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Fall and Redemption

Adam and Eve's Experience of Temporality after the Fall in *Paradise Lost*

The current essay is the third paper in a long drawn-out series that examines the temporality of created beings in *Paradise Lost*. The first paper (*The AnaChronisT* 1996) discussed the pristine condition of humans in an Eden characterised by dynamism rather than stasis. The second article (*The AnaChronisT* 2004) examined the temporality of Milton's angels, both loyal and fallen. The present investigation returns to Adam and Eve but looks at their life in time as we know it. I will show that the first human pair's initial reaction to the altered situation, their perception of time and despair after the fall parallel those of the fallen angels. The destinies of rebel angels and of disobedient humans diverge in that God bestows grace on the latter and reverses their fate, which betokens time's new significance for humanity as the potentiality to be redeemed. As part of the redemptive process, Adam and Eve must come to terms with death, foreknowledge and history. While the 1996 paper mostly concentrated on the paradisaic books, and the previous essay on books i–ii and v–vi, I now turn to the last third of the epic. Taken together, the three articles thus provide a sustained reading of the whole poem.

With the fall begins a new era. The fall, angelic and human, marks crucial turning points in the temporal structure of *Paradise Lost*. Satan and his cronies' literal fall comes at the very end of book vi, the structural midpoint of the whole epic by book-count. Chronologically, it introduces a series of three nine-day periods, at the end of which comes the human fall.¹ Cosmically, the next divine action is creation of the

1. Satan spends nine days in chaos (vi.871), nine in hell (i.50–52), and nine in the cosmos; cf. Albert R. Cirillo, "Noon–Midnight and the Temporal Structure of *Paradise Lost*," *ELH* 29 (1962) 372–95, pp. 366–67, and Elizabeth J. Wood, " 'Improv'd by Tract of Time': Metaphysics and Measurement in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 15 (1981) 43–58. – All parenthesised references are to this edition: John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667, 2nd ed. 1674), ed. Alastair

world. Subjectively, as I argued earlier, they fall simultaneously in and out of time.² Adam and Eve fall in book ix, which divides the whole work in octave proportion by book-count,³ and upon their sin follow the cosmological changes of x.668–87, terminating the eternal spring of paradisaical time. The tragic event takes place at high noon, a most distinguished temporal locus in Milton's scheme,⁴ and, arguably, introduces the last day, in the sense of a twenty-four-hour period, of epic action.⁵ Subjectively, with the fall begins time as we know it. It is here that Adam and Eve's experience most closely corresponds to ours. This paper will offer an analysis of that experience against the background of my previous investigations of created temporality in the

Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow etc.: Longman, 1998). Editorial material is quoted as Fowler² followed by page number and line reference. Editorial material from the first edition of 1968 will be quoted, from a 1991 reprint that excludes the rest of Milton's poetry, as Fowler¹.

2. See my "Spirits Immortal in and out of Time: The Temporality of Milton's Angels in *Paradise Lost*," *The AnaChronisT* 10 (2004) 1–30. Since I will be building on my analysis in that article, it seems justified to summarise here the relevant points rather than burden this paper with repeated references to the earlier essay. I argued there that Satan and his followers do not lose their immortality, which leads them (and some critics) to think, mistakenly, that uncreation is beyond God's power, and to assume that they are inherently eternal beings. In fact, however, continued existence becomes a means of their punishment in that they now must live in perpetual fallenness. In that sense they are locked up in time. It is no accident that in *Paradise Lost* unfallen time is measured in days, a circular, ever-renewing natural unit, while the fundamental unit of hellish time is the hour, an arbitrary, unstructured yet much more limited measure. Connected to the devils' inability to die is their inability to repent. As a result, their despair, primarily presented through the archfiend, knows no limit, and only renewed obstinacy can provide a(n apparent) way out of it. Time is thus emptied of significance for the devils because no real change can now come to them, either fall or redemption. In that sense they are beyond time. While their fall is a temporally limited, narratively almost point-like, event, Milton also depicts it through its consequences as ever unfolding in time. In their pristine state, creatures are granted foreknowledge on condition of obedience to God. Having forfeited the latter, the rebels also lose the former. Instead, they not only predict a future of their own desire, but also subject their interpretation of the past to that unfounded projection, thereby completely reversing the divinely ordained order and view of past and future. The circularity of their reasoning also images their endlessly fallen state.

