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“Till By Degrees of Merit Raised”: The Dynamism of Milton’s Edenic Development and Its Theological Context

Since 1823, when the manuscript of Milton’s *Christian Doctrine* was rediscovered, it has been customary, if not required, to read it as a commentary on *Paradise Lost*. Relevant passages from the epic appear, in turn, in the footnotes of the editions of *De doctrina christiana*. Theological treatise and poetry have thus become nearly interchangeable. In this paper I want to both honour and implicitly criticize this practice. I shall indeed devote much of my attention to various theological interpretations of the Eden story, examining Renaissance exegetical lore against the background of early Christian biblical interpretation, both canonical and apocryphal. On the other hand, however, I will try to suggest that *Paradise Lost* as a piece of literature with its own narrative concerns goes far beyond usual theological interest in depicting the dynamism of Adam and Eve’s paradisaical happiness.

I

Andrew Willet’s *Hexapla in Genesin* (1609) may serve as a starting point. Rather than an original commentary, the *Hexapla* is a compilation of various critical opinions, arranged verse by verse, organized around exegetical difficulties and brought into discussion one with another. In that, it is not altogether dissimilar to Jewish Midrash. However, unlike his Rabbinic colleagues, Willet is determined to settle the issues and come up with a clear solution to each and every crux. In fact, at the end of each chapter he goes on to draw out doctrinal points and establish the true Christian teaching from scripture. The main value of *Hexapla* to Milton criticism lies precisely in its composite nature and unoriginality. Reflecting numerous

critical opinions, it can serve to illustrate the contemporary exegetical context (both consensus and debate) of Milton's subject matter. Genesis 1-3 receives a fifty-page treatment from Willet. The questions around which the material is organized include "Whether Paradise were terrestrial" and where it "was situate" (22), the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (23), "Whereof Adam was made, and of the excellent constitution of his body" (25), "Whether Adams soule was created after his bodie," "Wherefore Adam was placed in Paradise" (26), "Of the excellent knowledge and wisdom of Adam" (30), "How many ribs, and whence taken" (31, italics deleted throughout), etc. Adam's original immortality is asserted, and the idea that eating the fruit of the tree of life would have produced such effect is dismissed. "[M]an had by his creation power given him [not]¹ to dye, if he had not sinned wherefore immortality was the gift of his creation, not effect of the eating of the tree" (22). Also vindicated is the point that Adam had to work in Eden and had some kind of hunger, though never unpleasant, otherwise he could not have enjoyed food (26f). But there is no speculation on what might have happened without the fall.

Milton's own theological work, though by no means a Genesis commentary, can also be noted here. He devotes book I, chapter x of *Christian Doctrine* to "the Special Government of Man before the Fall; including the Institutions of the Sabbath and of Marriage" (296). This is a somewhat misleading chapter heading: it is no overstatement to say that the forty-page text is Milton's sixth divorce tract, throwing in, for good measure, the legitimacy of polygamy and capital punishment for adultery. Again, there is no sustained discussion here of the unfallen world.

The Common Expositor, Arnold Williams's study of Genesis commentaries between 1527-1633, yields similar results, drawn from a more diverse body of sources. Over a hundred editions are listed among the primary texts and some two dozen of them are actually quoted throughout the volume. Of the thirteen chapters of his book, Williams devotes two to "Adam and Eve" and "Paradise and the State of Innocence." The topics discussed in these chapters roughly correspond to those Willet concerned himself with. The chapter on "Adam and Eve" is occupied mainly with matters like their creation, relative status, marriage, the excellence of the human body, the origin and nature of the soul, and Adam's knowledge. Chapter V

¹ A curious printer's error, the key word (*not*) was left out and the correction is entered only in handwriting. However, the larger context precludes all doubt of Willet's intended meaning. Cf. also 46: "Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt returne: hence it is gathered, that death was not naturall to man, but hapned because of sinne: ... it was never said to man before he had sinned, that he should returne to dust."

chiefly deals with the location of Eden (once a purely allegorical interpretation is dismissed), its geography, the two trees in its midst, their (potential) effect and thus Adam's immortality. Only the last four pages (of seventeen in this chapter) focus on the state of innocence. Even here, the crucial issues are Adam's property rights with respect to the Garden and the commission to work. Moreover, a good many, if not all, of the actual descriptive quotations are taken from *Paradise Lost*, not from the commentaries proper.

The point I am trying to make is that contemporary theological interest in the state of innocence, as opposed to its constituent parts, was limited. And what there was was properly an interest in the *state* of innocence. That is to say, static pictures of paradisaical bliss were sometimes painted, but hardly any attention was paid to the (potential) dynamism of the prelapsarian universe.

I think three major reasons can be advanced to explain such silence. First, the fall was a given and created its own concomitant theological problems. The most prominent of them was probably God's foreknowledge which, combined with his omnipotence, caused a major crux for human freedom. Renaissance theologians dedicated their exegetical ingenuity to solving 'real' problems, rather than to hypothesizing new ones: the age of Scholasticism was over. Second, and this pertains especially to commentaries on Genesis, which were inevitably influenced by Humanistic literary critical methods, the biblical text does not provide material for a detailed picture. The point may be pressed a little further, though, beyond its overt anachronism, its applicability for the Renaissance exegetes is at best debateable. However, Milton and his predecessors apparently honoured the mimetic principle of Genesis which H. H. Schmid came to identify some three or four centuries later.

When Homer wants to describe Odysseus' raft, the biblical authors Noah's ark or Solomon's Temple, they do not actually provide a description but narrate how Odysseus built his raft, Noah the ark or Solomon the Temple. Antique authors describe by narrating. The biblical story of creation is thus not simply a narration of an act that took place long ago: it is primarily a description of the existing world.²

² Schmid 29.: "Amikor Homérosz le akarja írni Odüsszeusz tutaját, a bibliai szerzők Noé bárkáját vagy a salamoni templomot, akkor voltaképp nem leírást adnak, hanem elbeszélnek, hogy építette Odüsszeusz a tutajt, Noé a bárkát vagy Salamon a templomot. Ókori szerzők úgy írnak le, hogy elbeszélnek. Így valójában a bibliai tereméstörténet sem egyszerűen egy régen lejátszódott teremési aktus elbeszélése, hanem elsősorban a meglévő világ leírása." Though written in German, the article first appeared in Hungarian. The translation in the main text is mine.

Third, and this is most evident in Arnold Williams's repeated reference to Adam and Eve's *brief* period of innocence,³ the fall was supposed to take place only hours after the end of the creation. The Genesis narrative does not (fully) warrant such an interpretation. In fact, it is silent on the chronology, which, simply by not contradicting it, leaves enough room to argue practically any temporal scheme as the adequate explanation. God's consecrating of the seventh day in Gen 2:2 may suggest that the fall had not occurred until at least the third day of Adam and Eve's life, i.e., until the day after the first Sabbath, themselves having been created on the preceding 'Friday.' The second creation story beginning with 2:4 undermines any such computation, for the events therein enumerated clearly fell within the scope of the first six days, given the consensus that the two accounts of man's creation shared a single referent.⁴ On the other hand, God's walking in the garden in the cool of the day (3:8) invites a same-day interpretation. Similarly, the penal clause of the interdiction "in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (2:17)⁵ supports this view. Of course, even if it is conceded that the judgement scene took place the same day as the first transgression, it need not follow that both happened on the sixth day of creation. If nothing else, the gap between 2:25 and 3:1 effectively prevents such reasoning from being conclusive.

