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# Full of Doubt I Stand: The Structure of *Paradise Lost*

Neil Forsyth

*Paradise Lost* was published in two different editions during Milton's life. The first edition of 1667 (*Ed. I*) appeared in ten books, the second of 1674 (*Ed. II*) in twelve. Apart from some fifteen new lines, there were no other important changes between the two editions, yet the alteration of its external form shifts the way in which one perceives the poem's informing structure, what Aristotle called the *mythos*.

The longest books of the first edition were the last four. These were divided into six for *Ed. II*. Most of the extra lines also occur in the second half of the poem, changes which had the effect of moving the formal centre of the poem. This fact has troubled the numerologists, whose spectacular successes with other Renaissance poets<sup>1</sup> have not been repeated in Milton's case. By counting the lines of *Paradise Lost* as part of more ambitious numerological enterprises, Gunnar Qvarnström and Alastair Fowler found that the exact middle of the poem fell between lines 761 and 762 of Book VI. There the Son

... in celestial panoply all armed  
Of radiant urim, work divinely wrought,                      761  
Ascended, at his right hand victory                              762  
Sat, eagle-winged, beside him hung his bow.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See especially A. Kent Hieatt, *Short Time's Endless Monument: The Symbolism of Numbers in Edmund Spenser's Epithalamion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); also Maren-Sofie Røstvig, "Ars Aeterna: Renaissance Poetics and Theories of Divine Creation," *Mosaic* 3 (1970) 40-61, Alastair Fowler, ed., *Silent Poetry: Essays in Numerological Analysis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), and his own book *Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Citations of Milton's poetry are from the Longman edition, *John Milton: Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London 1971). For Fowler's discussion of the numerological centre, see pp. 22-28, 345-47 and 379-80; also Gunnar

That is, the hero of the cosmic battle climbs up into his chariot wearing the mysterious "urim," the stone on Aaron's breastplate of judgment that had taken on alchemical overtones. The action is seen to have various symbolic implications, including an anticipation of the event commemorated in the liturgical year by Ascension Day.

Now a poet as conscious of structural organization as Milton may well have intended this minor felicity, but if so he seems to have abandoned or deconstructed it himself. It is the first edition only in which this figural ascension is exactly placed at the centre: in *Ed. II*, the one we all read, the new centre, as Fowler was honest enough to admit, comes 4½ lines later. Fowler did not, however, feel obliged to quote the new line at the middle, which announces that from about the Son rolled a fierce effusion "Of smoke and bickering flame and sparkles dire" (766). That is, in words which adapt Psalm 18, the Son is so angry that he gives off smoke and flames.

The question now poses itself: what led Milton so to decentre his own poem that the exact middle became "bickering flame" rather than the neat and satisfying moment of the archetypal ascension? No critic who has paid attention to the problem offers a positive reason. W. B. Hunter, indeed, decided it was the printer's fault. The lines of the first edition had been misnumbered, so Milton was unaware that, in adding lines for *Ed. II*, he shifted the numerical centre. This may be true, but the argument smacks of the notorious insistence of Bentley that the blind Milton was at the mercy of an incompetent friend who saw the book through the press.<sup>3</sup> What is more, Hunter's suggestion unfortunately implies that Milton did not pay as much attention to line-counting as this particular kind of formalism would require, or perhaps that the structure of the poem, conceived in this way, is, like its main characters, finally in the hands of Providence. Yet one is forced to wonder whether other more

Qvarnström, *Poetry and Numbers* (Lund: Gleerup 1966) 93 and *The Enchanted Palace: Some Structural Aspects of Paradise Lost* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1967); Christopher Butler, *Number Symbolism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970) 140–58.

<sup>3</sup> William B. Hunter, Jr., "The Center of *Paradise Lost*," *English Language Notes* 7 (1969) 32–34. For discussion of Richard Bentley, whose edition appeared in 1732, see William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935), Robert M. Adams, *Ikon: John Milton and the Modern Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955), Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), and Frank Kermode, "Adam Unparadised," in *The Living Milton*, ed. Kermode (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) 85–123.

important considerations than line-counting were at work in the restructuring of the second edition.

A persuasive approach to this question has been that of Arthur Barker.<sup>4</sup> He argued that the ten-book structure still suggested too much of Milton's original intention, recorded in the Trinity manuscript, to write a five-act tragedy, whereas the twelve-book structure, echoing Virgil, subsumed the tragedy within the larger encyclopedic possibilities of epic. The new shape was achieved very simply, by dividing the two longest books of *Ed. I* into what are now Books VII, VIII, and XI, XII. The accompanying diagram, based on Barker's essay, shows how the ten-book structure of *Ed. I* (what Barker saw as five two-book acts) was broken and converted by the various new designs discernible in the twelve-book second edition. I have added several suggestions of my own, in order to show how *Ed. II* makes clear what was only implicit in *Ed. I*, that conversion, regeneration, the bringing of good from evil, are structural as well as doctrinal principles of *Paradise Lost*. The reorganization of the second edition is, I suggest, Milton's final illustration of this principle.

