, like typological exegesis, or to work against that harmony, characteristically urging the separation of the present moment from its context in past and future. God's speech is exemplary of the first practice, Satan's of the second. And though the bard can mock Satanic repetition, the larger iterative patterns show that the Miltonic norm approximates the divine model. Whenever Satan attempts to detach the present from its involvement with time's progress, the poem's teleological repetitions are evoked to defeat his strategy. Thus the use of repetition becomes a touchstone by which to discriminate moral from immoral aesthetics: Satan's
involved and involving rhetoric, despite its dazzling eloquence, is hollow and corrupting because it is exclusive, inviting the auditor to accept its assumptions and forget all contingency; Milton's bard, on the other hand, follows his God in practicing a rhetoric inclusive and rational, evoking and expecting substantiation from external authority--primarily from Scriptural revelation.

I

Satan has a vital interest in resisting the progress of time. In Heaven, when the Son offers to sacrifice himself, the simple gesture is itself a virtual fait accompli; but every act of Satan's is bound in fallen time, in which his final defeat has not yet occurred. In *Paradise Regained* his sense of the brevity of his reprieve makes Satan a forlorn and petty figure. But in *Paradise Lost* he has not yet come to appreciate the fact that mutability, the medium of experience his success with Adam and Eve introduces into the world, will be the vehicle for his undoing. Rather, his awesomeness and the power of his rhetoric (at least up to the moment of his utter humiliation in Book X) is owing to his ability to assert the present's discontinuity with past and future. His speech, like Comus', is Lethean. Similarly, his Protean personality, which accommodates numerous avatars without attempting to reconcile them, is also a function of the discontinuity he attempts to enforce. As he is the father of lies, the father of allegory, of
Sin and of Death, so he is also the father of histri-onics, with all previous identities irrelevant to his latest role. And this unwillingness to accept the continuity of his personality obliges him to act over and over as if he were "self-begot, self-rais'd" (V, 860) and to try to substitute repetition for proof.

This newness is an aspect of Satan's mythic quality, for the mythic figure inevitably adopts his course unself-consciously, unaware that it conforms to any pattern except the one his actions are in the process of defining. Significantly, "new" is a word Satan imbues with pejorative connotations in Heaven. Satan's first articulation of his resentment dwells on God's innovativeness:

... new Laws thou see'st impos'd;
New Laws from him who reigns, new minds may raise
In us who serve, new Counsels, to debate
What doubtful may ensue; more in this place
To utter is not safe... (V, 679-83)

The charge is of course unfair; there is a continuity in all God's actions, with everything being generated from the initial event. The language itself redounds to Satan's discredit. He is the one to break the process of which, as Abdiel explains, the exaltation of the Son is a culmination (V, 833-45). Heaven is atemporal because it is outside time, subject to the "grateful
vicissitude" of day and night; Satan asserts a linear view of time and then tries to recover timelessness of another sort, one which unduly emphasizes the present, disregarding antecedents and results. It is this sense of immediacy, of freshness, that enhances Satan's mythic stature, but the limitations it entails work at the same time to diminish his relevance either to divine continuity or to the shifting currents of postlapsarian human experience in all its confusing detail.

Satan's attempts at self-recreation are paralleled in his speech. He detaches words from their referents and proceeds to redefine them according to the thrust of his present argument. Moloch is a partial offender in this respect. Advocating renewed war against God, he repeats, in anticipation of any objection to his plan, words of rising and falling:

... But perhaps

The way seems difficult and steep to scale
With upright wing against a higher foe.
Let such bethink them, if the sleepy drench
Of that forgetful Lake benumb not still,
That in our proper motion we ascend
Up to our native seat: descent and fall
To us is adverse. Who but felt of late
When the fierce Foe hung on our brok'n Rear
Insulting, and pursu'd us through the Deep,
With what compulsion and laborious flight
We sunk thus low? Th' ascent is easy then.

(II, 70-81)

These repetitions do not constitute thoroughgoing re-definition. Rather, Moloch seeks, with a rhetoric that is as benumbing as the "forgetful Lake," simply to limit those words to their literal, denotative meanings. But the poem resists this kind of total involvement in the language of the moment. The spatial adjectives "upright" and "higher" inevitably carry moral connotations which continue to color the subsequent verbs and nouns of vertical direction, undercutting his bravado even as he formulates it. Even without Moloch's unintentional introduction of the moral perspective, however, bardic practice precludes our accepting a language so restricted.

The irony of the narrator at the beginning of Book II has already warned the reader against Moloch's rhetorical strategy, thus nullifying its effect. The moral connotations of descent and fall are inseparable in the poem from the spatial denotations, but Satan and his followers have the capacity to obscure spiritual reality. Thus when the bard observes of Satan enthroned,

Satan exalted sat, by merit rais'd
To that bad eminence; and from despair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
Beyond thus high . . .

(II, 5-8)
the close apposition of spiritual to physical status serves as a warning that appearance and reality are disparate in Hell, confirming the earlier bardic admonition against "high words, that bore / Semblance of worth, not substance" (I, 528-29). And so this and previous passages resonate in Moloch's repetitions despite his Lethean oratory. As Angus Fletcher observes of similar patterns in Comus,

... an echo is the phonic recollection of a sign ... in such a way that the structural implications of that sign, as well as its immediate meaning are present to the mind. An echo in this kind of formulation brings back the logical connections of things as well as their particular sense. Verbal echo comes to be a metamorphosing technique, by which the meaning of a present context is altered through its phonic reflection of another whole context. An echo, like a visual reflection, is subject to perspective.10

Moloch's repetitions, then, which are intended as a firm restriction of his words to their present context, inevitably have the opposite effect. Instead of limiting the reader to the passion and drama of the debate, the diction actually reflects and recalls a controlling
context whose progress even devilish eloquence is un-
able to arrest.