3. On the importance of the 1:2 proportion to the structure of *Paradise Lost*, see Fowler², p. 29.

4. Cf. Cirillo.

5. Although the matter, like many other points in the chronology of events in *Paradise Lost*, is subject to scholarly debate, the most influential epic chronology dates the expulsion to noon on the day after the fall; cf. Fowler², p. 31 and p. 674 (ad xii.588–89).

Milonic world. I will show that the initial human response to the fall is patterned on that of the disloyal angels, but the reversal of despair betokens the crucial difference in their ultimate destinies: “man . . . shall find grace / The other none” (iii.131–32). God’s mercy is pronounced early on in the poem, yet Adam and Eve must first repent and then go through a lengthy educational process before they can appropriate it through a renewed perception of death, a reinstatement of foreknowledge, an understanding of history as comedy and a lesson in typology.

The Fall of Eve and Adam

Having eaten of the forbidden fruit, Eve’s first experience is a new attitude towards the past. I have suggested elsewhere that the fruit is nothing in and of itself,⁶ it is no more tasty or beautiful *per se* than any other, nor has it any special powers other than by virtue of the prohibition. Yet Eve’s experience of it, and the subjectivity is doubly underlined by the bard’s “seemed” and “whether true / Or fancied so,” is that of novelty in taste. Eve

Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else
regarded, such delight till then, as seemed,
In fruit she never tasted, whether true
Or fancied so, through expectation high
Of knowledge, nor was godhead from her thought.

(ix.786–90)

Her expectation and the thought of divinity are directed towards the future, and Milton puts them in instrumental relationship (“through”) with the reinterpreted past. That constitutes a structural parallel to the moves of the fallen angels: the past is manipulated in order to justify a conceptually predetermined future. Employed in paradise, this circular approach is no less fallacious than in hell. Eve stuffed herself with the fruit, and the much-appreciated phrase “knew not eating death” (ix.792) in the next line encapsulates, if negatively, the very moment of the fall of her perception of time. A remarkable participial construction, imported from classical usage, it is capable of several different readings as “she did not know death while she ate” or “she knew (read, thought) that she was not eating (instantaneous) death” or “she did not know that she was eating death.” But whichever meaning of those four words we

6. Cf. my “‘Till by Degrees of Merit Raised’: The Dynamism of Milton’s Edenic Development and Its Theological Context,” *The AnaChronisT* 2 (1996) 133–61, p. 153n.

take, eating and knowing, and even death, become simultaneous, yet mutually exclusive because of *not*. Eating and knowing, that is, sinning and knowing, cannot go together.

Eve's ensuing celebration of the tree (ix.795–833) shows her knowledge, including that of present and future, in utter confusion. Characteristically, the speech does not move from somewhere to somewhere else in time. It *revolves* around the issue of what may come. Eve outlines various possibilities, but she can hardly settle for any one of them. The reason is her erroneous understanding of the present, given in the centre of the soliloquy.

And I perhaps am secret; heaven is high,
High and remote to see from thence distinct
Each thing on earth; and other care perhaps
May have diverted from continual watch
Our great forbidding, safe with all his spies
About him. (ix.811–16)

God's *scientia visionis* has been reduced from a metaphor to mere literalism, the basic mode of satanic discourse. Eve's hope is not only vain but also highly doubtful. It is wishful thinking, to note yet another parallel between her new state and that of the fallen angels. She has violated God's command, and with her disobedience came distrust in, and false knowledge of, the almighty, taking his⁷ infinity insincerely. The result could hardly be else than uncertainty and perplexity not least about the future. Having begun her monologue with a (totally deluded) vision of how she shall tend the tree, through a similarly groundless assessment of the present, Eve arrives at the genuine question of what to do. Apparently, she can determine the future, it depends on her decision. However, her vacillation is concluded in one direction because of her ignorance of, and inability to divine, the course events will take. She must settle for the safer resolution. Instead of influencing the future, she is influenced by its unpredictability, yet in turn she does bind its course through the decision she has made in her fear of the unforeseeable. The circularity mirrors again the world of the devils but with an important difference. Eve thinks of death, and now grasps that it means that she "shall be no more" (ix.827).

7. I adhere to Milton's and the critical guild's convention of using masculine pronouns for God with the understanding that all human language about God is to some extent metaphorical. Masculine pronouns are not meant to entail statements about God's ontological genderedness.