Not only was Milton aware, as the preface to *Samson Agonistes* makes clear, of the basic Aristotelian dictum that a poet is more the maker of plots than of metres, but in writing the first version of *Paradise Lost* he had perhaps followed too closely the Renaissance understanding of Aristotle. Although the *Poetics* contains many remarks about epic poetry, its focus on tragic form had led to a Renaissance fashion for ten book epics according to what the period took to be Aristotelian precepts. The crisis, the major turn of events, for example, should come in the equivalent of the fourth act. What we read as Book IX of *Paradise Lost* was originally Book 8, and thus the Fall of Man had its obvious and rightful place as the tragic *peripeteia*.<sup>5</sup> Each of the first three acts moves toward anticipations of this crisis: in Book II Satan conceives the plan to subvert mankind and begins his journey to the new world; in Book IV he makes a preliminary attempt and the book ends with a face-off between Gabriel and Satan, the scales dangling enigmatically in God's sky; the third act,

<sup>4</sup> Arthur E. Barker, "Structural Pattern in *Paradise Lost*," *Philological Quarterly* 28 (1949) 17-30, reprinted in *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 142-55.

<sup>5</sup> See Barker, p. 148; Jeffrey P. Ford, "Paradise Lost and the Five-Act Epic," Diss., Columbia University, 1966; and especially the authoritative discussion by John M. Steadman, *Epic and Tragic Structure in Paradise Lost* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 29-59.





Books V and VI, contains the Rebellion and War, dramatic image of divine discord, and although it ends with Satan's defeat, we know this to be the immediate occasion for the revenge he is planning. By the end of the fourth act he has succeeded and can retire from the scene. Act Five, all of what is now the last three books, presented the consequences of his success: as a well known passage near the end of the poem puts it, "so shall the world go on,/ To good malignant, to bad men benign,/ Under her own weight groaning" (XII 537-39). Satan and his plot thus dominated the first edition in a way that appeared to confirm the Romantic view of the poem's hero. It looked very much as if Blake was right, and Milton was of the devil's party.

This *Paradise Lost*, we may add, had something like the structure, not simply of tragedy *tout court*, but of that peculiar and largely indefinable Renaissance type that we have learned to call revenge tragedy. Satan's real model, then, would not be the motiveless malignancy of Iago proposed by C. S. Lewis, or the Faustus suggested in an influential essay by Helen Gardner,<sup>6</sup> nor even, though they come closer, Macbeth, Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*, or Ferdinand in *Malfi*, but Hamlet himself. The sympathy we are invited to feel for each has a similar occasion – their magnificent and tormented soliloquies, and in each case they are eventual victims of parallel revenge plots against themselves, but worked out in secret and so without their knowledge. In Hamlet's case, the patent villainy of Claudius's counterplot intensifies our fearful sympathy with the hero, while Shelley, Empson and other accomplished if partial readers have testified that they have similar reactions to Milton's Satan and his villainous God. At least we can say that Milton squarely faced the possibility that God might not be good. We should add that Satan uses or is linked with the word "revenge" many times,<sup>7</sup> and that the action of *Paradise Lost* is touched off by the same kind of action which, in a revenge tragedy, often initiates the chain of events – some irrational and wilful decision of an absolute monarch,<sup>8</sup> in this case God's

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942) 98; Helen Gardner, "Milton's Satan and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy," *English Studies* 1 (1948) 46-66, reprinted in her *A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 99-120.

<sup>7</sup> I 35, 107, 148, 170, II 107, 330, etc., ten times in Books I and II, twenty-one times in the poem as a whole; see O. B. Hardison, Jr., "In Medias Res in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* XVII, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983) 27-41.