Satan himself is a more subtle, and a more success-
ful, practitioner of this kind of rhetoric than any of
his lieutenants. The same dualism which is apparent
in Moloch's speech informs in a somewhat more complex
way Satan's opening of the debate. Arguing that the
devilish fraternity is more cohesive than the angelic
because "where there is then no good / For which to
strive, no strife can grow up there / From Faction"
(II, 30-32), he continues his appeal to a nonexistent
tradition:

... With this advantage then
To union, and firm Faith, and firm accord,
More than can be in Heav'n, we now return
To claim our just inheritance of old,
Surer to prosper than prosperity
Could have assur'd us ... (II, 35-40)

A part of the irony of the speech is resident in the
metamorphosis of "to prosper," an action Satan desires,
into "prosperity," the state of being he is denouncing.
But the earlier repetition of "firm," for Satan a matter
of emphasis and perhaps an instance as well of over-
pleading, has a similar effect for the reader with an
attentive ear for synonyms. The recurrent use of "firm,"
followed by a derogatory reference to "Heav'n," might well
be expected to recall the synonym "firmament," a noun Milton applies both to the astronomical and the spiritual Heaven. Like the more self-explanatory repetition which follows, the resonance deflates Satan's claims. Despite his assertions, his followers are not more firm than the firmament, and they cannot hope to prosper beyond their previous state, which was prosperity itself.

Usually, his public oratory is deliberately deceptive, but occasionally, particularly when Satan is soliloquizing, words overcome him, their referential power resisting his attempt to reduce or qualify their force. His admiration for Eve leaves him momentarily disarmed, "Stupidly good" (IX, 465), but though he is the purveyor of Lethean beauties, he cannot himself surrender wholly to Eve's charms. His recollection of purpose leaves him stuttering in a failed attempt to deny the truth present before him:

Thoughts, whither have ye led me, with what sweet Compulsion thus transported to forget
What hither brought us, hate, not love, nor hope Of Paradise for Hell, hope here to taste Of pleasure, but all pleasure to destroy, Save what is in destroying, other joy To me is lost. (IX, 473-79)

Visions of delight recall to him only the pains of Hell, and those memories strengthen his resolve, but the forlorn
tone of the passage, together with his retention of some idea of pleasure even as he plots the destruction of all pleasure, suggests that he has not quite gained control of his rhetoric. Shortly thereafter, though, he is able to separate his own motives from what he sees, and thus he can appropriate love as a mask for hate.

Shee fair, divinely fair, fit Love for Gods,
Not terrible, though terror be in Love
And beauty, not approach by stronger hate,
Hate stronger, under show of Love well feign'd,
The way which to her ruin now I tend.

(IX, 489-93)

The metamorphosis of "Love" from honorific title to Satanic disguise is accomplished by first reversing the negation "Not terrible," then supplanting "fair" with "terror," and finally interposing "hate" twice in positions successively more emphatic, achieving a grammatical subordination of "Love." In the process, of course, "Love" has ceased to refer to anything inspired by Eve and becomes simply a self-generated role.

Words will serve as Satan's weapons in his assault on Eve, and his speeches in Hell give him the practice he needs to deploy a self-defining rhetoric to optimum advantage. The kind of reinterpretation involved in the confession and prayer "all Good to me is lost; / Evil be
thou my Good" (IV, 109-110), is pervasive in Satanic speech, but when addressed to an auditor, it is usually more gradual. His early exhortations to his companions, repeating words like "free" and "reign," begin to re-define those concepts, but they invariably have a plural subject. Satan's generosity, however, is not long-lived, and his recasting of meaning is soon complete. As free deliberation disappears in Satan's carefully managed conclave, so "reign," by Book II, acquires an exclusively singular subject, though Satan eases the transition by emphasizing the cares of office, not its privileges: 

Wherefore do I assume

These Royalties, and not refuse to Reign,
Refusing to accept as great a share
Of hazard as of honor, due alike
To him who Reigns, and so much to him due
Of hazard more, as he above the rest
High honor'd sits? (II, 450-56)

Satan saves his subtlest, most insinuating rhetoric for Eve. In her recollection of the argument he offers in her dream, he at first dichotomizes Gods and Men, and then he invites her to join the angels as an equal, urging her to finish at once the process of exaltation with which sustained virtue is constantly being rewarded in Eden:

... O Fruit Divine,
Sweet of thyself, but much more sweet thus cropt,
Forbidd'n here, it seems, as only fit
For Gods, yet able to make Gods of Men:
And why not Gods of Men, since good, the more
Communicated, more abundant grows,
The Author not impair'd, but honor'd more?
......
Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods
Thyself a Goddess, not to Earth confin'd,
But sometimes in the Air, as wee, sometimes
Ascend to Heav'n, by merit thine, and see
What life the Gods live there, and such live thou.

(V, 67-81)

At the beginning of the temptation proper the succession
of apostrophes moves from the literally accurate (for
the serpent) but potentially ambiguous "sovran Mistress"
(IX, 532) through a series of titles that ascend in
flattery as they descend in truth value. If we begin
to question the propriety of "sole Wonder" (IX, 533),
the next appellation "Fairest resemblance of thy Maker
fair" (IX, 538) makes the direction clear: he is
elevating her above Adam, urging her to forget her
marital obligations. And the drift of the correct but
somehow suspicious use of "fair," applying the positive
to God and the superlative to Eve, is realized at the
tentative conclusion, which places Eve first "A Goddess
among Gods" (IX, 547) and then superior to them, com-
manding an obeisance from angels that they owe only to the deity. The powerfully suasive rhetoric continues, removing the significatory quality of the fruit by calling it simply an apple (IX, 585) and then imputing to its own nature magic properties possessed apart from God's disposition (IX, 602-12). In a similarly sophis-
tical fashion Satan introduces doubt by converting a tautology, God is God, to a negative gradatio: "God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just; / Not just, not God; not fear'd then, nor obey'd" (IX, 700-701). And finally he redefines death, removing the dreadful con-
notations Eve has learned to associate with it and supplying her with new ones:

So ye shall die perhaps, by putting off
Human, to put on Gods, death to be wisht,
Though threat'n'd, which no worse than this can bring.