In a passage, significantly longer than average, "At what time Adam fell," Willet lists a number of calculations for the length of Adam's stay in Paradise, ranging from one day (until the Sabbath) to as many years as Christ lived on earth. "[B]ut the most approved opinion," he goes on to say, "is, that *Adam* fell the same day of his creation."⁶ Willet gives ten reasons why this view should be accepted. The most ingenious, if not the most convincing, of them is the eighth.

What became of Lions and Beares, that lived of flesh, all this while of *Adams* being in Paradise? they could not fast so long, and flesh they did not eat, because there was no death before mans fall: and they did not feed on

³ Willams, 94, 108

⁴ In the first century and a half after the Reformation, it would be grossly anachronistic to mention two different traditions, the distinction between the P and the J sources, form and redaction criticism.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, primary Biblical quotations are taken from RSV. Though not all modern translations preserve *day* and have rather a simple temporal *when*-clause, the expression *in the day* appeared in all major antique versions including the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint (LXX), Old Latin, Vulgate, and Syriac translations. Willet quotes two variants of the verse, but they only differ in the verb and pronoun (LXX has plural to show that the command was given to both Adam and Eve while the Vulgate, following the Hebrew original, has singular) and they both have *day* ("in what day" and "in the day that," respectively; 27f).

⁶ Willet 45

grasse: for then their nature should not so soone have beene changed to devoure flesh.⁷

The key scriptural proof is reserved to be the last item on Willet's list. The *locus classicus* is the literal translation of a Psalm verse. "10. That place lastly maketh to this purpose: Psal.49.13. *Adam lodged not one night in honour: for so are the words if they be properly translated.*"⁸ It was taken to mean that Adam's transgression and expulsion took place on the day of his creation: he did not spend a single night in paradisaal bliss. Not insignificantly for our purposes, Willet lists, among others, Ephrem and Irenaeus as representatives of this view.

To take a short excursus, the verse which runs "Man cannot abide in his pomp, / he is like the beasts that perish" in RSV (Ps. 49:12)⁹ featured prominently in early Christian exegesis. St. Ephrem the Syrian, who, though himself never a bishop, was probably the most influential theologian of fourth-century Syriac Christianity, wrote in "Hymn XIII on Paradise" that "David wept for Adam, / at how he fell / from that royal abode / to the abode of wild animals" (v.5). The parallel between Adam and the beasts propels Ephrem to the further identification of Adam with Nebuchadnezzar, the famous Babylonian king of Daniel 4, who "was driven from among men, and ate grass like an ox" (v.33). "In that king / did God depict Adam" (Ephrem XIII.6). Basil the Great, Ephrem's contemporary, Gregory of Nyssa's brother and himself a prominent fourth-century bishop of the Eastern church, explores the same theme in "Homily IX" of his *Hexaemeron*. "Thy head, O man! is turned towards heaven; thy eyes look up. When therefore thou degradest thyself by the passions of the flesh, slave of thy belly, and thy lowest parts, thou approachest animals without reason and becomest like one of them" (IX.2). The editorial gloss is again to Ps. 49:12. Basil's point is the contrast between man's upright stature ('celestial growth') and the 'terrestrial form' of animals whose "head is bent towards the earth and looks towards their belly" (IX.2). St. Augustine also quotes the same Psalm verse in *The City of God* but to a different purpose. "God ordained that infants should begin the world as the young of beasts begin it, since their parents had fallen to the level of the beasts in the fashion of their life and of their death" (XIII.3). Augustine declares, and I shall return to this point, that Adam and Eve were never

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *Man* in the Hebrew original is *adam*, the literal meaning of *abide* is 'stay a night.' Cf. Willet 45. LXX and Syriac have a textual variant reading "a man who has riches without understanding." This may be a further key to Ephrem *below*, cf. Dan 4:34-36.

reduced to infancy by their sin or its punishment. The sentence pronounced on them was mortality, not “infantine and helpless infirmity of body and mind which we see in children” (XIII.3). In patristic exegesis, then, the second half of the Psalm verse is given greater emphasis—the animality attendant upon man’s first sin, not the brevity of paradisaic bliss, though there is no general consensus as to what exactly this beastliness means.

Yet that the brevity of prelapsarian human existence was a standard Christian notion is clearly indicated, beyond Willet’s evidence, by a number of references to it. The examples I examine in the following paragraph come from the early centuries of the Christian era and remained influential throughout the Middle Ages. In book XIV, chapter 26 of *The City of God*, St. Augustine explains that the only reason why there was no sexual intercourse in Eden is that “sin and its merited banishment from Paradise anticipated this passionless generation.” As “the honest love of husband and wife” (XIV.26.) is part of Augustine’s prelapsarian vision, the obvious implication is that sin came before the consummation of Adam and Eve’s marriage, i.e., before their first night. In Pericope 10 of *The Life of Adam and Eve*, an apocryphal piece from (late) Antiquity which became highly regarded in the Middle Ages for its explanation of Jesus’ descent to hell¹⁰ and of the origin of the wood of his cross but whose roots and date of composition are much debated,¹¹ Adam relates the story of the fall to his son Seth.

Son, when God made us, me and your mother, through whom also I die, he gave us power to eat of every tree which is in paradise, but, concerning that one only, He charged us not to eat of it, and through this one we are to die. And the hour drew near for the angels who were guarding your mother to go up and worship the Lord, and the enemy gave it to her and she ate from the tree. (Greek 7:1-2)¹²

¹⁰ In fact, the relevant material is incorporated from the Gospel of Nicodemus, but acquired wide circulation through this transmission. Stone notes, “Meyer had observed that the original portion of the Latin *Vita Adam et Evae* is replaced in the present version of this event in the Latin translation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*... . Certainly, here is a hint that something unacceptable may have stood in the underlying documents” (37). Cf. Anderson (Latin) 41:1-42:4.

¹¹ Cf. Stone 1-74 and *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (= *ABD*; see Freedman for bibliography) 1.64-66.

¹² Trans. Gary A. Anderson. MS, forthcoming. The relevant verse from the Slavonic text reads in German translation: “Als nämlich die sechste Stunde kam, sah Eva den Satan und verehrte ihn.”