<sup>8</sup> Franco Moretti, "Tragic Form as the Deconsecration of Sovereignty," in his *Signs Taken For Wonders* (London: Verso, 1983) 42-82.

announcement of the exaltation of his son, and that Milton has done his best to make reasonable Satan's response to this absolutist act. Most obviously, the action of *Paradise Lost* is controlled by the plot which drives the poem into motion – Satan's effort to colonize the newly created earth in revenge for the defeat he has suffered in heaven. The question must soon be faced, of course, whether Milton, as Dame Helen put it, was "creating the last great tragic figure in our literature and destroying the unity of his poem in so doing."<sup>9</sup>

The plot of *Paradise Lost* thus defined was what Milton was constructing from the time when he first conceived the idea of a tragedy, at some point in the late 1630's according to the jottings in the Trinity manuscript, until *Ed. I* was published in 1667.<sup>10</sup> This is the version of the poem's *mythos* which makes it begin in Hell, so that Heaven appears as a parody of what the reader has already seen; which makes the War in Heaven precede the Creation, an unusual though not unprecedented choice of sequence, so that the Creation appears to be God's reaction to the depopulation of Heaven; and which makes Satan's success in the garden the cause of the Redemption, a structural connection whose implications many critics have tried to minimize by allusion to the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall.<sup>11</sup> In sum, this is a plot which makes good and evil balanced opponents, and which shows God's goodness as required by Satan's badness.

Since the shift of the second edition involved little more than renumbering the books of the poem, however, it is clear that the second plot emphasized by this new division was already present in the first edition. Milton's tinkering with the poem's structure served merely to draw out in an explicit way what was already written into *Ed. I*, the secret and usually silent plot with which God and Milton had informed their creations, but which the power and dominance accorded, by their permissive wills, to Satan, had threatened to obscure. Good emerges from evil in the divine, benign scheme of things and in Milton's imitation and justification of that scheme.

<sup>9</sup> Gardner, p. 120. She had changed her mind about this by the time she reprinted the essay in her book (note 6 above), adding a note to say that "the strength of Milton's design holds together the cosmic and the human theme" (*ibid.*). This change of mind corresponds, I think, to Milton's, as my argument will suggest.

<sup>10</sup> See Fowler, ed. *Paradise Lost* (note 2 above), pp. 3–5.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," *English Literary History* 4 (1937) 161–79, and widely reprinted since. For further discussion see below.

Several objections might be raised to this account of the poem's growth. The first edition, after all, is not a tragedy but an epic. Renaissance practice had usually produced epics in multiples of ten books – Camões' was in ten, Tasso's in twenty, for example – and Milton's *Ed. I* simply followed suit. Helen Gardner, indeed, in the essay cited previously, pays no attention to the difference between the two editions but argues instead that it was the decision to write an epic that loosed Satan from the chains in which a classical tragedy would have confined him. One could reply, however, that this argument appears to contradict the main point of the rest of her essay about the tragic and dramatic power of Satan. More generally, we should remember that Italian neo-classical theory had, in the course of adapting Aristotle, closely associated tragic and epic genres, and that this had led among Milton's predecessors to several experiments in five-act epics, from Sidney to Davenant's *Gondibert*.<sup>12</sup> So ten books was current epic practice, yes, but in Milton's mind the practice may still have born a close association with his original conception of a tragedy on the Fall of Man.

A more serious objection would be that none of the plans for the tragedy preserved in the Trinity manuscript bears much resemblance to the structure of the ten-book first edition. Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, it is true, tells us he first saw Satan's Niphates speech as the opening of a drama, perhaps during the 1650's, and this does suggest the idea of an Elizabethan revenge tragedy.<sup>13</sup> Yet the plans of the Trinity manuscript and Phillips's version are quite different, and, in any case, what Phillips says, always supposing it is true, itself suggests how far the epic form had modified the tragic idea, since the Niphates speech now occurs at the opening of Book IV, what in Barker's scheme would be the middle of the second act. Against this objection one could reply that Milton still kept the essential idea of a plot which opens with powerful scenes for Satan, even when the epic scope allowed him to expand Satan's role and set scenes in Heaven and in Hell. Thus the tragic figure of the "lost Archangel" as well as the tragic five-act form persisted when "Milton changed his mind... and set himself a problem of extraordinary difficulty in choosing to treat this particular subject in epic form."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> R. H. Perkinson, "The Epic in Five Acts," *Studies in Philology* 43 (1946) 465–81; see also Barker (note 4 above), Steadman and Ford (note 5), and especially Hardison (note 7), p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Helen Darbishire, ed., *The Early Lives of Milton* (London: Constable, 1932) 13, 72–3.