(IX, 713-15)

Satan's arguments have their effect on Eve. Not only does she eat the fruit, she also appropriates the rhetoric, and in her temptation of Adam she uses the same devices of repetition and insinuation with disas-
trously successful results. Her fear of the future causes her to address Adam with an air of urgency previously unknown to him. Having sought to reverse their positions, she now invites him to accept from her the gift of
equality, in a speech which insists "that equal Lot / May join us, equal Joy, as equal Love" (IX, 881-82), repeating the adjective as a means to win from Adam readier acquiescence to a state from which he should recoil. But her strategy works. Adam accepts the present moment as cataclysmic, and verbal and visual ambiguity are introduced as the modes of communication current in the fallen world. 12

Satanic echo is hollow, as Milton points out in the simile he uses to describe the response to Mammon's speech:

... such murmur fill'd
Th'Assembly, as when hollow Rocks retain
The sound of blust'ring winds, which all night long
Had rous'd the Sea, now with hoarse cadence lull
Sea-faring men o'erwatcht, whose Bark by chance
Or Pinnace anchors in a craggy Bay
After the Tempest ... (II, 284-90)

But its lulling, beating quality can be seductive. As it seeks to sever the auditor from previous experience in order to gain readier acceptance of a self-defining language, one not controlled by its referents, so it seems to assert the same inviolability of moment and of mind that prompts Satan to exult that "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (I, 254-55). Yet the attentive reader
has an alternative. The bardic repetitions, taking their model from divine discourse, work to counteract this disarming effect, awakening memory instead of lulling it. And from the vantage this larger context provides, we can see the abyss opening beneath Satan's rhetorical edifice. Insofar as he deals with reality at all, he must confront the inability of his rhetoric to alter it. His insistence that with determination Hell can become Heaven is supplanted with his later confession that the localized Hell is Heaven only when compared to the spiritual torment he suffers:

Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.

(IV, 75-79)

II

Satan's repetitions are finally simple returns, a turning back to ground already covered, even when the original usage is already falsified. Divine repetition, however, is fluid, progressive, and always in touch with the reality to which it refers. Thus it provides the model for the reiterations the bard employs. In both cases, each return is also an expansion, a clarification, of its antecedent, and in this way the poem realizes its author's aspiration to reflect the bene-
ficient progress of Creation and history.

The most conspicuous aspect of divine repetition resides in the perfect harmony between word and thing, for God's words are not only signs but the ontological basis for the things they signify. Raphael tells Adam of God's decision to create in recompense for Satan's rebellion

Another World, out of one man a Race
Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
Not here, till by degrees of merit rais'd
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tri'd,
And Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, and Heav'n to Earth,
One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end.

(VII, 155-61)

The chiasmus in line 160 accomplishes syntactically--transposing "Heav'n" and "Earth" in the sentence--what God intends to effect in reality, and what all Satan's plotting can only delay, not prevent. But from a divine perspective, the utterance is the accomplishment. Though human words are subsequent to and dependent upon the things they signify, the words of God are prior to their referents, supporting and controlling them. A comparable passage occurs in the dialogue between Father and Son, where the former explains His course of action towards the pair whose fall he foreknows. He decrees,
... Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glory excel,
But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.

(III, 131-34)

The colloquy that follows demonstrates the meaning of "Mercy first and last." The Son will enable them to repent, and then provide them with a paradise within in mitigation of their banishment from Eden. But the sentence itself, with the word "Mercy" both preceding and following the word "Justice," is already an effectual accomplishment of what the colloquy makes explicit and what the events subsequent to the Fall translate into history.

Satan introduces ambiguity into language, but God reverses the implications of ambiguity, turning frustrating meaninglessness to rewarding variety and thus making Satan's corruption of language, his appropriation of the grand style without the verities which support it, a felix culpa. The permutations God practices on the word "will," in the following often-criticized passage, is a case in point:

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
Freely voutsaf't; once more I will renew
His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthrall'd
By sin to foul exorbitant desires.

(III, 173-77)

An aspect of centripetal, Satanic repetition is the consistency with which the speaker employs the word as the same part of speech. God, however, characteristically varies form and usage as the sentence develops. Altering "will" from verb to noun and changing its referent from human to divine, God indicates both the malleability of the human will and its dependence upon the divine. The first usage is latently ambiguous. Though clearly a verb, its voice is a matter of conjecture. Is it active, meaning "to will" and implying human sufficiency, or passive, meaning "to be willing" and thus positing an external agent? The subsequent usages resolve the ambiguity by replacing the original pronominal antecedent "Man" with the divine first person singular. Man's will, transformed from verb to noun, is shown to be static and impotent, while God's will, active and efficacious, becomes the agent for restoring to man the passive receptiveness of which even fallen will is capable. Thus all the possible meanings finally obtain, with the repetitions sorting out the referents applicable to fallen psychology.

The distinction between prelapsarian and postlapsarian speech, the potential or original meaning of a word and its present application, is a crucial one in
Paradise Lost. The point of the passage just discussed, it seems to me, is that "will" requires this kind of clarification because God applies it to the fragmentary fallen psyche and not to prelapsarian man, in whom thought and action, faculty and effect, reception and transmission, are inseparable. Adam's inquiry to Raphael about angelic love indicates this character of unfallen language to contain without tension the varieties of fallen meaning. Assuring Raphael that his devotion to Eve is within limits, Adam concludes,

To Love thou blam'st me not, for Love thou say'st
Leads up to Heav'n, is both the way and guide;
Bear with me then, if lawful what I ask;
Love not the heav'nly Spirits, and how thir Love
Express they, by looks only, or do they mix
Irradiance, virtual or immediate touch?

(VIII, 612-17)

The exact symmetry of these repetitions, using "Love" as both noun and verb first as applied to man and then to angels, indicates the perfect concord in Adam's mind between the emotions of love and its expression, and between spiritual and sexual love.

The subtlety reflected in divine diction also resides in divine syntax. Continuing the dialogue in Heaven, the Father reiterates man's dependence on Him in a way which has provided further evidence for those critics
who would prosecute Milton's deity:

Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand
On even ground against his mortal foe,
By me upheld, that he may know how frail
His fall'n condition is, and to me owe
All his deliv'rance, and to none but me.

(III, 178-82)

At one level, the repetitious "upheld"—phrases, like
the iterative "me," is there for emphasis, making styl-
istically apparent what any Puritan would accept as a
matter of course: man's resistance to Satan is possible
only as a result of the pervasive and perpetual assistance
of God's grace. But the placement of the phrases demon-
strates, as the War in Heaven does in another way, that
Satan's power too is derivative. The first "Upheld by
me" applies clearly and solely to man, and recalling the
first usage, the later variation "By me upheld" seems
also to qualify only "man," an impression both sense and
line-division reinforce. But the normative practice of
Miltonic repetition rarely functions as a simple re-
creation of initial experience, and this passage is no
exception. For the syntax admits the possibility that
the second participial phrase also modifies "foe," and a
moment's reflection on Miltonic ontology validates this
option as well. Thus a repetition that seems at first
an instance of God's protesting too much in his insistence
upon man's recourse to Him in the battle against an awesome adversary becomes, finally, a reduction of that opponent. God's control, which has seemed oppressive when directed only to man, is accepted with a sense of relief when we see its major thrust is toward Satan. For man, the combat is no less important or difficult, but God's presence assures that man's efficacy is not required but only his faith.