Temporal reference by the hour clearly indicates the appropriate scale of time. Surely, all events recalled had taken place on the first day. *The Cave of Treasures*, another apocryphal writing originally in Syriac which Stone dubs "one of the most significant of the secondary Adam books,"¹³ could not be any more explicit. Its section on "Adam's stay in Paradise" begins like this. "At the third hour of the day Adam and Eve ascended into Paradise, and for three hours they enjoyed the good things thereof ; for three hours they were in shame and disgrace, and at the ninth hour their expulsion from Paradise took place."¹⁴

It is also worth briefly noting a couple of Jewish parallels. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, the most elaborate of the Aramaic translation-interpretations of the Hebrew Bible rendering the Pentateuch at twice its original length,¹⁵ gives Gen 2:25 as "And they were both wise, Adam and his wife, but they did not remain in their glory." To the latter clause, translator-editor John Bowker appends a footnote. "Cf. Ps. xlix. 12 (13): *Adam did not abide in glory* (the same root as the Targum here)."¹⁶ Here is again the *locus classicus* which served Willet well above. The implication for the brevity of Adam's Edenic stay requires no further comment. However, the suggestion may now be risked that this interpretation of Ps 49:12, with the emphasis on the first part of the verse, found its way into Renaissance Christian exegesis, especially given its interest in the Hebrew original, from Rabbinic and not patristic sources. *The Book of Jubilees*, in contrast to *Ps.-Jonathan*, views matters rather differently. "When the conclusion of the seven years which he [Adam] had completed there [in Eden] arrived — seven years exactly — in the second month, on the seventeenth, the serpent came and approached the woman" (3.17). The serpent was in no hurry and let Adam linger in Paradise for quite a while.¹⁷ The discrepancy between these views begins to make more sense if we realize that *Jubilees*, a retelling of the Bible (Gen 1 - Ex 20) originally in Hebrew though the extant full versions are all in Ethiopic, is an early piece of Jewish exegesis, written around 170-140 BCE.¹⁸ As such, it predates *Ps.-Jonathan* by some

¹³ Stone 91

¹⁴ Budge 66

¹⁵ Cf. *ABD* VI.322 and Bowker 26f.

¹⁶ 112 note e

¹⁷ As the title suggests, *Jubilees* is preoccupied with the 49-year periods (seven 'weeks of years') into which it organizes the entire history. This may explain the emphasis here on "seven years exactly," but that in itself does not explain why Adam was not expelled from Paradise on the first day.

¹⁸ *ABD* III.1030. Hick, apparently relying on some earlier scholarship without the evidence of the Qumran findings, dates it "somewhere between 135 and 105 B.C." (209).

three or four centuries.¹⁹ In the meantime, the understanding of the origin of sin underwent an important development.

II

In his *Evil and the God of Love*, John Hick identifies two basic types of theodicy that evolved throughout the history of the Christian church. One he calls Augustinian, the other Irenaean. My concern here is not with theodicy, but the framework is significant. I wish to outline what appear to be the two paradigms of evaluating the fall in Christian thought. Their cardinal importance for us lies in the larger patterns that serve as the framework for evaluation.

In chapter IX, Hick traces the development of Jewish and early Christian theological understanding of the origin of evil.²⁰ The evolution of the basic setting culminated in Gen 1-3 being canonized as the key text.

[I]n the mid-second century, in the course of the Church's mortal struggle against Gnosticism, the New Testament canon was formed, with Paul's letters as part of it. From about this time onwards his teaching about the fall was regarded as authoritative, and virtually all subsequent Christian

¹⁹ Cf. *ABD* VI.322: the present form of *Ps.-Jonathan* dates from the seventh or eighth century, but the material goes back before the fall of the Parthian empire (224 C.E.).

²⁰ Although the first steps of this development concern us only marginally, they surely deserve a brief outline, especially as it will bridge the gap between *Jubilees* and early Christian and Rabbinic views. In fact, Hick notes that in *Jubilees* "the Adamic story alone reveals the origin of sin" (209). This is a big step towards the Pauline climax, and it was preceded by a major shift from Gen 6 to Gen 3. The first destruction of the created order was caused by the flood. It was seen as God's response to human sin, which was thus first located in the marriages between the sons of God and the daughters of men (Gen 6:1-8), leading to abundant human wickedness. Humankind, on this view, fell gradually from Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit through Cain's murder of his brother into total corruption. Although this view was further developed in (to) the story of the Watchers in I Enoch, by the first century C.E. the Adamic myth had replaced it. "From the Book of Jubilees onwards, during the course of the first century B.C., it is possible to trace the gradual suppression of the Watcher-legend by the Adam-story" (Norman P. Williams 29). An originally morally neutral doctrine of 'evil imagination' (*yecer ha-ra*) coalesced with the Adam story, resulting in the rabbinical teaching that Adam's sin bore consequences not only for himself but for the entire human race. Death became linked with sin. This theme was taken up by St. Paul.

This note is based on Hick 207-14, which in turn summarizes the consensus established mainly by the work of Julius Müller (*The Christian Doctrine of Sin [Die Christliche Lehre von der Sünde*, Breslau: 1839-44), 5th ed., trans. William Urwick, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), F. R. Tennant (*The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1903), and Norman P. Williams, esp. 12-91. On the Jewish linking of sin and death, see also Gardner 91f.

thought concerning sin and evil has been set within the framework of the Adamic myth. But within this framework two significantly different developments have taken place, the one ... going through Augustine and the Western Church, the other going through Irenaeus and the Eastern Church.²¹

It was in this Pauline framework that the primitive simplicity of the pristine human condition came to be viewed as an exalted state of 'original righteousness.'²² In fact, it is part of Hick's thesis that even after the establishment of the basic framework, this development was not uniform throughout Christendom, nor need it have been. Without further elaborating the evolution, I simply want to outline three patristic views of Paradise, hoping that they will help us better appreciate Milton's treatment of the subject.

St. Augustine's view is best presented in the *City of God*, especially in books XI-XIV. There he declares that in Paradise, Adam

lived without any want, and had in his power to live eternally. He had food that he might not hunger, drink that he might not thirst, the tree of life that old age might not waste him. There was in his body no corruption, nor seed of corruption, which could produce in him any unpleasant sensation. He feared no inward disease, no outward accident. Soundest health blessed his body, absolute tranquillity his soul... . No sadness of any kind was there, nor any foolish joy; true gladness ceaselessly flowed from the presence of God.

(XIV.26)

It is perhaps best to note the superlatives—both grammatical and conceptual—to appreciate Augustine's concept. His "beliefs as to the Paradisal state of unfallen man represent the culminating point of that tendency to exalt it to the highest pitch of 'original righteousness' and 'perfection'."²³ And he was certainly not alone with his view. Basil the Great outdid Augustine in singing the praises of Paradise.

How could you find a way to represent the degree of pleasure there [in Paradise]? If you compared it with anything in this world, your comparison would be absurdly inadequate to convey a true picture of the original.

²¹ Hick 216

²² Hick 209

²³ Norman P. Williams, 360

Everything there is perfect and fully completed. It did not grow gradually, slowly coming to maturity and then flowering in the course of time, but came into existence in an instant at the highest peak of perfection and power, not requiring human help.