<sup>14</sup> Gardner (note 6 above) p. 119. Hardison (note 7) develops Gardner's ideas but ends by suggesting that, far from allowing Satan to escape his conscious

A further objection to Barker's hypothesis has recently been put forward by John Shawcross.<sup>15</sup> He claims that he fails to see the dramatic unity of Barker's Act IV, for example, what is now Books VII, VIII and IX. He points out that the "act" was broken in two by an invocation even in *Ed. I*. But this objection may be turned on its head. For one thing, the claim is not that *Ed. I* showed "unity" in its acts, certainly not in the fourth act, which was often in Elizabethan tragedy (like *Hamlet*) packed and diverse, but rather that *Ed. I* had something about it which Milton felt obliged to change: the traces of an earlier tragic design still clung too noticeably to it. For another thing, that "invocation," unlike the three previous ones (which do introduce "acts" in Barker's scheme) is not a direct address to the Muse but rather a meditation on the mixed form of the poem: it is here that the narrator says he "now must change/ These notes to tragic," a "sad task," as he calls it, "yet argument/ Not less but more heroic" than those of classical epics. It is here too that he stresses the process of composition rather than the finished product:

If answerable style I can obtain  
Of my celestial patroness, who deigns  
Her nightly visitation unimplored,  
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires  
Easy my unpremeditated verse:  
Since first this subject for heroic song  
Pleased me long choosing and beginning late.<sup>16</sup>

The Muse remains here "unimplored" in the third person, and this personal aside or digression both insists on how recently epic form and subject have come together and goes on to cite the tragic rather than epic virtues of "patience and heroic martyrdom" as the proper but unsung subject of this new and unprecedented genre.<sup>17</sup>

control, Milton's difficulty was in creating a credible symbol of evil in a poem dominated by an omnipotent God. Once again, it is revealing to find different critics reacting differently to the same evidence. Hardison cites as precedents *The Jew of Malta* and *Richard III*, which both open with soliloquies for the villain.

<sup>15</sup> John T. Shawcross, *with Mortal Voice: The Creation of Paradise Lost* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982) 64.

<sup>16</sup> IX 20–26. See the extensive discussion by Steadman, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–38. Hardison, *op. cit.*, p. 34, makes the interesting point that the dramatic action of "Adam Unparadised," one of the projects for a tragedy, is focused on the material which appears in Books IX to XII of *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>17</sup> Dennis Burden, *The Logical Epic* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 59. Burden also develops the parallels with Elizabethan tragedy along the lines proposed by Gardner.



Shawcross's own list of structural symmetries is heavily dependent on the ten-book edition, so he is obliged to argue that Milton bowed only to external pressure, the neo-classical requirements of the age of Dryden, in publishing the second edition in twelve books. Yet since he groups his symmetries in two columns, the first of which comprises the first six books, the second the last four, of *Ed. I*, it would seem that the second edition would have been more appropriate, so that six would have been the number of books in each of his columns. And since he occasionally violates the sequence of events, whether in *Ed. I* or *Ed. II*, to produce his often fascinating list of correspondences between the two halves of the poem, the second edition would surely have done as well as the first. Shawcross appears to wish that Milton had not changed the form of the poem simply in order that the reader might have had more work to do.

The drawing of good out of evil is seen also in terms of drawing order out of disorder (such as God's creation of light), of harmony out of disharmony, of proportion out of disproportion. Much more is thus achieved by a metaphor of structure where the seeming disorder, disharmony, and disproportion which the ten-book version allows disappear as the full structure is recognized. But man's finite perception has frequently failed to let him see that structure.<sup>18</sup>

Although he disapproves, then, Shawcross's version of Milton's reason for the change agrees with Barker's, that Milton wanted God's plot to emerge more clearly.

Actually Barker's explanation for the shift between the two editions implied something more interesting. It was not only a desire to emulate the *Aeneid* that he stressed, but Milton's sense of what he saw in his own creation. Although he did not say so, Barker makes his Milton sound a lot like Milton's God, at least as Empson read him. Having made his point that the Virgilian twelve-book structure corrects the excessive emphasis on Satan, Barker continues:

Milton, it is clear, was by no means unaware of what has been called 'the unconscious meaning' of *Paradise Lost*. It may be that in 1667 he was not quite aware of it, or that for some reason or other he was then inclined towards it; it is certainly emphasized by his having written in ten books. But the 1674 renumbering indicates his consciousness of Satan's power over the poem, and (it if was not simply a trivial toying) the new disposition was meant to strengthen Satan's chains. Its motive was to shift the poem's emphasis and its centre in a way that would point more clearly to its stated intention.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Shawcross (note 15 above), pp. 46, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Barker (note 4), p. 28.



Barker's parenthetical proviso allows for the absence of external evidence to suggest why Milton made the changes, but what he implies is that Milton noticed something as a reader of his poem of which, as its writer, he had not been "quite aware."