Bardic practice in the matter of repetition is quite flexible. Milton's bard may appropriate Satanic rhetoric for purposes of reduction, as when in describing the bombast of the Council he observes "highly they rag'd / Against the Highest" (I, 666-67), with the irony in the adverb being emphasized by its close apposition to the superlative. Or it may assume the properties of imitative form, as in the famous description of Satan's flight: "So he with difficulty and labor hard / Mov'd on, with difficulty and labor hee" (II, 1021-22). But the bard can also approximate the quality of fluid, continuous exfoliation that is characteristic of divine repetition. At the level of diction, the technique is perhaps most fully represented in the description of Adam and Eve:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native Honor clad
In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all,
And worthy seem'd, for in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shone,
Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't.

(IV, 288-94)

Picking up the adjectives "erect" and "severe" in order to explain them, Milton works against the self-containment of the lines, reinforcing with repetition the effect C. S. Lewis attributes to syntax: "Milton avoids discontinuity by an avoidance of what grammarians call the simple sentence."^{14} Stylistic practice finds its counterpart in structural repetition. By allusion, prolepsis, typological symbolism, etc., Milton brings to bear on each episode a complex of reinforcing contexts both from within the poem and external to it. Thus the poem itself exfoliates, expanding the experience of Adam and Eve throughout the subsequent history of their descendants.

Poetry of this kind addresses itself primarily to the memory. The expansion and clarification of episodes is only functional if the reader recognizes the resonance with what has gone before in the poem, and all allusions are integral only when the reader is able to call upon a general store of information which he acquires prior to his reading of the poem. Appropriately, memory is the critical faculty in Augustinian/Calvinist epistemology, in which the Interior Teacher arbitrates the rectitude
of signs on the basis of their capacity to evoke their referents. Satan attempts to subvert memory, to assert the primacy of the mythic moment, and to exclude from consideration all questions of definition and assumption, with a result that is centripetal and discontinuous. Against this practice, and obviating its effectiveness in *Paradise Lost*, is the moral aesthetics of the bard, whose poem reflects the continuity of God's plan, its progress toward a goal, and whose style requires us always to recall that controlling context.
Notes to Chapter Four


2C. A. Patrides has described these two concepts of time in the following way: "The meaningless cycles of flux and reflux in the Graeco-Roman attitude toward history are like the legendary phoenix, dying periodically only in order to revive again, while to Christians history is like Jacob's Ladder, 'ascending by degrees magnificent' toward the Eternal City, the Christ's presence not only suffused everywhere in the ladder but, according to Renaissance commentators, the ladder itself." See *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 227.


4In the vision of history which concludes the poem, time is presented in spatial terms, but Adam's *seriatim* examination of the elements in the panorama emphasizes once more their temporal aspect.


6See George L. Schepfer, "Reformation Attitudes toward Allegory and the Song of Songs," *PMLA* 89 (1974),
Schepel notes that "Calvin carried forward the doctrine of one plain literal sense with even greater thoroughness than Luther and rejected allegorical interpretation even when invoked for purely ornamental and homiletic purposes. Yet on typology he was ambivalent. Theoretically, he professed to eschew typology and Christocentric interpretations even of the prophetic writings. But confronted with the typological interpretations made by Paul himself, he is forced to regard them as illustrative references or 'accommodations' or else to admit that many Old Testament types actually refer directly or immediately to Christ and not to the apparent referent at all (lest a multiple sense be implied)" (pp. 551-2).


9 Jackson I. Cope, for instance, in The Metaphoric Structure of Paradise Lost (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), views the dialogue in Heaven as "a ritual of enacted certainty foreshadowing the treatment of temptations in Paradise Regained. Further, the language is ritualistic. For Christ: not only repeats what the
Father has said, but he describes the ritual of repeated worship . . . " (p. 170).


11 The OED cites examples from Milton's writings to illustrate both meanings of the word.

12 Anne Davidson Ferry has described Eve's temptation speech in similar terms: "In her first speech to Adam we witness her beginning to shape language with conscious artistry in accordance with her needs, without any necessary correspondence between her words and what they describe." See *Milton and the Miltonic Dryden* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 69.

13 In "Milton's Counterplot," *ELH* 25 (1958), 1-12, Geoffrey Hartman shows that the similes and allusions which adumbrate the Fall also often look beyond the tragedy to Christ's victory. I am arguing that the technique extends to the diction.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Recovery of Paradise
God's determination to extend salvation to mankind despite the sin of Adam and Eve requires alterations in the way His truth is mediated. Because the Book of Nature is obscured both in itself and in Adam's perception of it, the vehicle for man's regeneration must differ from, or at least supplement, the signs of divinity in Creation which helped sustain his innocence. This problem, the discovery of a medium adequate both to convey the knowledge necessary to salvation and to address effectively man's fallen capacity for knowing, is the crucial one Michael and Adam face in the last two books of Paradise Lost. The substance of the vision of futurity as well as its mode of presentation implies an answer with two related terms. First, revelation in history assumes primacy over revelation in Nature; what the creating Logos had provided in the Garden, Christ the Redeemer will supply in historical time. And second, the reliance on verbal communication—the only normally accessible means of recovering the past or of disclosing the future—is emphatic. These central aspects of Miltonic epistemology generate the muted style of the concluding books of the epic and also of Paradise Regained and, to a lesser degree, Samson Agonistes. But the emphasis on the tutelary word is a shift not in kind but only in degree from the pedagogical method addressed to Adam's
prelapsarian faculties, and so the style that characterizes Milton's last poetic efforts is consonant with the aesthetic principles his poetry everywhere evinces. The changes result not from a "falling off" of interest or of power, as some critics have charged, but from exigencies dictated by the subject and the dramatic situation.