(“On Paradise” 5-6)

And he had good reason to do so. As the Book of Revelation did not enter the canon of the Eastern church until much later, Eden was “understood as representing both the primordial and the eschatological state at the end of time.”²⁴ Augustine’s motivation, however, was different. His context was original sin, a doctrine that had not been systematically considered before him. “The more glorious man’s original state and endowments are made, the deeper, by contrast, became the criminality and guilt of the Fall.”²⁵ Historically, Pelagianism prompted the doctor of grace to paint a gloomy picture of man’s fallen state, against which background God’s mercy could be depicted all the more glorious. Theologically, Augustine considered the created order perfect in its entirety and parts.²⁶

Yet there is another side to Augustine’s view. With all its splendour, the Edenic bliss was not the *non plus ultra* of God’s plan with man. It was only the beginning. Augustine draws a careful distinction between the state of angels, who were incapable of dying (*non possunt mori*), and that of Adam and Eve, who were capable of not dying (*possunt non mori*). Adam was created in an animal body, not in a spiritual body, but had he stood and not fallen, his body would have been turned into a spiritual body and he would have become like an angel, incapable of sin and death. This was the grand design of human development, and although the fall cannot ultimately prevent its fulfillment, humanity must reach its goal through a much more painful course.

For God had not made man like the angels, in such a condition that, even though they had sinned, they could none the more die. He had so made them, that if they discharged the obligations of obedience, an angelic immortality and blessedness might ensue, without the intervention of death; but if they disobeyed, death should be visited on them with just sentence.

²⁴ Brock’s “Introduction” to Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise*, 49.

²⁵ Norman P. Williams 360

²⁶ Surely, there was “gradation according to the order of nature” (XI.16), but whatever existed was perfect with regard to its own position.

(XIII.1)²⁷

Irenaeus' understanding is substantially different. To put it bluntly, while Adam represents perfection for Augustine, Irenaeus can only see a child in him. This view is most unambiguously expressed in chapters 12 ("Paradise") and 14 ("Primal Innocence") of *Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*.

12. ... They [the angels], however, were in their full development, while the lord, that is, the man, was a little one; for he was a child and had need to grow so as to come to his full perfection. ... 14. And Adam and Eve ... were naked and were not ashamed, for their thoughts were innocent and childlike, and they had no conception or imagination of the sort that is engendered in the soul by evil, through concupiscence, and by lust.

This is a far cry from Augustinian perfection where the only reason preventing sexual intercourse in the Garden is the brevity of time. Irenaeus expresses and further elaborates the same notion in *Against Heresies*. There is a curious suggestion in IX.xxxviii.1 that God could "have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant": as though man receiving God's gifts existed somehow independently of man created by God. The point probably should not be pushed too far (Irenaeus also had his theological agenda), but the fundamental pattern of intended growth ought to be recognized.

Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is He who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one nigh unto God.

(IV.xxxviii.3)

This suggests, first, that immortality was to be achieved at the end of a long development. Secondly, no mention is made of where sin entered the system, only

²⁷ Cf. also XI.12, XIII.19-20, XIII.22-24, XIV.1, XIV.10.

that at a certain stage sin should be left behind.²⁸ At the heart of the Irenaean paradigm is the view of human history as analogous to “the development of an individual human being as a growth from the innocence of childhood to adult maturity.”²⁹ Sin, then, is an inevitable, though not therefore the less disastrous, part of this process: a key difference from Augustine.³⁰

St. Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise* fall somewhere between the two views outlined above. Ephrem agrees with Irenaeus that Adam would have become immortal at the end of a long development, but sides with Augustine in that the fall rather perverted the original plan than was an inevitable part of it. The two trees were the prize that Adam could have won had he not fallen. Their significance is physical (another non-Augustinian trait), the eating of their respective fruits confers knowledge and eternal life.

Two Trees did God place
crown
in Paradise,
the Tree of Life
and that of Wisdom,
a pair of blessed fountains,
source of every good;
by means of this
glorious pair
the human person can become
the likeness of God,
knowledge;
endowed with immortal life
from
and wisdom that does not err.
[harm

[unshakable.

For God would not grant him the
without some effort;
He placed two crowns for Adam,
for which he was to strive,
two Trees to provide crowns
if he were victorious.
If only he had conquered
just for a moment,
he would have eaten the one and lived,
eaten the other and gained
his life would have been protected
and his wisdom would have been

(XII.15, 17)³¹

²⁸ Although the verb *recover* in the Iren’ean text is far more suggestive than this simplified interpretation.

²⁹ Greer 167

³⁰ Cf. Greer 167f, Hick 220f.

³¹ Ephrem makes the same point in his commentary on Genesis (II.23). Cf. p. 214 of *Hymns*.

A crucial model for Ephrem's Paradise is the structure of the Jewish Temple. At the creation Adam is placed in its precincts. The tree of knowledge of good and evil represented the sanctuary veil, and the tree of life the Holy of Holies (III.5). The interdiction of the former meant that Adam was not to go beyond it more towards the centre of Eden where the other tree stood.

Two things did Adam hear
 in that single decree:
 that they should not eat of it
 and that, by shrinking from it,
 they should perceive that it was not lawful
 to penetrate further, beyond that Tree.

(III.3)

Adam was to enter it later though it was not yet revealed to him.

Nor did He [God] show him [Adam] the Holy of Holies,
 in order that, if he kept the command,
 he might set eyes upon it
 and rejoice.

(III.9)

The potential development is less drastic than in Irenaeus, but perhaps more so than in Augustine. Perfection should have been reached in Eden, but the fruits with their real effects and the corresponding increase in Adam's freedom of movement signify more room (even literally) for advancement than Augustine's model would permit. On which all three fathers agree is the ultimate bliss in store for humanity.

The state of theological speculation on Paradise, which provided Milton's context, was, then, the following. There was a well established patristic tradition in both Eastern and Western Christianity - indeed, it was the orthodox concept - that Adam's Edenic bliss stood at the beginning of a long development which would ultimately have led to a considerably higher state of humanity. There seems to have been no agreement as to the precise details of this progress, though its terminal point (sinless eternity without further danger of lapse) was identical according to the various views, and none of the Fathers "approved" of sin. The key element is, however, the notion of progression, and that potentially without the fall.

There were, however, some significant counterforces opposed to the basic principle. First, as the locus of sin's origin was gradually focused on Adam and

Eve's eating of the forbidden tree, their stay in Paradise became proportionately shorter. Consequently, less and less time remained for genuinely Edenic activity. By Milton's time the consensus of a (very) short stay had been established, and the dominant view probably only allowed the first couple a few hours in their state of innocence. (The bears and the lions were not to grow hungry.) Moreover, it was obviously assumed that whatever happened in Eden was narrated by Genesis. Thus the biblical text was scrutinized, but the temporal gaps were rather closed (passed over in silence) than explored. Second, the Augustinian 'maximalist' conception of Paradise that became predominant in Western Christianity³² effectively reduced the room left for development. Though even this view postulated more than a mere return to Adam's prelapsarian happiness after the second coming, the key difference between the two states was seen in the impossibility of death and sin after the resurrection. As the potentiality implicit in Adam's pristine condition became a dreadful reality with the fall, not much remained to be said about the original state. It was all too clear what it had actually led to. Finally, sixteenth and seventeenth-century exegetes apparently lost interest in what might have happened without the fall. Being deprived by the text's silence of positive material (as represented by, for example, the names of the four Edenic rivers, which indeed sustained a long quest for the Garden's location³³), scholars focused attention on other issues. This was the age of humanistic literary critical methods, not of scholastic speculation. By consensus, the *via activa* had gained the upper hand over the *via contemplativa* - even in such practical matters as textual interpretation.³⁴

III

That Paradise is only lost in book IX of Milton's epic has long perplexed critics. The structure and proportions of *Paradise Lost* are so very different from those of Genesis 1-3 that the discrepancy has often invited the 'predating' of the fall. Many critics have contended that Adam and Eve fell before actually eating the

³² Norman P. Williams identifies as the first characteristic of the Augustinian view the "exalted conception of Adam's original righteousness and perfection" (400). Tracing the subsequent development of Augustine's doctrine of the fall in medieval Europe, especially Scholasticism, he asserts that "[i]n essence the Augustinian conception of man's original state [was] left unchanged" (*ibid.*).