When Adam comes and meets Eve by the tree, she opens the dialogue with a description of the agony she felt in Adam's absence.

Thee I have missed, and thought it long, deprived
 Thy presence, agony of love till now
 Not felt, nor shall be twice, for never more
 Mean I to try, what rash untried I sought,
 The pain of absence from thy sight. (ix.857–61)

In one sense it is a flattering lie (another weapon from Satan's linguistic armoury), as is her claim to have sought divinity mainly for Adam's sake (ix.877–78), but in another sense it is true and mirrors her revaluation of the past. This was certainly not the first time she had temporarily parted with Adam (cf. viii.39–63), but in her former paradisaic state she cannot have felt the *agony* of love or *pain* of absence. In the act of negation, implicitly suggesting the comparability of the immediate past with earlier occasions, she nonetheless creates a continuity of time under the aegis of fallenness. That marks a new outlook on the past. The other noteworthy characteristic of the speech is that it is aimed at persuading Adam to eat. In other words, the whole text, including its representation of the past, is subjected to a political end to be achieved in the future. That explains Eve's falsified account of history. Eve's perception of time after her fall exhibits, then, the same features as that of the fallen angels.

Adam is in a peculiar situation having heard his wife's story. He is not yet fallen but decides to fall, and a distorted vision of past and future plays a crucial role in his decision. He laments inwardly for Eve in these words.

How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
 Defaced, deflowered, and now to death devote!
 Rather how hast thou yielded to transgress
 The strict forbiddance, how to violate
 The sacred fruit forbidden! Some cursed fraud
 Of enemy hath beguiled thee. . . (ix.900–05)

The clauses beginning with *rather* show that Adam is still fully aware of the significance of the situation.⁸ He knows that the only important point is God's prohibi-

8. In a different context, John Leonard, *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 222–24, has demonstrated that these and the next lines (esp. ix.905) illustrate Adam's insight rather than the lack thereof as suggested by other critics.

tion, no matter what other issues might be involved. While unfallen, Adam's grasp of the past is perfect both factually and analytically. He even conjectures at the future, and the possibility of "another Eve" (ix.911) is certainly a shrewd guess at the faithfulness of God's providence.⁹ Where he is mistaken is the presupposition that his subjective history cannot be healed, "yet loss of thee / Would never from my heart" (ix.912–13). That in fact amounts to underestimating God, who might be able to correct the course of events for the future but who is no lord over the past. That limited view leads to Adam's decision to prefer a destiny shared with Eve to God's command.

When, in the second phase of his transition towards the fall, Adam addresses Eve audibly, he repeats the movement from a correct starting point through fallacious argument to a wrong conclusion. The opening line "Bold deed thou hast presumed, adventurous Eve" (ix.921) is surely an adequate assessment of the case rather than an approval of, or praise for, Eve's deed.¹⁰ The turning point comes, again, with his limited view of the past, "But past who can recall, or done undo?" (ix.926). The reader is obviously trapped in the logical necessity implied by Adam's question, but the reader is fallen. Adam is not yet, and he should remember what he has learned from the dialogue with Raphael or indeed his encounter with God himself. He should know that time, as human, albeit prelapsarian, understanding can comprehend it, does not apply to the almighty. By commenting that Adam was "Submitting to what *seemed* remediless" (ix.919, my italics), the bard unmistakably signals his take on the matter. God's reality is greater than "what created mind can comprehend" (iii.705), even in temporal terms. In any case, whatever the *logic* is, it does not pertain to obedience to God. Adam should bear the prohibition in mind (cf. viii.323–28 and x.12–13). Imitating satanic argumentation, however, he rather chooses to manipulate the past in order to prove the plausibility of a version of the future (Eve not dying) he desires.