I

Pleasure is the affective result of beauty, and the innocent delights of the divine Creation suggest that Milton's Eden approximates very closely that condition Samuel Johnson would reserve only for a higher realm: "The happiness of Heaven will be, that pleasure and virtue will be perfectly consistent."\(^1\) But the distinction that remains between the Eden Milton describes and the Heaven Johnson anticipates must be respected. As Raphael has warned in Book VIII, the enjoyment of lesser goods, however pleasurable and proper in their own right, contain a potential for abuse.\(^2\) One must look not to the gift but to the giver. And even then, the created object is never an adequate reflection of the Creator; thus Adam requires expositors in Eden to supplement with definitive information the sense of the divinity Nature intimates to him. After the Fall, his incapacity to penetrate to the meaning underlying the images Michael presents is both more
acute and more dangerous. As their sexual abandon after their first sin demonstrates, the fallen Adam and Eve have a greater propensity to subvert reason to appetite, and so the sources of pleasure must be approached with extreme caution. In Adam's prelapsarian existence, pleasure and virtue are at least a part of the same continuum if not identical, and it is with vestiges of that ideality still defining his epistemological address to the world that Adam turns from the ugliness of death and disease to take solace in the beauty of the "spacious Plain" (XI, 556). But Michael warns him that the attractive surface is only a facade concealing moral degeneration:

   ... Judge not what is best
   By pleasure, though to Nature seeming meet,
   Created, as thou art, to nobler end
   Holy and pure, conformity divine.
   Those Tents thou saw'st so pleasant, were the Tents
   Of wickedness, wherein shall dwell his Race
   Who slew his Brother; studious they appear
   Of Arts that polish Life, Inventors rare,
   Unmindful of thir Maker, though his Spirit
   Taught them, but they his gifts acknowledg'd none.
   Yet they a beauteous offspring shall beget;
   For that fair female Troop thou saw'st, that seem'd
   Of Goddesses, so blithe, so smooth, so gay,
Yet empty of all good wherein consists
Woman's domestic honor and chief praise;
Bred only and completed to the taste
Of lustful appetite, to sing, to dance,
To dress, and troll the Tongue, and roll the Eye.
To these that sober Race of Men, whose lives
Religious titl'd them the Sons of God,
Shall yield up all thir virtue, all thir fame
Ignobly, to the trains and to the smiles
Of these fair Atheists, and now swim in joy,
(Erelong to swim at large) and laugh; for which
The world erelong a world of tears must weep.

(XI, 603-27)

As he does repeatedly in Book XI, Adam here mistakes appearance for reality, libertinism for lawful pleasure. Because appetite gains control so easily over fallen reason, Adam must learn restraint through discipline where once he had practiced temperance spontaneously. The course of Michael's exposition acquaints Adam with the distinction the fallen world enforces between physical representation and conceptual truth. And aesthetic appeal, as a potential effect of physical representation, must be regarded as a more dubious index to worth than it had been in Eden, where until Satan's invasion beauty had signified divinity even if it did not subsume it. Adam's response to the first vision
Michael shows him is aesthetic. Observing the initial instance of death, Adam exclaims,

But have I now seen Death? Is this the way
I must return to native dust? O sight
Of terror, foul and ugly to behold,
Horrid to think, how horrible to feel!

(XI, 462-65)

Michael's reply corrects this response, divorcing the fact of death from its "many shapes" (XI, 467) and its sensory threshold from its quiescent inner sanctum: "yet to sense / More terrible at th'entrance than within" (XI, 469-70). Adam's repulsion at the "unsightly sufferings" (XI, 510) the Lazar-house discloses is also aesthetic, but in the elaborative dialogue that ensues, he evinces some development. Striving to reconcile the human deformity he sees with the notion of man's creation ad imaginem Dei, he shows a desire to transcend a troubling event in order to arrive at the clarity of conceptual truth. Michael's answer to Adam's question, though hardly definitive, is nonetheless appropriate to the iconoclastic temper of the book because it denies any necessary and immutable investiture of temporal reality with spiritual significance (XI, 515-25). This same point Michael reiterates when, in describing the displacement during the Flood of the mountain on which Paradise was situated, he explains, "God attributes to
place / No sanctity, if none be thither brought / By
Men who there frequent, or therein dwell" (XI, 836-38).
Viewing the "spacious Plain" Adam again commits the aes-
thetic fallacy, attributing to beauty a power to convey
meaning that ugliness has been shown to lack. Disabused
of that illusion, he embraces a more abstract but finally
self-serving revaluation, blaming man's woes on woman,
which Michael's curt reply corrects: "From Man's
effeminate slackness it begins, / Said th'Angel, who
should better hold his place / By wisdom, and superior
gifts receiv'd" (XI, 634-36).

Adam's excessive devotion to Eve has warned us
against the reliability of the aesthetic responses on
which he recurrently depends in Book XI, and the attrac-
tiveness of the lost Eden makes us understand the force
of the longing that causes him to require Michael's
repeated corrections. If the use of pleasure as a norm
to guide action results in the hedonism of the debauched
priests, which is a local manifestation of Sin, so there
is an equally specious alternative whose prototype is
Death. Like aesthetic appeal, physical power has even
before the Fall been revealed as an inadequate index to
the legitimacy of the positions it enforces. Abdiel's
puzzlement that Satan, bereft of angelic goodness, should
still enjoy angelic "strength and might" (VI, 116) fore-
shadows the repellent treatment of Cain's sin and its
civilized counterpart, war. Adam's horror is of course aesthetic, at least initially, but the bardic voice provides direction for the militarists in Milton's audience, dismissing summarily the displays of military prowess with "On each hand slaughter and gigantic deeds" (XI, 659). Juxtaposed to these spectacles, and overshadowing them morally if not physically, is the recurrent figure of the "one just man," a type of the isolated and humble Christ of *Paradise Regained*.

Michael teaches not merely through negative images or positive, if humble, examples, but by explicitly supplementing these images with their conceptual import in order to correct Adam's untutored response to them. The practice has much in common with Puritan sermonizing, and J. B. Broadbent has traced the style to a particular sub-genre of pulpit oratory. "Michael is in fact," Broadbent observes, "preaching a 17th-century sermon of the plain Puritan kind recommended in William Perkins's *Art of Prophesying*. He takes a text, explains it, derives 'close and natural' doctrine from it, and applies the doctrine 'to the life and manners of men in a simple and plaine speech.'" But the balance of particular with general is characteristic of another didactic literary mode equally important to Puritans: spiritual history and its related medium, spiritual biography.