³³ Arnold Williams 100-02

³⁴ Discussing Adam's state in Eden, Arnold Williams notes, referring to the dean's Sermon XIX, that "Donne construes the dressing and keeping of Paradise into a reason for the active against the contemplative life" (110).

forbidden fruit.³⁵ They consequently ransacked books IV-VIII for either evidence of fallenness or in search of a suitable location where the 'real' fall had occurred. This notion did not go unchallenged. In fact, the ensuing debate has probably been one of the most significant in post-war Milton criticism.³⁶ Although the agenda had been largely set by the first group, the reaction resulted in some important studies, reevaluating Milton's Paradise.³⁷ With the help of this new awareness, I wish now to examine some features of Milton's Eden against the theological background outlined above.

Milton preserves the basic Christian notion of development. The paradisaical state of Adam and Eve is not the end but the beginning of a long evolution. Raphael's answer to Adam's enquiry concerning angelic digestion includes, though somewhat tentatively, the outline of a possible future without sin:

[T]ime may come when men
With angels may participate, and find
No inconvenient diet, nor too light fare:
And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend
Ethereal, as we, or may at choice

³⁵ Cf., e.g., Ricks's parenthetical remark, "if they [Adam and Eve] could fall, were they not already in some sense fallen?" (99). Mustazza 91: "[Eve's] deed of plucking and eating the fruit is simply overt confirmation of her inner corruption... . Not only does the inner corruption come first; it is the more important of the two." Merrill 107: "To put the issue bluntly, it seems plausible to assume that Milton calculated a *linguistic* fall for Eve prior to her actual lapse." (For a more refined view on Merrill's part, see 103f.) However, the paradox was expressed most radically by Millicent Bell when she said, "from the very first we are after the Fall" (867). E. M. W. Tillyard (*Studies in Milton*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1951) and A. J. A. Waldock (*'Paradise Lost' and Its Critics*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1947) were also prominent representatives of this view, though they qualified it somewhat more than Bell.

Incidentally, St. Augustine arrived at the same conclusion - but his text was strictly biblical, not Miltonic: "Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted" (XIV.13).

³⁶ For a helpful summary of positions see Tanner 19-28. From a different though not altogether unrelated perspective, Stanley Fish also provides a valuable analysis of critical development between the war and the early 1970s in "Transmuting the Lump: *Paradise Lost*, 1942-1979." *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*. Durham, NC and London: Duke UP, 1989. 247-93.

³⁷ E.g., Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, Lewalski, Danielson, Leonard. Though none of these books are exclusively dedicated to this single issue, they all make important contributions to the debate.

Here in heavenly paradise dwell.

(V.493-500)³⁸

The Father is not only a greater authority on such matters, he also gives a more unambiguous description of the goal of the created world.

[I]n a moment [I] will create
Another world, out of one man a race
Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
Not here [in heaven], till by degrees of merit raised
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tried,
And earth be changed to heaven, and heaven to earth,
One kingdom, joy and union without end.

(VII.154-61)

This is clearly an echo of the Augustinian notion of the 'animal body,' though Milton does not use the term, turning into spiritual body. Moreover, the ultimate achievement of sinless history coincides with that of the eschaton of sinful time. Michael gives a sweeping description of the last aeon of the world ending with the return of the Son, who shall

then raise
From the conflagrant mass, purged and refined,
New heavens, new earth, ages of endless date
Founded in righteousness and peace and love
To bring forth fruits joy and eternal bliss.

(XII.547-51)³⁹

This view is apparently biblical, as is clear from the parallel in Revelation 10:6: "[The angel] sware by him that liveth for ever and ever ... that there should be time

³⁸ All quotations from *Paradise Lost* are taken from the Fowler edition, whose notes I have also made extensive use of.

³⁹ Cf. also Adam's reply: "How soon hath thy prediction, seer blest, / Measured this transient world, the race of time, / Till time stand fixed: beyond is all abyss, / Eternity, whose end no eye can reach" (XII.553-56). It is true that Adam's reactions to Michael's pageants are, by and large, not normative, but this instance is part of his last comment, which the archangel finally approves of (XII.575ff).

no longer."⁴⁰ We have little knowledge as to what comes after doomsday, and Milton unfailingly depicts that realm as static: "hell her numbers full, / Thenceforth shall be for ever shut" (III.331f) and "God shall be all in all" (III.340).⁴¹ The implication of both time's cessation and hell's closing for good is, again, Augustinian. Sin and disobedience will no longer be possible. Human immortality will no longer be threatened. The change from *posse non mori* to *non posse mori* will have been completed. Whether with or without fall, at the end of time's teleological line stands God, into whom and into whose eternity all is to collapse.

The notion of human maturation is, as we have seen, by no means unique to St. Augustine. Milton's adherence to it, outlined in the previous paragraph, is a minimal requirement, as it were, for writing the all-comprehending human history that *Paradise Lost* is, reaching from eternity to eternity. The critically more rewarding enquiry awaits the reader in examining how Milton elaborates this basic theme.

It is a well-known fact about the Miltonic universe that there is time in its eternity. The *locus classicus* is Raphael's parenthetical explanation to Adam in his introduction to the story of the war in heaven:

As yet this world was not, and Chaos wild
Reigned where these heavens now roll, where earth now rests
Upon her centre poised, when on a day
(For time, though in eternity, applied
To motion, measures all things durable
By present, past, and future) on such a day
As heaven's great year brings forth...

(V.577-83)

In critical literature this is usually supported by another quote from *De doctrina* where Milton declares that

there is no sufficient foundation for the common opinion, that motion and time, (which is the measure of motion) could not, according to the ratio of priority and subsequence, have existed before this world was made; since Aristotle, who teaches that no ideas of motion and time can be formed except in reference to this world, nevertheless pronounces the world itself

⁴⁰ Noted by Fowler 636. KJV. RSV renders it "that there should be no more delay" meaning no delay "in the accomplishment of God's will" (note in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*).

⁴¹ See also VI.732, the Son to the Father: "Thou shalt be all in all."

to be eternal.⁴²

(246f)

This granted, we can turn to the uses Milton put his time to.