Although he does not cite Barker, Joseph Summers's argument might seem to confirm him. He made a similar point, more extensively, about the poem's centre. In the twelve-book version, the centre, in book numbering, not lines, has shifted from the division between Books V and VI, the rebellion and consequent war, to that between Books VI and VII, the war and subsequent creation. Thus it is no longer Abdiel who appears on each side of the central divide, the "angelic exemplum of man's ways at their most heroic," the one just man, the saving remnant, he who undergoes and, alone of the poem's angelic or human characters, resists temptation; now it is Christ who bestrides the central books, "the divine image of God's ways at their most providential."<sup>20</sup> So the larger activity of Christ, not just his clambering into the chariot, becomes the true centre of the poem. Yet whereas Barker suggested that it was the Satanic power of which Milton became fully conscious on a second reading, Summers implies the opposite. In his view, it may have been the other plot, God's, of which Milton was not quite aware in the writing of the first edition. Summers seems to imply this when he notes something "oddly touching" about a Milton who, "in humility before his own creation," perceives afresh the structural implications, which are "larger and other than his conscious intention."<sup>21</sup>

In practice it may not matter whether Satan's or the providential plot were not quite conscious as Milton wrote the first edition. One can see how important the question would be if we were arguing about the source of poetic inspiration, whether it be demonic, as Blake thought, or divine, as Milton's Muse and the classical tradition required. What matters to my argument here is that both are conceivable.<sup>22</sup> As we have pursued the ideas of various critics, we have found a Milton who fully discovers one or the other side of his poem only on re-reading it, who shifts the balance between them for *Ed. II*, and who finds that his own act of writing corresponds to the major movement he inscribed within it

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Summers, *The Muse's Method* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962) 113.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>22</sup> William Riggs, *The Christian Poet in Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) 15–45, shows that Milton anticipated Romantic theory by including several elaborate parallels between Satan and the poem's narrator within the poem.

– good emerging from evil, light from darkness. We hesitate, as he appears to have, which of the two structures to stress. What can we make of this?

The major changes in his perception and organization of the poem all occur in the second half and make more nearly accurate what the narrator says at the beginning of Book VII: “Half yet remains unsung.” Three new pairs of books replace the two pairs that made up Acts Four and Five of *Ed. I*. The first of these pairs is the new Books VII and VIII, one long book in *Ed. I*. The new arrangement reveals a previously buried or subordinate aspect of the poem, one which now begins to assert itself – the increasing focus on Adam and his progressive understanding. In *Ed. II* one book is now devoted entirely to the magnificence of the creation, and then a further book to Adam’s anxious questions about it, the astronomical speculations, and to his allied reflections upon his feelings for Eve (she it was who first posed the questions about the stars which Raphael answers).<sup>23</sup> No longer only a preparation for the Fall, the dialogue with Raphael turns the otherwise mysterious and transcendent process of creation into something which has direct and decisive relevance, though problematic, to Adam’s and mankind’s situation. Indeed Adam has himself something to offer to this dialogue, his own account of the birth or rather the creation of Eve. From this point of view, the dialogue that is Book VIII leads towards Adam’s assumption of the narrative duties and skills of Raphael, at least on a smaller scale, and so illustrates Raphael’s hint that things on earth and in heaven may be “Each to other like” (V 576).

The next new pair of books has a similar structure; the old climax of the Fall becomes now the first movement of a process which is compensated by the gradual repentance of Eve and Adam in the Book X of *Ed. II*. In that process Adam begins to realize the significance of the sentence passed on mankind by Christ, with its initially mysterious references to Eve’s heel and serpent’s head. The repentance scene may now be seen more clearly to include within it the contrast with the unrepentant Satan’s triumphant return to Hell. That return is no longer what it chiefly had been in *Ed. I*, the beginning of Satan’s power over earth, his successful colonization. The final pair, also made out of one book in the original, may now be seen to turn about a similar pivot as the previous pair, and indeed as the whole poem now does: the break be-

<sup>23</sup> Compare IV 657, 675, V 44 with VIII 15–25, 100–106, where the idea is reiterated that the stars must shine in vain unless someone watches them. The idea forms a part of Satan’s temptation of Eve.

tween Books XI and XII, newly established for *Ed. II*, comes between the Flood and the Rainbow, or, as one of the new lines puts it, "Betwixt the world destroyed and world restored" (XII 3). Here too, as we shall see, Adam gradually moves toward a deeper understanding of his role in the larger scheme, and of the meaning of that scheme. So each of the new books created out of the second part of a long book in *Ed. I* is devoted to Adam's education by an angel.