The Puritan interest in the past has its doctrinal
basis in the Calvinist resistance to "natural theology." Revelation in Creation is still objectively real, but to fallen man it can be only a reminder of his guilt and not a way to regeneration. The revelation in history, recorded in the Scriptural word, is what matters, and only through it can man hope to decipher the Book of Nature accurately. Paul Hunter has said of the Baconian empiricism underlying the Puritan approach to Creation,

The book of nature now became not a reproduction of the spiritual world nor an exact index of the attributes of God but, rather, an imperfect emblem of the spiritual world—an emblem which needed careful interpretation but which led equally surely, if not equally easily, to truth.¹

The norm according to which the emblem of Nature was to be explicated was provided, Puritans believed, in history, especially sacred history. Hence the basis for William Haller's assertion, "The intellectual leaders of Puritanism were interested in biography and history. They were not primarily interested in nature except as a revelation of divine providence secondary though parallel to scripture."² But like the revelation in Creation, historical revelation also required careful exposition in order to convey the proper lessons. As image is to visual perception, so event is to historical study; neither is
self-sufficient, both must be explicated. The Puritan interest in history, then, lay not in the raw data of temporal experience but in its capacity for instruction. The bias against the potential for idolatry latent in icon-making did not extend to the transmission of history, partly because the latter is most effectively mediated verbally. Still, their use of history, exploiting its homiletic potential, suggests its affinity with the treatment of the image in Puritan hermeneutics, which Milo Kaufmann has studied with respect to The Pilgrim's Progress:

Since there was no truth in the image per se, it had to be discounted; the truth lay in an abstraction from the image, an abstraction that might be equated to word, and that abstraction in turn had as its referent the true object, which was an abstraction from the object as it existed in protean variousness for the imagination. Revelation, bypassing images entirely, might use words which related referents without taint of distortion or ambiguity.\(^6\)

This process of abstraction leads to an emphasis on concept or precept, using only sufficient detail to give the lesson force for the listener. Fullness of account was sacrificed in order to gain the perspective
from which those details most illustrative of the doctrinal truth of the event stood in sharpest outline. The geographical counterpart to this intellectual attitude is, of course, Michael's mountain, where the distance renders the typological truth of history more apparent because, as with images, types are explicable only in terms of a conceptual analogy with their anti-type. A pedagogical method which eschews detail in favor of precepts depends heavily upon memory, the ability to recall lessons revealed in history, as well as reason, the ability to choose the appropriate lesson and apply it correctly. The details of spiritual biography serve as an aid to empathetic appreciation of the trials of our ancestors, a quality Adam reveals in his compassion for the suffering of his progeny in the Lazar-house and at the Flood. But the point, Michael's continued tutelage seems to indicate, lies elsewhere, in the general which gives meaning to the particular. Recalling the lives of God's people in all ages helps the man of faith to understand the events of his own life, and his reflection on the promise of the Second Coming, the assurance that history has both a meaning and a goal, is a way of transcending the tribulations of the moment. Thus Michael's pedagogical method, while more explicit and straightforward than Raphael's as a result of the regression of their pupil, is perfectly consonant with
Adam's mode of learning in the Garden. In the same way that Michael explains the meaning of events, first God and then Raphael are required at crucial stages in Adam's education to supplement the hieroglyphs in the Book of Nature with a verbal and summary exposition of truths for which any image is at best an insufficient manifestation.

As Adam has made an effort to extract meaning from the exposure of the allurements of the "spacious Plain," so when he sees the rainbow at the conclusion of the deluge he again ventures an interpretation, this time more adequate if not entirely sufficient. But his attitude is as important as his answer. Where before he had been assertive and self-serving, here his hypotheses are offered in an interrogative mode, signalling his willingness to submit to an authority more trustworthy than his own reason. Thus instead of re-proving, Michael praises him and confirms the substance of his insight while elaborating its further implications:

          .. Dext'rously thou aim'st;
So willingly doth God remit his Ire,
Though late repenting him of Man deprav'd,
Griev'd at his heart, when looking down he saw
The whole Earth fill'd with violence, and all flesh
Corrupting each thir way; yet those remov'd,
Such grace shall one just Man find in his sight,
That he relents, not to blot out mankind,  
And makes a Gov'nant never to destroy  
The Earth again by flood, nor let the Sea  
Surpass his bounds, nor Rain to drown the World  
With Man therein or Beast; but when he brings  
Over the Earth a Cloud, will therein set  
His triple-color'd Bow, whereon to look  
And call to mind his Gov'nant. (XI, 884-98)

Like the events Adam has been watching, images are efficacious only when they evoke concepts, and for retention concepts are best formulated verbally.

II

Much of Book XI is devoted to exposing the aesthetic fallacy, the presumption that Beauty is Truth, to which Adam has shown himself to be especially subject both before and after the Fall. As a corollary, the vision also dismisses the military fallacy, the assertion that might makes right. Adam's response to the latter continues to be at least partly aesthetic: it is the spectacle of war that disgusts him. But Milton's readers, acquainted with the qualities most prized in classical epic and having witnessed conflicts closer in time, are expected to supplement Adam's primarily intuitive response with moral revulsion. The content of the vision then works as a kind of negative formula. In consonance with the psychological theory that like banishes like,
to which Milton subscribes in the preface to *Samson Agonistes*, Michael objectifies alternatives to the way of life he is espousing as a means of purging Adam of the desire to pursue them. The same principle is put to a more compressed use in Milton's epic similes, which often proceed negatively, as when in the initial description of Eden Milton carefully excludes the most famous false paradises:

... Not that fair field
Of *Enna*, where *Proserpin* gath'ring flow'rs
Herself a fairer Flow'r by gloomy *Dis*
Was gather'd, which cost *Cares* all that pain
To seek her through the world; nor that sweet Grove
Of *Daphne* by *Orontes*, and th' inspir'd
Castalian Spring might with this Paradise
Of *Eden* strive; nor that *Nyseian* Isle
Girt with the River *Triton*, where old *Cham*,
Whom Gentiles *Ammon* call and *Lybian* *Jove*,
Hid *Amalthea* and her Florid Son,
Young *Bacchus*, from his Stepdame *Rhea's* eye;
Nor where *Abassin* Kings thir issue Guard,
Mount *Amara*, though this by some suppos'd
True Paradise under the *Ethiop* Line
By *Nlus* head, enclos'd with shining Rock,
A whole day's journey high, but wide remote
From this *Assyrian* Garden ... (IV, 268-85)
But the more extended use of the technique, common in the last books, is characteristic also of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. As Adam's vision varies the prospects of sensual indulgence and glory in battle, so both Samson and Christ are tempted with physical ease and temporal success. Christ, of course, has no real need for this moral catharsis; he submits to it for the sake of Milton's readers, so that through him we are cleansed. But even Christ's education makes use of this negative objectification, as D. C. Allen has remarked:

> It is amazing how strongly the undefined expectations of the human Christ flare into divine certainty whenever he is confronted by the subhuman enticements of the mind of evil. This seems almost to be the pattern. When Christ is alone, he is human; when he is confronted by Satan, he assumes divinity or, at least, is raised above humanity. On these occasions Christ not only knows himself, but remembers the long history of his opponent both in Heaven and in earth.  