Milton did not strictly adhere to the contemporary consensus of a short paradisaical period, i.e., one day, for Adam and Eve. It can be argued that allowing them to stay one night was a necessity provided that he wanted to express his opinion on the problem of sexuality and fallenness unequivocally. There had to be enough time to consummate the marriage physically - not only potentially as Augustine argues. Sure enough, the scene is described with perfect clarity (IV.736-43), and in case that proved insufficient, the narrator comments on it (746-49) and sings an epithalamium (750-73). On the historical plain, Milton sides with Augustine and counters the opinion of the Greek fathers; on the contemporary, he presents the Protestant view and dismisses the Catholic. However, this scene in book IV, though it occurs at the reader's first night in Paradise, is not the first night of the Edenic marriage. Nor is it the first instance of marital love. Some four books later, we learn from Adam's account what we may have suspected from Eve's (IV.488-91). Raphael invites Adam to tell his own story, in the course of which Adam relates his first meeting with Eve. The fullness of the encounter is unmistakable.

I followed her, she what was honour knew,
And with obsequious majesty approved
My pleaded reason. To the nuptial bower
I led her blushing like the morn: all heaven,
And happy constellations on that hour
Shed their selectest influence; the earth
Gave sign of gratulation, and each hill.

(VIII.508-14)

This happened at their first meeting - in the afternoon, if you like. Milton's concern for unfallen sexuality alone would not have been a strong enough reason to keep Adam and Eve long in Paradise. Had that been the point Milton wanted to make, the first couple could have been expelled from Eden before their first day was over.

⁴² Milton's reference is probably to *Physics* VIII/1, esp. 251^b [10-25], but there Aristotle directly asserts the uncreatedness of *time*: "But so far as time is concerned we see that all with one exception are in agreement in saying that it is uncreated... Therefore, since the moment is both a beginning and an end, there must always be time on both sides of it."

Moreover, Milton goes considerably beyond this immediate concern with his Edenic chronology. In the introduction, Fowler devotes an important section to the topic. He figures that the time from the Son's anointing to the expulsion from Paradise comprises 33 days (26).⁴³ Adam and Eve are created on day 19,⁴⁴ and thus spend two weeks in Eden. What is perhaps most curious in this arrangement is the imbalance generated by Milton's uneven provision of details. The events in books I and II account for a day in Fowler's computation (although it is only in retrospect that the reader can work out how they fit in with Adam and Eve's story); Raphael's half-day visit occupies most of books V to VIII; and the crises from the temptation to the expulsion fill another day,⁴⁵ and three and a half more books. Moreover, Raphael's dialogue with Adam (and later Michael's visions vouchsafed to him) open up into another plain of narration and cover a great expanse of time, notably the three days of the war in heaven and the week of the creation. All this information is telescoped into the afternoon of the angelic visit. The week effected by Satan's un-creative circling of the earth, on the other hand, occupies scarcely a dozen lines (IX.58-69). What takes place in Eden or heaven during that time is never specified. Reading time certainly does not closely correspond to narrated time.

By assigning fourteen prelapsarian days to Adam and Eve, Milton allots them considerably more time than most of his contemporaries saw warrant for. By unevenly covering the events of those two weeks, he destabilizes the reader's sense of chronology.⁴⁶ And he goes one step further. Somewhat resembling the famous

⁴³ The choice of this span is, of course, arbitrary to a great extent. Narrative time, i.e., the chronology of events taking place on the primary level of narration (performed by the Miltonic bard) extend from the fallen angels' recovery in hell (day 22 according to Fowler) to the expulsion (day 33). Narrated time, i.e., the sum total of all events described on any level of narration (including the accounts of the epic characters) covers the entirety of world history.

⁴⁴ The uncertainties of Fowler's scheme need not concern us here. If the textual evidence is not altogether unambiguous (e.g., there is no clear indication of the length of Satan's journey through chaos), Fowler certainly makes a compelling case by invoking number symbolism which would probably not work with other sequences (27f).

⁴⁵ I.e., twenty-four hours. Fowler does an excellent job in tracing the meaning of *day* and Adam's growing awareness of it throughout the last books. Incidentally, as I have hinted above, there was great exegetical concern with the precise meaning of Adam's death on the day of transgression. Willet also dedicated two sections to the problems of "What kind of death was threatened to Adam" and "When Adam began to die" (28). — Strictly speaking, only books IV-VIII are my concern here, but the temporal distribution of the non-Edenic scenes may help illustrate the larger pattern.

⁴⁶ Further complicating the reader's time are the epic similes. The simile is a technique, in Rosalie Colie's words, for Milton "to deal across the barriers of time and eternity. In his epic simile ... he often joins superhuman action to human by means of his own and his reader's sense of history" (136). My

double time of *Othello*,⁴⁷ paradisaical time is simultaneously short and long. Rationally we may conclude that a fortnight is, after all, not very long. Noticing that books IV-VIII, the bulk of Edenic scenes, covers but a day and a half, we may indeed feel that the state of innocence was tragically short. There is, on the other hand, textual evidence in plenty to create the feeling that Adam and Eve dwelt long in the Garden. It is interesting to note that the dual time scheme is sustained throughout the terrestrial scenes of *Paradise Lost*. The method of asserting, or rather creating, it is uniform. In connection with a particular situation the speaker makes the incidental remark that it is un/like the first human pair's customary behaviour. The credibility of the pattern is underlined by the fact that it is invoked both relatively regularly and by various characters. Eve often recalls her first awakening (IV.449f) and regularly dreams of Adam or their work (V.31-35). Apparently, according to Eve, they often see inhabitants of heaven (V.55f), and, according to Adam, frequently hear "celestial voices" (IV.680-88). The narrator speaks of their morning customs (V.3, 144-48), and confirms the repeated visits of "God or angel guest" (IX.1-5) whose memory Adam can recollect even after the fall (X.1080-83), and to which God himself alludes (X.104-08, 119-22). "Milton's strength of conception here is to show Adam and Eve at home in Paradise, not transients."⁴⁸

IV

Beyond creating the impression that paradisaical time was not only a fleeting moment, Milton puts the time allocated to the prelapsarian era to good use. He

point lies precisely here: in the reader's sense of history continually aroused by the similes. The effect is practiced on Adam by Raphael on a small scale (VI.253-56, VII.295-7, etc.), and on the reader by the narrator at large (e.g., I.286-95). The effect is again a shifting sensibility. The reader's sense of time is confused by the various temporal plains invoked by the similes.

⁴⁷ For parallels in the representation of time by Shakespeare and Milton, see, for example, Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (1965. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 37, and Gardner 39.