Adam mimics devilish reasoning on a further count. He buttresses the wished-for scenario for the future with his interpretation of God's nature, in which the problem of uncreation plays a crucial role. Should the punishment clause of the injunction come true and they die, "God shall uncreate, / Be frustrate, do, undo, and labour loose, / Not well conceived of God" (ix.943–45). He quickly adds, though, that "his power / Creation could repeat, yet [God] would be loath / Us to

9. Contrast with the closed vision critiqued by ix.919.

10. *Pace* Fowler², p. 524 (ad ix.921). Consider other occurrences of *bold* esp. in i.82–83, 127, 470; ii.386; Argument iv, vi.803, viii.235; x.520–21, and note the echo of Eve's dream (v.65–66). Further, the first line's boldly adventurous presumption is connected to "peril great" in the next with *and* – Adam is clear about the negative import of Eve's action.

abolish” (ix.945–47) – for fear of letting the enemy scorn him. Adam is thus not fully subscribing to the satanic legion’s view of uncreation, for he does not flatly deny God’s power to destroy, yet he does think that the past, creation, puts God under some kind of constraint. That is a fatal misconstrual of his nature. As a result, Adam tragically misunderstands his own options, recall the bard’s “*seemed remediless*” (ix.919, my italics), and settles for a future he himself has projected but which he considers predetermined. Ironically, his last free act is the determination of the future, at least insofar as within his power lies, in conformity with his own projection although the causal relationship is the exact opposite of what he takes it to be. Not until the “completing of the mortal sin / Original” (ix.1003–04) was the future humanly determined.

Having tasted the forbidden fruit, Adam is fallen indeed, and with him his perception of time, which will be depicted through its effects.

Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste,
And elegant. . . .

.....

I the praise

Yield thee, so well this day thou hast purveyed.
Much pleasure we have lost, while we abstained
From this delightful fruit, nor known till now
True relish, tasting. . . .

.....

But come, so well refreshed, now let us play,
As meet is, after such delicious fare;
For never did thy beauty since the day
I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorned
With all perfections, so inflame my sense
With ardour to enjoy thee, fairer now
Than ever, bounty of this virtuous tree.

(ix.1017–33)

I think it emblematic that the first word Adam utters in his fallenness, after naming his wife, is *now*. Thematic fronting puts extra emphasis on the adverb which is then repeated four times in the course of sixteen lines. The present is contrasted with the past and the result is an unfavourable comparison for the latter. Adam reiterates Eve’s creation of a single fallen time continuum in retrospect. Memories of paradisaical time are lumped together with new experience; there is no sharp dividing line between the two phases. If they discern any momentous change at all, it is for

the better. It is not to be wondered at since there is continuity of perception from their point of view. The very change in that perception, clearly identifiable from an outsider's point of view, cannot be comprehended from within. Its alteration will be grasped over a longer period of time. Angelic and human falls, it seems, are alike to Milton in that they are simultaneously point-like events occurring in a relatively short time and on-going processes endlessly unfolding in time. There is, however, a significant difference not to be overlooked: humans are redeemed.

There is still a long way to go before Adam and Eve can come to repentance. They have just waked from a sleep of "conscious dreams" (ix.1050)¹¹ and a new feeling surprises them: shame.

Shame to Milton is something deeper and more sinister in human emotion than simply the instinctive desire to cover the genital organs. It is rather a state of mind which is the state of the fall itself: it might be described as the emotional response to the state of pride.¹²

I would put great emphasis on *human* in Frye's text. The fallen angels persevered in their pride, or to adapt Frye's axiom, they never responded to it emotionally. The hellish conference is in this sense highly unemotional. It is a show of intellectual brilliance, such as the devils still possess. There are emotions involved, of course, but they are pride and hatred: the ones that ruled the rebels during their mutiny against God in heaven. They are still the old ones, not *responses* to them. If there are any new emotions, they are bitterness and spitefulness. Satan and his followers are hardened in their old obstinacy after their fall. Whether in heaven, hell or on earth, they may, in addition, feel jealousy but never shame.

So far I have tried to demonstrate how similar the fallen human state is in its first phase to that of the angels. Shame, however, indicates the first stage where the two begin to diverge.¹³ Shame is a newcomer not only to fallen humans but also to the world of *Paradise Lost*. And with it comes a new view of the past. It is no longer superseded by the present, but the latter becomes ashamed of itself when compared

11. Cf. vi.521.

12. Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (1965; Toronto and Buffalo, N.Y.: U of Toronto P, 1975), p. 37.