The objectification of evil is necessary for the working of grace. Like Moses' laws as Michael describes their function, the inadequacy of what is presented externally convinces the observer of the need to rely solely on the
Redeemer as the way to recover the paradise within:
And therefore was Law given them to evince
Thir natural pravity, by stirring up
Sin against Law to fight; that when they see
Law can discover sin, but not remove,
Save by those shadowy expiations weak,
The blood of Bulls and Goats, they may conclude
Some blood more precious must be paid for Man,
Just for unjust, that in such righteousness
To them by Faith imputed, they may find
Justification towards God, and peace
Of Conscience, which the Law by Ceremonies
Cannot appease, nor Man the moral part
Perform, and not performing cannot live.

(XII, 287-99)

In Book XI Adam moves from a dependence upon dis-connected pageant to an appreciation of the essential continuity of history which its conceptual truth exposes. But the historical sense has its dangers as well. In the vision, civilization is treated with suspicion. Augustine noted that the cities of man inevitably bear the brand of Cain: "It is recorded of Cain that he built a city, but Abel, being a sojourner, built none."  
The substance of civilization is the subordination of nature to art in conjunction with, and usually only as a result of, military prowess; and the outrage of Enoch
and Noah shows that worldly beauty and power are simply metonyms for Sin and Death. The Flood is inadequate to erase the mark of Cain from the human city, but after the waters subside God's intervention seems about to establish the good society, to provide a civilization capable of conveying His truth and establishing it in history. The seed of Abraham, the people Moses and Joshua lead to Canaan, the constituents of David all seem at first to offer a viable alternative to the potential vehicles for truth which have already been dismissed. But the hope turns out to be ephemeral, the people themselves too morally wayward, to meet literally the expectations they evoke. Rather, the chiliastic fallacy must also be purged, the law of Moses must be superseded and the earthly kingdom must be transformed by the antitype of these leaders into a kingdom of the spirit and not of the world.

The view of history, then, is eschatological without being progressive in the evolutionary sense. Causation, the mechanical sequentiality of events, is granted to Satan, as Michael will later comment: "so shall the World go on, / To good malignant, to bad men benign" (XII, 537-38). But the *ordo naturae* is still ultimately God's, and it is as capable of encompassing His miraculous incursions in the fallen, historical world as it is of determining the results of the Fall.¹⁰ The process of
causation and incursion in history is like the presentation in Book XI in terms of episode and explication. It is neither history's meaningless flux nor its simple repetitions that are important, but rather the miracle of illumination which transcends history. Barbara Lewalski's discussion of the treatment of history in *Paradise Regained* is equally applicable to the last books of *Paradise Lost*:

> What Satan cannot see, given his fixed categories, is that Christ has not only repeated these good models and types, but has subsumed and fulfilled them, and through this action has made novelty and re-creation possible—new men, new lives, in a new kingdom whose history need not be sterile repetition but can be marked by significant and unique events.\(^1\)

Michael's summary treatment of postdiluvian time, in which the Logos exists as a promise but is not yet incarnate, emphasizes transcendent meaning. The tenuous hold of the seed of Abraham on worldly glory precludes the establishment of the Israelite nation as a permanent vehicle for God's truth, but it does suggest the nature of the medium which will supplant it. Moses' fortitude looks beyond itself to Christ in a number of ways: in the law, which Adam himself recognizes is inadequate;
in the wandering in the wilderness, a type of the experience which Milton will make the subject of his brief epic; and in the succession, at the entrance of Canaan, of "Joshua whom the Gentiles Jesus call" (XII, 310). Similarly, David's stock will produce the later Jesus to rule over a different kind of kingdom. Thus history yields its metaphoric meaning just as the Creation did to Adam's eager inquiries, but Michael's presentation shows that though the metaphor is necessary it is ultimately only the tenor and not the vehicle which matters.

Accompanying the process of internalization in the last books is a stylistic shift from the practice of the earlier account which has met with almost universal disapprobation. C. S. Lewis, for instance, has called the whole of Michael's presentation "an untransmuted lump of futurity" in which "the structural effect . . . is inartistic" and "the actual writing . . . curiously bad."\textsuperscript{12} Lewis speculated that a number of extrinsic factors might account for what he regarded as a failure in poetic power:

Perhaps Milton was in ill health. Perhaps, being old, he yielded to a natural, though disastrous, impatience to get the work finished. And since he was writing in a very new manner, he probably had no useful criticism—no one to tell him that the style of these last books bore only a superficial
resemblance to that of his epic prime. \textsuperscript{13} But the relative lack of ceremonial grandeur surrounding Michael's appearance suggests that the shift represents Milton's deliberate choice to adopt the style Lewis so deplores. In contrast to the elaborate and reciprocal greetings which Raphael's visit elicits, here Michael responds only perfunctorily to Adam's gesture: "\textit{Adam bow'd low, hee Kingly from his State / Inclin'd not, but his coming thus declar'd. / Adam, Heav'n's high behest no Preface needs}" (XI, 249-51). Michael's succinctness signals both a change in man's relation to the divine and the new strictures that the shift places upon language, exigencies which are reflected in the muted style.