⁴⁸ Stapleton 740. Cf. Gardner 38f: "This time [from the day of the anointing till the fall in *Paradise Lost*] is brief and firmly stated. Yet though the time-table can be worked out from the poem, the effect on our imagination is very different. We have the impression of a long time... Milton ... employs and apparently precise time scheme, yet makes his poem seem to include aeons and the sense of a long Paradisaical time for his sinless pair." Leonard 260: "Adam's lines [IV.677-88] also evoke a sense of timelessness ... yet Adam speaks these lines only a few days after his Creation." In a somewhat similar fashion, Tanner 20, with a reference to Paul Ricoeur, also suggests "the 'twofold rhythm' of the 'Adamic myth'" for the discussion of the fall and its motivation.

establishes a carefully defined educational paradigm that can serve as an illustration how human history would have proceeded without the fall. If the developmental pattern itself is nothing special to *Paradise Lost*, the careful delineation of its details certainly is.

Augustine never specifies how humankind's animal body would have turned into incorruptible spiritual body without the fall. Nor does he explain how Adam, Eve and their descendants would have spent their time in Paradise - apart from the fact that we would have had sex. Ephrem's vision is more particular in this respect, but Milton does not share his understanding of the two trees having any innate power to bestow. Milton again sides with Augustine in taking the prohibition as a clearly religious injunction.⁴⁹ Irenaeus discusses the actual maturation of the human race through four dispensations of God.⁵⁰ His scheme, however, pertains to the postlapsarian world; the fall is an integral (if tragic) part of mankind's education. Moreover, C. S. Lewis's point is well taken concerning Adam and Eve's maturity in Eden.⁵¹ Milton's protagonists are adults, not children like Irenaeus'. To put it more generally, *Paradise Lost* also presents a high view of original righteousness and perfection. The literary conventions of the fall as tragedy require it so. The poetic genius of Milton can, then, be seen in exactly this. Without compromising the perfection of Eden, he gives the reader a full-blooded vision as to what even greater heights that perfection could have led to.

⁴⁹ Augustine: "...that one tree ... was interdicted not because it was itself bad, but for the sake of commending a pure and simple obedience" (XIII.20). Milton, *Christian Doctrine*: "[If Adam] received any additional commands ... respecting the tree of knowledge, ... these commands formed no part of the law of nature, which is sufficient to teach whatever is agreeable to right reason, that is to say, whatever is intrinsically good. Such commands must therefore have been founded on what is called positive right, whereby God ... commands or forbids what is in itself neither good nor bad, and what therefore would not have been obligatory on any one, had there been no law to enjoin or prohibit it" (298f). Fish, *Surprised by Sin*: "The arbitrariness of God's command, that is to say, its unreasonableness, is necessary if compliance is to be regarded as an affirmation of loyalty springing from an act of the will" (242). Gardner 91-93: "The apple is, in itself, nothing. It is everything because God's command has made it so... The command that is transgressed must be an irrational one in order that it may be purely religious."

⁵⁰ *Against Heresies*, III.xi.9: "For this reason were four principal (kaqolikai) covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom." See also Greer 165-68.

⁵¹ "The whole point about Adam and Eve is that, as they would never, but for sin, have been old, so they were never young, never immature or underdeveloped" (116). Cf. St. Augustine's exegesis of Ps. 49:12 above: "To this infantine imbecility the first man did not fall by his lawless presumption and just sentence" (XIII.3).

The central theme of the Edenic books is knowledge. Justifying the ways of God to men entails that Adam and Eve's trial is fair, they not only should but also could resist temptation. The very structure of *Paradise Lost* mirrors this concern, and given Stanley Fish's seminal interpretation focusing on the reader as the poem's hero (*Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost*, the title says it all), this is no insignificant point. It is exactly by the beginning of Book IX, i.e., the temptation scene, that the Miltonic bard has worked his way in both directions to the end from the *in medias res* beginning. It is at this point that the entire previous story has been imparted to the reader. It is here that narrative time and narrated time catch up. There are no more missing pieces, knowledge has attained to fullness. The same is true for Adam and Eve: it is at the end of Book VIII that Raphael departs. In the course of piling up all necessary information, God himself takes great pains to ensure that Adam and Eve know all they ought, in order, in the notorious phrase of "The Argument" of Book V, "to render man inexcusable." He tells Raphael to

Go therefore, half this day as friend with friend
Converse with Adam, ...

...tell him withal

His danger, and from whom, what enemy
Late fallen himself from heaven, is plotting now
The fall of others from like state of bliss;
By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,
But by deceit and lies; this let him know,
Lest wilfully transgressing he pretend
Surprisal, unadmonished, unforwarned.

(V.229-45)

This has led critics to focus on the moral education of Adam and Eve, carefully delineating the steps in which they are given as precise indirect knowledge of evil as possible. The key paradigms in this development are the interpretation of Eve's devilishly inspired dream, Raphael's account of the war in heaven, Abdiel chiefly providing the model of righteousness withstanding temptation, and his explicit warning to Adam. This is certainly a theme worthy of careful critical attention. However, there is more in the central books than a simple moral education.

Adam and Eve's Edenic existence is presented in great detail, and many of the particulars are superfluous to draw out a purely moral lesson. Dennis Danielson succinctly presents the case.

Milton ... was insistent that man, not God, caused the fall; that neither man nor God needed the Fall; that therefore neither sexual love, nor culinary arts, nor intellectual conversation, nor virtue itself presupposed the Fall. ... And thus he emphatically did need, and so did present, just such a vision of how things might have been had man persisted in the "long obedience" that the seventeenth-century Calvinist considered of so little avail.⁵²

Perceptive as this summary is, I would like to push it somewhat further. I want to underline the dynamism of Milton's Paradise as opposed to both our usual static notions on the subject and the stationary implications of the above quotation. Barbara Lewalski associates the comic mode with the Edenic state, "since comedy is a mode in which difficulties can be met and happily resolved, in which growth and change are nurtured and privileged, and in which self-knowledge and social harmony are advanced by dialogue."⁵³ Upon his creation, Adam tried to enter into dialogue with the created order, with the sun, "hills and dales, ... rivers, woods, and plains" (VIII.275), and "when answer none returned" (285), he sat down "pensive." Eve, having been led to Adam by, significantly, a voice, turns away from him and is only better persuaded by his address (IV.449-91). Between these two events, God himself engages Adam in a conversation (VIII.292-451). Again, it is in a dialogue that the couple works out the correct interpretation of Eve's dream, and Raphael instructs Adam in a series of verbal exchanges. Dialogue is the prominent mode of Edenic discourse, to which Satan's soliloquies in book IV (32-113, 358-92, 505-35) provide an emphatic counterpoint, and I want to suggest that dialogue can also serve as a metaphor of the prelapsarian state. It is unified and harmonious (dialogue in Paradise is never a pair of parallel monologues) in its outward form yet dynamic in the exchanges between the interlocutors. Edenic life is constant but dynamic in its sinlessness, without the duality of good and evil.

Of the numerous available examples, I want finally take a look at the very end of Raphael's discussion with Adam. I quoted earlier Adam's autobiographical account of his first love experience with Eve. He concludes his story with an exultation in his wife's perfection. To which "the angel with contracted brow" replies

⁵² Danielson 214.