13. However painful, I here take shame to be an ultimately salutary response. The question is currently debated in psychological literature. For a helpful review, see Teodóra Tomcsányi, "Bűn, büntudat, szégyen: A delegált büntudat valláslélektani és lelkipozíciós megközelítése családtörténetek kapcsán," in *Valláspszichológiai tanulmányok*, ed. Katalin Horváth-Szabó (Budapest: Akadémiai, 2003), 153–86, esp. pp. 156–67.

to the former. Shame flows from a recognition that the present is emptied of some significance the past still had. In their paradisaic state, Adam and Eve had both continual obedience and the breaking of it by an act of disobedience as the potential course of the future. As long as they persevered, that is, actualised the former, both options remained open. In the actualisation of the latter, the richness of that potentiality was forfeited. Once broken, the cycle of obedience lost its potentiality to break. By the time the Son came to judge them, Adam had realised that their new state did not offer one of the two possibilities open in the prelapsarian world, but had not yet comprehended the new potentiality of redemption. This is why he laments his selfish love as misspent on Eve.

Is this the love, is this the recompense
Of mine to thee, ingrateful Eve, expressed
Immutable when thou wert lost, not I,
Who might have lived and joyed immortal bliss,
Yet willingly chose rather death with thee. . . (ix.1163–67)

More than his love, Adam laments in these lines the immutability of the past and hence, apparently, of the present and the future.

Wailing: Between Judgement and Repentance

Following the biblical account (Genesis 3:11–13), Adam pushes the blame on Eve and Eve on the serpent when the deity descends to judge them (x.92–162). God, though not altogether without comment (x.144–56), seems to accept the defensive moves and pronounces his judgements in reversed order, first on the serpent. The significance of that bears strongly on my theme of time. The curse declared on the snake includes a promise for humankind’s future (x.175–81), which the bard is quick to interpret for the reader (x.182–90). The latter part of the judgement scene (x.175–208) is closely modelled on Genesis 3:14–19, but this fact should not be overemphasised to the exclusion of Milton’s creative genius. As witnessed by the whole epic, Milton felt quite at liberty to enlarge on particular biblical details if he thought fit. His adherence to the words of Genesis is, therefore, an act of equal importance. We can only suppose that Milton deemed the biblical text sufficient to express his poetic meaning. The aspect of Milton’s version I wish here to underline is the repetitive structure of the individual judgements pronounced. It is expressly formulated in the serpent’s case and Adam’s, and is implicit in Eve’s. “Because thou hast done this . . . thou shalt. . .” (x.175–77). The judgement is given in view of the crime committed.

The divine determination of the future is appropriated to the human act in the past. In that sense, the future follows from the past. I think that thesis is part of the Son's point in the judgement. It is the reassertion of the right view of past and future. Angels and humans had this cognisance in their prelapsarian state, but it was perverted by the fall.

The same principle explains a crux in Adam's curse.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,
Till thou return unto the ground, for thou
Out of the ground wast taken, *know thy birth*,
For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return.

(x.205–08, my emphasis)

These four lines are an almost verbatim quotation from Genesis 3:19, with the conspicuous insertion of the italicised clause. It sticks out both stylistically and syntactically. Alastair Fowler finds it “puzzling, since Adam has already been told by Raphael that he was formed of ‘dust of the ground’ (vii 525).”¹⁴ The parenthetical clause is undoubtedly intended for Adam's education, but not in the sense in which Fowler takes it. I suggest it means, “remember whence you came.” But it is more than simple remembrance, it ought to be active knowledge of his origins in the widest possible sense. Knowing his birth, Adam should also remember his creator, whom he owes obedience, as well as the creation of his wife, whom it is his duty to govern. Forgetting these obligations proved fatal for Adam.¹⁵ The right knowledge was obscured and shattered by the fall, and the Son now reminds Adam of it. His memory has failed, and now he needs reminding since to be prepared for the future he must be properly aware of the past. The lesson, however, is not easily learned, and Adam commits the same mistake again. His long private lamentation (x.720–844) revolves around the questions of “what comes next?” and “what to do?” Fallen beings are preoccupied with the future, which they innocent selves were not, and to which they have now lost access.