In part, the alteration is traceable to the models of history and biography which are apparent in these books, for the essence of their style is a lack of overt adornment. An important convention of Puritan hagiographical writings, William Haller has pointed out, "\textit{was that they should seem to possess no art but the art of the holy spirit, which was simply to report the facts.}"\textsuperscript{14} The medium does not call attention to itself because it sought to be perfectly transparent, absorbed as fully as possible into the content. For this reason, Haller explains, such Puritans as Baxter could commend history "\textit{much as humanist critics like Sidney had praised poetry,}
for being both 'useful' and 'delightful.' In part, too, the style is a function of the historical time which the Fall has brought about. In the Garden, time existed only as a medium of infinite growth, and its "grateful vicissitude" was reflected in the elaborate and ceremonious language Milton used to describe it. Here, time is to be transcended, and Michael's succinctness, because it pays such single-minded attention to its purpose, is an aid to patience, "the virtue with which," William Madsen observes, "the Christian confronts the perplexities of history." "Patience," he continues, "is necessary because we are creatures living in a world we did not create and immersed in a time-process which is the fulfillment of a purpose not our own."16

And finally, dramatic exigency is partly determinative. Accustomed to the purely referential language he has employed in Eden, Adam is not yet equipped to turn to effective use the ambiguities of diction and syntax Milton trusts his readers to appreciate through most of the epic. Adam must come, guided by Michael, to approximate the reader's sophistication. As Stanley Fish has said,

Much of what is usually thought to be unsatisfactory in Books XI and XII results from the substitution of Adam for the reader in the dialectic of trial and error
which is the basis of Milton's method.
There is still to be sure a drama of the
mind, but it is Adam's, and the reader
stands in relation to him as an advanced
pupil to a novice. 17

Adam is capable of typological interpretation only in
retrospect: the manifestation of the antitype alone
can invest the type with symbolic meaning, and Adam
must come to this knowledge gradually, constantly re-
valuing what is retained in his memory in the light
of new information. But the reader is under no such
constraint. Prodded by Michael's insinuations, which
must for a time remain cryptic to Adam, we can see through
the historical event to the truth for which it is a
shadowy type. Thus the alternation of glorious evil
with humble virtue functions as a latent epic simile
much as the opposing views of astronomy function for
Adam in Book VIII, as stages in a process of supersession
leading to what is beyond all comparison. And a part
of the intended satisfaction for the reader must lie in
just the attitude toward Adam that Fish's metaphor of the
two pupils implies: compassionate understanding of his
perplexity mixed with the confidence that he will progress
as readily as we and with the relief that we are long
past the initiation he is undergoing.

If Milton modulates his epic voice from a sense of
decorum, he is likewise in these last books offering a justification of his earlier style. As Ben Jonson had argued in his famous quarrel with Inigo Jones, unless the primacy of the word is carefully protected, it will fall victim to spectacle, the experience of which is inevitably ephemeral and potentially misleading. Adam's recurrent absorption in the pageants of Book XI constitutes a proof of Jonson's point and also explains why the shows of Hell and the genuine glory of Eden alike are always subject to the controlling and correcting voice of the bard. The greater energy and elaboration of the earlier books has been required in order to accommodate an alien experience to his fallen readers. Given an Adam new to history, Michael presents time spatially; given a readership whose sensibilities have been shaped by the flux of linear time, Milton through simile and allusion temporalizes Edenic space. But despite the complementary techniques, the effect is the same. For Adam as for his heirs, the mode of presentation is a stimulus to stand apart from history in anticipation of the coming, immanent if not imminent, of the Redeemer.

In Book XI, image has been subordinated to concept in response to the limitations of human epistemology. In Book XII, however, spectacle subsides altogether, to be replaced with narrative, while the thematic concern
with the verbal medium becomes more explicit.\textsuperscript{19} Michael's narration begins with Nimrod's Babel, the verbal equivalent to the Fall, and concludes with Pentecost, the dispensation which counters the curse, making the degeneration of language a felix culpa and allowing Milton's linguistic complexity to function as a part of his moral aesthetics. But with this reliance on the word comes the admission that even that medium, consecrated by the Logos and answered through the Interior Teacher acting in the hearer, is inadequate to convey the essence of God. Hence the resort to metaphor and other sorts of verbal obliquity. Louis Martz is among the critics who deplore Michael's pedagogical strategy:

\ldots if the reader is expected to grasp the workings of grace against sin, they must somehow be given an adequate imagistic and dramatic presentation, to counter the powerful thrust of the scenes of sin. Milton has done exactly this in Book 10, in presenting the recovery of Adam and Eve. Here he fails to present any such organic vision, and instead allows a fissure to develop between the concrete representations of sin and the abstract assertions of Adam's "Teacher."\textsuperscript{20}

The concession to local effect that Martz desires, however, would destroy the larger, conceptual unity of the
poem which is dependent not upon image and drama but upon the elucidating word. Throughout the poem, Milton has reserved the most sharply delineated images to the presentation of Hell, to Satan and his constituents, and the most compelling drama to the results of their plotting. Even in Eden and Heaven, where outer form and inner reality exist in concord, the explicating word is ultimately controlling, while in the last books the distance between image and truth amounts to a hellish expanse. Because in a fallen world, and to fallen eyes, images constitute a particularly dangerous attempt to render the spiritual, Milton must resort once more to the negative formula which has served him thus far. Like the earlier images of beauty and power, the worldly kingdom of David is ephemeral, but though we reject the chiliastic fallacy along with the aesthetic and the military, we come to accept the spiritual kingdom it typifies. And the strictly verbal presentation, because it lends itself more readily to revealing the conceptual basis of typological symbolism, is both necessary and appropriate.
Notes to Chapter Five


7 For the conceptual nature of typology, see Hunter, especially p. 102.


9 The *City of God*, Book XV, Chapter 1, trans. by M. Dods, in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, ed.

Calvin espoused the same principle: "Nature is not only 'order,' but the field of God's special volitions. . . . The ordo naturae is simply the orderliness or constancy of God's will within nature. This is not an empirical orderliness pure and simple, but an order such that God can work miracles, which are a scandal from the point of view of empirical order, without breaking the order of nature." See Edward A. Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 66-7.


Ibid., p. 130.

Haller, p. 108.

Ibid., p. 101.


For a succinct treatment of the issues involved in the quarrel, see D. J. Gordon, "Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel Between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949), 152-78.

The shift to narrative has provoked a great deal of critical speculation, including the following: "It is equally appropriate that Adam be denied the use of physical vision in Book XII, which is concerned with ambition, the third of the root sins involved in the Fall. Whereas Adam's (and mankind's) intemperance and vainglory are a kind of moral blindness to be cured by sharper sight, ambition in Adam and Eve was traditionally identified with the desire to know good and evil, to see too clearly into 'objects divine' unsuited to human sense," pp. 27-8 in Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Structure and the Symbolism of Vision in Michael's Prophecy, *Paradise Lost*, Books XI-XII," *Philological Quarterly* 42 (1963).