⁵³ Lewalski, 117. Fiore 35: "The gift [of knowledge] did not, however, embrace all those matters outside this realm [of the laws of reason, i.e., moral law], such as science and culture, so they [Adam and Eve] were able, indeed obliged, to inquire and progress in learning." Cf. also 26-28. Tanner 26: "As derivative creatures, humans are created perfect relative to their ontological status in creation; that is, they are perfect as human beings, which is far different from the perfection of the Supreme Being. 'Moving' rather than 'static,' human perfection allows mobility and scope for growth."

(VIII.560), warning him not to get his principles wrong. Eve is “fair no doubt, and worthy well / Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love, / Not thy subjection” (568-70). Yet if Adam did not strike the right balance in praising Eve, Raphael seems to go too far in the other direction.

In loving thou dost well, in passion not,
Wherein true love consists not; love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
In reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heavenly love thou mayst ascend,
Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause
Among the beasts no mate for thee was found.

(VIII.588-94)

This implies, on the one hand, that the true form of love is Platonic - it is the ideal that Adam should aim at and may in time realize; and, on the other, that bodily love is sub-human. No wonder then that Adam answers it “half abashed.” He demonstrates that he indeed knows his priorities, and values higher than physical beauty “those grateful acts, / Those thousand decencies . . . which declare unfeigned / Union of mind, or in [Adam and Eve] both one soul” (600-04). Furthermore, he counters the angel’s implicit equation of “procreation common to all kinds” (597) and human sexuality.⁵⁴ For this once, Adam has a better understanding of the hierarchy in the created order, “Though higher of the genial bed by far, / And with mysterious reverence I deem” (598f).

The topic then leads Adam to risk a question concerning angelic love. Does it have a bodily aspect? In fact, it is next to impossible for him *not* to ask the question. Raphael commends Adam for loving and warns him to love wisely. Yet he implies

⁵⁴ Adam’s remark upon Eve at her creation after his naming of the animals presents an exegetical crux. “This *at last* is bone of my bones,” he say (Gen 2:23, italics added), and it is not quite clear what this refers to. Eleventh-century French Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi, commonly known as Rashi, commented, “This teaches that Adam went to all the beasts and animals, but was not satisfied with any of them” (Bowker 120). The implication is not difficult to discern: Adam had sex with the animals. Note Milton’s pointed contrast in bringing the animals-before Adam “[a]pproaching two and two” (VIII.350). On a later passage in the ensuing God-Adam dialogue (389-97) comments John Leonard, “As Fowler notes, Adam’s ‘converse’ (396) means ‘associate familiarly’ (‘Fish’ and ‘Fowle’ do not ‘converse’ so well together as ‘Lion’ and ‘Lioness’). Adam chooses the right word in ‘converse’, but he has still to identify verbal conversation as the distinguishing feature of the ‘rational delights’ he is asking for. God will not bless Adam with the cheerful conversation of a meet help until Adam has given ‘converse’ its fully human meaning” (30). In Leonard’s reading, the entire naming scene has linguistic and epistemological, not sexual, significance (25-35).

something that contradicts Adam's experience of true love. Adam is trying to make sense of the world, and here he is presented with a dilemma. Experience, which in Eden is both untainted and a reliable means to knowledge, apparently comes into conflict with revelation granted by God through his messenger. Adam does the most sensible thing, asks a question. That he presents his problem to Raphael, as well as the way he does so, indicates an improved self-understanding on Adam's part. He recognizes where he stands relative to his interlocutor. Though it was the angel who, with his apparently contradictory suggestions, created Adam's dilemma, Adam acknowledges his own juniority by seeking explanation from Raphael. The answer, though kept short by the arrival of the hour appointed for the angel's departure, is unambiguous. Adam correctly speculated that his body was created good, and bodily experience is neither sinful nor to be shunned. What Adam enjoys purely (pun intended) in his body, the celestial beings enjoy in even greater perfection. His conclusion drawn from Raphael's exhortation and his own experience is confirmed. Finally, Raphael returns to the central theme of his mission, and warns Adam again to stand firm. It is worth noting that the angel does this very gently, though the comment on the parting sun breaks the smooth transition, by parenthetically noting Adam's purity and re-asserting the love motif. Obedience surfaces as a corollary to loving God (VIII.623, 633ff).

The larger pattern of the dialogue indicates how the educational paradigm works in Eden. Adam reflected on an experience that he was narrating. Eve's beauty as a topic came up naturally in the conversation. Yet praising her, Adam appeared to be so absorbed in her perfection as to forget the larger context and lose sight of the overarching hierarchy with God at its pinnacle. Raphael, attempting to relativize what was not absolute, overstated his case which led to a dilemma for Adam: experience of happiness originating in the divine will and revelation of divine hierarchy seemed to clash. Having learnt his first lesson and willingly submitting his experience (or his interpretation of it) to revelation, Adam seeks an explanation of the problem. Not only is it granted to him, but his intuition is confirmed and both his speculative and interpretive (as regards his experience) powers are approved. Finally, the original point is repeated by Raphael to an Adam who has now grown in understanding both his own identity and the created order. All this is achieved without any abruptness or force. Dialogue is an organic form of discourse, following its own dynamism. In fact, the chief aim of angelic discourse with humans is to educate them in the right *mode* of making sense of the world. Adam and Eve, summarizes Barbara Lewalski,

have much yet to learn - by speculation, revelation, and experience - about the cosmos, about God and the angels, and about the complexities of marital and social interaction. The Adam-Raphael dialogues provide models for seeking such knowledge and ordering such growth... [They] serve not so much to provide Adam and Eve with knowledge absolutely necessary to their lives, as to exercise them in the right way of meeting intellectual and moral challenges and difficulties.⁵⁵

One more feature of the Miltonic dialogue ought not to go unnoticed. Whether it is an exchange between God and Adam, or Raphael and Adam, or Adam and Eve, hierarchical disparity is always involved in the structure of discourse. This underlines the educational function of this literary mode, but it would be an oversimplification, with the exception of the first model, to assume a strictly one-way flow of information. God's method is indeed Socratic solicitation, but in the other instances the interchange is genuine though not fully balanced. An example has been seen in the above analysis, but the list can easily be extended. For instance, Adam's autobiography is entirely new to Raphael, and it is Eve who "makes the first foray into the realm of astronomical speculation"⁵⁶: "But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?" (IV.657-58) The search for knowledge and answers to the questions that present themselves is a dynamic communal act in Paradise.

Though I must leave the subject at this point of suggestiveness rather than exhaustiveness, I hope to have demonstrated that in dialogue Milton found a form perfectly suited to the task of Edenic education. More important than that, he drew a uniquely detailed and elaborate picture of prelapsarian development. Whether it was his concern for theodicy, as Danielson suggests, or the logic of contemporary poetics and theory of genres, as Lewalski argues, the Edenic vision of *Paradise Lost* is clearly unparalleled in Renaissance or patristic theological speculation. How far it is a result of the literary conventions and necessities that come part and parcel with the epic form, and how singular the Miltonic dynamism of prelapsarian life is in its *literary* context can only be determined after a careful comparison of *Paradise Lost* with other retellings of the Adamic myth in Renaissance literature. That, however, must remain the subject of another paper.

⁵⁵ Lewalski 208-10.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* 189.

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