The central issues for Adam in his wailing are his death on that day and the future of his race. When he desires yet fears death, he is haunted by the Hamletian dilemma that “in that sleep of death what dreams may come . . . Must give us pause” (III.i.66–68). This is essentially the same question that the fallen angels faced, but Adam's formulations are more tentative, more searching and less cynical about the

14. Fowler¹, p. 517 (ad x.203–08).

15. Cf. the divine reprimand in x.144–56.

almighty than those of the devils.¹⁶ The present is miserable because of the broken relationship with God, and to die would mean no relationship – but would it? Whichever way he looks at it, he must conclude hopelessly, “both death and I / Am found eternal” (x.815–16).¹⁷ Neither of them really is, of course, but that is a piece of dramatic irony reserved for the reader at this stage. Adam will have a steep learning curve before recognising the true nature of both his own mortality and that of death. For the time being, he would be content with the former, and his chief lament is that death does not come. He feels cheated because death promised for “that day” delays, “Why am I mocked with death, and lengthened out / To deathless pain?” (x.774–75).

Although I disagree with some of the details, the best analysis I know of the meaning and importance of “day” in the second half of book x is still Fowler’s, given in the critical apparatus of his text edition.¹⁸ He identifies three phases of Adam’s gradually growing awareness of the true significance of the term. First, the day should end at sunset which is now past, and he is still alive. Second, he then fearfully concludes that God must reckon days from morning to morning. He still expects a literal fulfilment. Third, he finally understands the figurative meaning of both interdiction and judgement (that days do end at sunset, after all, and the terms are less literal but more mysterious than he first thought). But, so Fowler, Adam now overlooks the fact that the twenty-four hour interval following the fall will not expire without his expulsion from the garden of Eden: “the decrees [of divine justice] are nevertheless eventually accomplished, though in an unexpected way.”¹⁹ In the last move, Fowler is pushing details too far in my estimate. After all, a noontime expulsion may be literally “that day” in the sense of “the same twenty-four hour period,” but it is certainly not enough to secure the literal fulfilment of the interdiction. Adam still does not literally die that day. Frye’s much less elaborate analysis may get closer to the heart of the matter on this score. “In both oracles [v.603–04 and vii.544] there is a mental reservation in the word ‘day’ which angels and Adam alike are required to understand. ‘This day’ to the angels does not mean literal begetting at that moment: ‘the day’ to Adam does not mean literal death that moment.”²⁰ Notwithstanding these reservations, Fowler is absolutely right in substantiating the thesis that at the

16. Cf. x.782–816.

17. Cf. x.782–83, 787–88, 808–10.

18. See Fowler², p. 542 (ad x.49–53), p. 582 (ad x.773), p. 586 (ad x.854–59), and p. 594 (ad x.1050); cf. pp. 30–31, p. 446 (ad viii.323–33), and p. 674 (ad xii.588–89).

19. Fowler¹, p. 552 (ad x.854–59).

20. Frye, p. 34.

end of each period of “that day,” Adam has a new recognition and a firmer grasp of what is entailed in God’s judgement.²¹

Contemplating the doom awaiting his yet unborn progeny, Adam also makes important discoveries. His thoughts run ahead into the imagined future and are then turned back to his past. The exercise proves useful because, instead of interpreting the past in the light of a hoped-for future, he recognises the fairness of his present state and future doom with the help of an invented scenario that throws light on his past.

[W]hat if thy son
 Prove disobedient, and reprov'd, retort,
 Wherefore didst thou beget me? I sought it not:
 Wouldst thou admit for his contempt of thee
 That proud excuse? Yet him not thy election,
 But natural necessity begot.
 God made thee of choice his own, and of his own
 To serve him, thy reward was of his grace,
 Thy punishment then justly is at his will.
 Be it so, for I submit, his doom is fair,
 That dust I am, and shall to dust return. . . (x.760–70)

Reflection on the possible future of his progeny has enabled Adam to reassess his own condition, past, present, and future. The passage, however, appears more sober out of context than in situ. On its own, it might sound as if arriving at clear-headed acquiescence in divine judgement and Adam’s own deserved mortality, leaving the matter in God’s hands. That is not yet the case, however, and Adam, quickly switching over to his other favourite theme, rapidly gives himself up to desolation. “Oh welcome hour whenever!” (x.771), he continues what seemed meek submission to God’s verdict of mortality, and his line is certainly not an expression of the Christian’s joyous anticipation, but a desperate yet vain cry for annihilation.