Barker briefly proposed that other buried structures became more visible in the second edition. The new possibility of 3 groups of 4 books, for example, would allow for a triad of disobedience, woe, and restoration – but for this idea he has recently been castigated persuasively by Shawcross, who does not find that triad where Barker points.<sup>24</sup> Yet such possibilities will continue to provoke new readers to find, or construct, fresh structural patterns. I would propose, for example, that two of the new books, VIII and XII, now invite alignment with Book IV. All three contain important birth scenes: Eve's in IV, Adam's and Eve's in VIII, and Christ's in XII. This arrangement suggests the progress of love, a preoccupation of these three books, from bliss in IV, through troubled discussion of the subject in VIII, to the renewal of divine and human unity in XII – so at least Adam seems to understand the birth of Christ from his own loins and God, saying "So God with man unites" (XII 382).

However we define the new possibilities opened by the book divisions of *Ed. II*, it seems as if the critics who discuss the question need to find a way in which, as I also am arguing, the new organization serves to reassert or restore the divine plot by which Satan's plot is contained and converted. The second edition more nearly imitates this divine plot than the first. From the point of view emphasized by the first edition, the sequence of episodes shows his God doing what Milton appears to have done himself in the second edition, reacting to the power accorded to Satan. Book III, of course, like the poem's earliest event, God's speech in Book V, purports to resolve this difficulty by showing that God anticipated all of the events and allowed them their place in his scheme. Yet is there really so much difference, granted an omniscient God, between reacting to an anticipated deed and picking up the pieces after it has happened, even if the new structure one makes from the pieces is better, in some sense, than the old? However we may react to or conceive of Milton's God, whether with Empson and the Romantic tradition, or with what Empson called the "illiberal approach" which dominates the

<sup>24</sup> Shawcross, p. 64.

Milton industry and which has recently been asserted in a book called *Milton's Good God*,<sup>25</sup> it is clear that most of the problems the poem poses resolve themselves ultimately, as Milton saw, into the problem of God. It is the ways of God that call for justification, and Milton's chief means of doing so, since this is a poem rather than a treatise, is to imitate and so reveal in narrative structure the divine form. But what is remarkable about *Paradise Lost*, as the various discussions of its structure have revealed, is how closely it weaves together Satan's plot and God's, and how much they come to look like each other, as the rebel and victorious angels do. As a famous passage in *Areopagitica* asserts, the doom that Adam fell into was to know good and evil, and the context of this remark, it should be remembered, is the argument that men be allowed to enjoy this doom without the interference of censors: the bishops, like God, should permit us to read bad books and make our own discriminations.

Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were imposed on *Psyche* as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt.<sup>26</sup>

Milton applied the same doctrine to the reader of *Paradise Lost* as he applied to all potential readers in *Areopagitica*. The changes between the two editions show him engaging in the process of discernment himself.

The new break that introduces Book XII coincides with another shift in the poem's manner, the moment when Michael ceases to be a Prospero-like producer of a magic-lantern show and becomes simply a narrator. "Henceforth what is to come I will relate,/ Thou therefore give due audience and attend" (XII 11-12), he explains, and so echoes the Miltonic narrator, who also hoped that he would "fit audience find, though few" (VII 31). Michael's reason for the change, he says, is that "I perceive/ Thy mortal sight to fail" (XII 9), and he thus picks up a central aspect of the blind narrator's language, he who spoke of "things invisible to mortal sight" (III 55). Michael's words thus link Adam with Milton as well as with the poem's reader.<sup>27</sup> And the second edition increased the structural responsibilities that this tiring Adam must bear.

<sup>25</sup> Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> *Areopagitica*, cited from *The Prose of John Milton*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1967) 287.

<sup>27</sup> A good discussion of the relations between angelic and Miltonic narrators is Riggs, (note 22), ch. 3.



Adam proves a good reader (or listener), if a little overenthusiastic. He still gets things wrong and has to be chastened by Michael. When he hears about the birth of Christ, for example, he reacts by seeing the structural implications, looking both backwards and forwards at once: "O prophet of glad tidings, finisher/ Of utmost hope!" (XII 375–6). He goes on to say that he now understands the meaning of the obscure promise of Book X that the seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head. So far so good, but immediately Adam goes wrong again: "Say where and when/ Their fight, what stroke shall bruise the victor's heel" (385–6). He reacts like the father of a boxer whose son has just been offered his big chance, and he wants tickets for the fight. In a sense, that is exactly his position – he has just said that Christ will proceed from his loins – but Michael is obliged to explain the inward nature of the battle: "Dream not of their fight/ As of a duel" (386–7). In this and similar passages, Adam becomes a figure for the reader's efforts to construct an accurate version of the poem's – and God's – plan.