By recognising his responsibility for his progeny, that in him “all / Posterity stands cursed” (x.817–18), Adam reaches the deepest point of self-accusation when he identifies himself with Satan although his conclusion about his own doom is overhasty. He not only identifies his crime with that of Satan, but also unconsciously imitates his utter despair. He finds himself “miserable / Beyond all past example and future,” the closed temporal vision should not go unnoticed, “To Satan only like both crime and doom” (x.839–41). The admission is inevitable. Adam is at his wits’ end,

21. Cf. Fowler², p. 582 (ad x.773).

and it is a dead end, “O conscience, into what abyss of fears / And horrors hast thou driven me; out of which / I find no way, from deep to deeper plunged!” (x.842–44). The echoes of Satan’s Niphates soliloquy are not lost on the reader (iv.76–78): human fallenness parallels Satan’s to the lowest point; the difference is in how it is reversed. Milton’s explanation is the doctrine of prevenient grace, and there are a few points worth noting in the particulars. Satan is alone, repentance as an option occurs to him quickly, but he soon rejects it simply because he is incapable of it. The reason of his inability is that he *dreads* shame, does not *feel* it (cf. iv.82). Adam, on the other hand, ends his speech with the exclamation cited and lies on the cold ground invoking death. He cannot get past the point on his own. He has, unlike Satan, a companion, and Eve eventually directs him to true repentance.

Eve is instrumental in leading Adam to contrition in more ways than the obvious. She puts forward the very idea of returning to their place of judgement and pray there (x.932–36). Soon afterwards, however, she helps Adam find the right answer indirectly, that is, by advising wrong courses of action. She proposes “wilful barrenness”²² or suicide (x.979–1006). Adam is already past those arguments and as he now reconsiders them, a new understanding dawns on him. He recognises, though not yet properly, the deeper meaning of the curse pronounced on the serpent. He grasps the significance of a past event which he recalls by his memory and thereby attains to foresight into the future. “[U]nless / Be meant,” “I conjecture,” and “Would be” (x.1032–36) indicate that the process does not work with prelapsarian certainty, but it does work, and it soon gains momentum. Adam dismisses the ideas advocated by Eve and freely accepts the role assigned to him by his curse. He turns to the past again and apprehending the grace exhibited by their judge, outlines what he believes to be their future of simple work (x.1044–85). His prediction is not wide of the mark, and the paradisaical method is again in operation, but since the breach of obedience it has no longer been perfectly reliable for Adam.

More important than the particulars of the civilisation he envisions is Adam’s renewed understanding of God, who “Hath unbesought provided” (x.1058), as inclined to pity, willing to sustain, and ready to instruct (x.1061–62, 1081–83). That recognition, and prevenient grace, move him and Eve to return “where he judged them” (x.1099) to “prostrate fall . . . and pardon beg” (x.1087–89). Milton finds a superb narrative solution for this poignant scene. Adam’s last speech concludes with a seven-line proposal to offer up penitential prayers (x.1086–92), followed by a four-line encouragement cast in the form of a prediction that God “will relent and turn /

22. The term is Adam’s; cf. x.1042.

From his displeasure” (x.1093–94). Adam’s last words quoted in direct speech include divine “favour, grace, and mercy” (x.1096). But the book does not end for another eight lines, which, apart from two short transitional clauses, constitute an almost verbatim reduplication of his proposal, except that the first person and present tense (hortatory) forms are replaced by third person and past tense (descriptive) forms. What was first proposed has now come to pass. The repetition generates a sense of closure, which is skilfully complicated by a sense of suspense. Milton cuts off the last four lines of Adam’s text, and thus the whole scene comes to a close on a note of human “sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek” (x.1104), leaving God’s reaction to the beginning of the next book. A final effect of the arrangement is that the conclusion in its present form harks back to Eve’s original suggestion (x.932–33). The echo is muted but not completely drowned out by the much more audible reverberation of Adam’s words. Both their pasts are tributary to the event in which their life turns towards a new future.

Redeeming Time, Redeeming Death

God’s redemptive plan for humanity is decided upon before the fall and it is announced to Adam and Eve, in the serpent’s curse, before themselves are judged for their sin.²³ If its fulfilment falls beyond the concise temporal scope of the epic’s first narrative level, it is nevertheless presented in careful detail on the second level. In temporal terms, Michael’s pageants are characterised by several paradoxes. The visions’ subject matter is human history, yet this section is perhaps farthest from a ticking clock-time in the whole epic. It is generally sensed, though rarely if ever acknowledged, that time feels somehow less real here than in other parts of the poem.²⁴ The impression is not unfounded. Unlike in previous embedded narratives, of celestial war and of creation, time is here not measured in days, the fundamental time unit in the epic. In fact, it is hardly measured at all. Except for the metaphoric noon at the opening of book xii, Michael and the bard offer practically no temporal clues throughout the whole episode. Yet at the end of the long scene, Adam explicitly claims that the angel’s “prediction . . . / *Measured* this transient world, the race of time” (xii.553–4, my italics). If the pun at the end allows the sense “humankind,” it is