Learning from this chastening, Adam greets the final paradox of the poem's history with an ambivalent response. His final discovery in the poem is a crucial event, in every sense, for the interpretation of its structure. Since Lovejoy's essay, this moment has been called, rather incautiously, the discovery of the *Felix Culpa* or *Fortunate Fall* – the Redemption or Atonement story, which makes the Fall fortunate. This apparent key to the poem's meaning Adam greets at first with wonder:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!  
That all this good of evil shall produce,  
And evil turn to good; more wonderful  
Than that which by creation first brought forth  
Light out of darkness! (XII 469–73)

Lovejoy pointed out that it was a major innovation of Milton's to have Adam perceive the doctrine himself, but he did not point out that Adam's first reaction is essentially a structural one: Adam is piecing together the poem's meanings, and he here links the Redemption to the process that Milton had made the centre of the second edition: the emergence of light from darkness, the creation which follows the war in heaven. Lovejoy went on to show that Adam's next reaction, doubt, was also a Miltonic innovation, but again I suggest Milton's originality goes further. The word "doubt" retains, I think, its Latin meaning of hesitation alongside its psychological and religious meanings. What Adam hesitates between are two reactions to the poem's informing structures. As we first hear his lines, they suggest the dominant plot of the poem, or at least the active and obvious one, the Satanic plot that Milton tried to contain in *Ed. II*:

Full of doubt I stand  
Whether I should repent me now of sin  
By me done and occasioned, or rejoice

The line end at "rejoice" makes us think, until we follow the enjambement on to hear the relatively innocuous sequel, that the Satanic plot of the poem is the one that succeeds in more than the sense in which Eve and Adam were induced to eat the apple. All the intervening lines, the Son's judgment, the bitter recriminations, Michael's teaching, have all led towards the same rejoicing as Satan's on his return to Hell. Adam, as we hear him first, doubts not only whether he should repent, sufficiently disturbing alone if one follows the logic of the thought, but whether he should not rejoice at what he has done. Just as Satan does. Just as all the romantic or humanist readers have done.

The rest of the speech, however, soon absorbs or converts that threat, just as the larger plot does. Adam is hesitating whether to repent or to rejoice

Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,  
To God more glory, more good will to men  
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound.

What Adam might be inclined to rejoice at, it turns out, is not what he did, but what God will do. But even there the syntax is not quite so explicit. Adam does not incline to rejoice at God's active achievement but rather at his passive or indirect presence: "To God more glory" and "more goodwill to men/ From God" – parallel prepositional phrases at the beginning of succeeding lines which both put God in oblique cases. Grace, it is true, shall abound over wrath, but also "good *thereof* shall spring" – where the antecedent of "thereof" is Adam's sin. What Adam perceives here, then, in the complexity of his syntax and the perplexity of his mind, is not so much the active deity as the results of his plotting – or to put it another way, the compensatory, redemptive and converting plot of the poem as Milton, in God's wake, had constructed it, and as, with his final godlike act, he had reinterpreted it, allowing the main epic plot to emerge from, and compensate for, the "dark materials" (II 916) of the dominant tragic plot he had first invented.

Several critics have in fact argued that we do not find the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall in *Paradise Lost*, even in the hesitant and ambivalent way I have suggested.<sup>28</sup> Clearly the doctrine was dangerous ground. The

<sup>28</sup> Lovejoy's argument (note 11 above) has been challenged by Virginia R. Mollenkott, "Milton's Rejection of the Fortunate Fall," *Milton Quarterly* 6 (1972)



risk is that, if the logic of the paradox were spelled out, then the Fall is Fortunate because necessary to the Redemption. Thus the Satanic plot is not merely converted but ignored, and so the whole delicate doctrinal and architectural structure of Milton's poem would collapse, leaving only a bland, if cosmic, smile, a Buddha face, in place of the awful sense of sin, the dread proximity of damnation, that Milton evokes in the figure of his lost archangel. So dangerous was the doctrine that many Christians, and Milton's contemporaries among them, denied the idea altogether, as Danielson has recently insisted in arguing for an entirely Unfortunate Fall. It is indeed true that *Paradise Lost* provides for Adam and Eve to graduate from Paradise by a better route than the sorrowful way in which they do leave it. God says as much, for example in a speech from the heavenly throne in Book VII (155–60). It is also probable that Milton included such passages, as Dennis Burden argued, because he was

worried about the idea of the Fortunate Fall. It is one thing to say that Adam is, as a result of the Atonement, better off than he was in Paradise, but something altogether different to suggest that he is better off than he would have been if he had stayed obedient. God's mercy cannot be allowed to make nonsense of his justice.<sup>29</sup>

That is well said, but, equally, it is one thing to argue, with Burden, that Milton was worried about the Fortunate Fall, and something quite different to argue, with Danielson, that he therefore scrupulously avoided it. Milton was not in the habit simply of avoiding dangerous issues, and this one goes to the heart of his project to justify the ways of God to men.

That Milton did not so oversimplify the problem is evident, I think, not only in the lines which Lovejoy used to demonstrate his point, and which I have been further analysing, but also in the following quotation from earlier in the poem:

From this descent  
Celestial virtues rising, will appear  
More glorious and more dread than from no fall.

1–5, by John C. Ulreich, Jr., "A Paradise Within: The Fortunate Fall in *Paradise Lost*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971) 351–66, and most recently by Danielson, (note 25), pp. 202–33.

<sup>29</sup> Burden, (note 17 above), p. 37. The dangers of the doctrine are amply illustrated by the citations in Lovejoy's essay, as well as by the new material gathered by Danielson's fine research. In spite of the various objections, however, the assumption continues in Milton criticism that the paradox explains the poem: see, for example, Steadman (note 5 above), p. 30.

This is as clear a version as one could wish, much clearer than Adam's hesitant response, of the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall. The words, however, are Satan's, part of the speech in which he encourages the troops at the opening of the great consult (II 14–16). The sentence does not end with the last line of my quotation, but continues: "And trust themselves to fear no second fate." We are thus required to reassess the meaning of "virtues" in line 15: it is not the abstract term, but the title of a rank of angels, and this literal meaning is all that Satan has in mind. One of the many ironies of the poem is that this apparently straightforward version of the doctrine that informs it should be given to Satan, only for us to discover he doesn't understand it.

So the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall is present in the poem, but ever threatening to become a Satanic parody of itself. Any interpretation of the poem's structure and meaning is always likely to turn into its opposite: even the informing structural principle exemplified by the Fortunate Fall, that good emerges from evil, is heralded and balanced by Satan's defiant anticipation of it

If then his providence  
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,  
Our labour must be to pervert that end,  
And out of good still to find means of evil.<sup>30</sup>

And the principle is set at risk by his later heroic cry, "Evil be thou my good" (IV 110).

Both points of view, then, the Satanic and the divine, are required by and woven together in the overall plot of the poem. As the state of man

<sup>30</sup> I 162–65, J. R. Watson, "Divine Providence and the Structure of *Paradise Lost*," *Essays in Criticism* 14 (1964) 148–55, cites this among other examples of the symmetry which the poem now shows about its central point between Books VI and VII, and also suggests that it was Milton's perception of this symmetry that caused him to renumber the later books. Watson's approach is reminiscent of Cedric Whitman's to the *Iliad*, in *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), who discovers "geometric design" and what he calls "pedimental structure" as informing devices. William H. Marshall, however, "*Paradise Lost: Felix Culpa* and the Problem of Structure," *Modern Language Notes* 76 (1961) 15–20, finds that the didactic and dramatic elements of the poem clash, so that the conclusion "involves repudiation rather than subordination, of what we have felt during the first nine and a half books." But if Marshall had seen that there is no "explicit assertion in the final books of the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," as he puts it, but only the hesitant Adam's perplexity about it, he might have seen how the delicate balance is maintained by these symmetries, and reinforced in the second edition.

now is, it is necessary they be intermixed since it is the Miltonic reader's task to distinguish them. Adapting Milton's words in *Areopagitica*, we might say that Satan's plot is necessary in order that, however dimly, we may see God's.

Just how much Milton made them look like each other, how difficult they are, even for Milton, to sort, may be seen if we return, finally, to our first and apparently trivial illustration of the change between the two editions. Even as he shifted the major centre of his poem to Christ's activity across Books VI and VII, Milton dethroned the ascendant Christ from the numerological centre and replaced him with a line that suits better the landscape of Hell: "Of smoke and bickering flame and sparkles dire". The odd word "bickering" is glossed by Fowler as "darting, flashing," but this is the earliest use of the word in that sense: all other such uses, defined as poetic by the OED, are allusions to that line of Milton's. The OED's basic meaning for the word is frequentative, akin to, but stronger than, its modern English sense: quarrel, skirmish, battle. It was Milton who extended and altered this sense by aligning it with the word "flame" and so producing the alliterative suggestion of "flickering." In their context the words are attached to Christ's rather than Satan's warlike rage. But whether consciously or by inadvertence Milton has made the poem's central words feel Satanic even as they are observed into the larger activity of Christ which now commands the poem's middle books. The balance is different, but only slightly, and these minor shifts, to and fro between Satanic and divine foci and between first and second editions show how close and necessary to each other are the poem's two informing structures. Adam and Milton, the first two readers of *Paradise Lost*, both hesitate between the two plots in the process of reconstructing the structure of this text. To stand, but full of doubt, seems to be the necessary, even salutary, position of the Miltonic reader.