23. Cf. iii.80–343 and x.163–211.

24. None of the epic chronologies produced for *Paradise Lost* includes the period covered by the pageants although other second-order episodes are usually seen as part of the same timeline as the first-order narrative.

also capable of meaning “history,” a more obviously temporal allusion.²⁵ Time is, then, measured by this most measure-less revelation.

The subject matter of the last two books is not so much human history pure and simple as salvation history, where time is by no means linear but is punctuated by divine interventions. The story on that secondary level, connecting up the events in which God has manifested himself, is far more important than on the level of uniform flow. A final general temporal feature of the revelatory visions is that from the beginning of postlapsarian time down to the end of the ages, six epochs are shown to Adam. The number is traditional,²⁶ and significant.²⁷ It corresponds to the six days in which God created the world. The arrangement represents symbolically the fact that history is salvation history. God is re-creating the world in it. And when the end of time comes, the divine act will be complete and the world will enter the eternal Sabbath.

Turning now to Adam’s experience, he is granted much more than a simple promise for the future. The pledge is first given him in the serpent’s curse, and as it is “Plainlier . . . revealed” (xii.151) in Michael’s historical pageants, Adam is vouchsafed comprehensive foreknowledge of the complete course of human history. He is to be pacified and educated by it or, as Michael brings the two purposes together, “to learn / True patience” (xi.360–61). Patience is surely one of the most time-bound virtues. In *Paradise Lost* it is by no means an exclusively human virtue. It was one of the central issues in the war in heaven, which also took place in time. William G. Madsen contends that “the principal lesson of Raphael’s narrative is the lesson of patience, the virtue with which the Christian confronts the perplexities of history. It is one of the most difficult virtues to practice, as difficult for Milton as it was for some of the good angels.”²⁸ Madsen adds a couple of pages later,

25. Cf. *race* as “mankind” (*OED sb.2* I.5.a.) and “the act of running, a run” (*OED sb.1* I.1.a.), perhaps even as “a contest of speed” (*OED IV.10.a*)

26. Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, xxii.30.

27. That is not to say that further patterns cannot be discovered in the text. Fowler’s three-fold division is perceptive (cf. Fowler², pp. 667–68, ad xii.466–67). He punctuates Adam’s education by the three drops “from the well of life” (xi.416) and Michael’s pauses at xii.2 and xii.466. The result is a tripartite history, with ages of the first Adam (up to Noah), from the flood to the incarnation, and of the second Adam (until doomsday). Cf. Fowler², p. 621 (ad xi.416), pp. 645–46 (ad xii.5) and David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1990), pp. 95 and 178n.

28. William G. Madsen, *From Shadowy Types to Truth: Studies in Milton’s Symbolism* (New Haven et al.: Yale UP, 1968), p. 111.

Patience is the exercise of saints. Patience is not a kind of spiritual setting-up exercise arbitrarily imposed on us by God. It is necessary because we are creatures living in a world we did not create and immersed in a time process that is the fulfilment of a purpose not our own. We must act, assuredly . . . but we must abide the time.²⁹

Humans' immersion in time, which Madsen has earlier declared to be "the condition of [their] salvation,"³⁰ is considered the essence of history by David Loewenstein. "Nor will history in his [Adam's] case serve, as it so often did in Milton's age, as a refuge from devouring time.³¹ Rather for Adam and his race, these trying history lessons mean a painful immersion into time and mortality."³²

How painful the immersion is is adequately illustrated by the fact that Adam bursts out in tears three times during the first six visions,³³ and by his reluctance to acknowledge his own responsibility for the misery to come. Michael's invitation is plain enough:

Adam, now ope thine eyes, and first behold
The effects which thy original crime hath wrought
In some to spring from thee, who never touched
The excepted tree, nor with the snake conspired,
Nor sinned thy sin, yet from that sin derive
Corruption to bring forth more violent deeds. (xi.423–28)

Adam and Eve's culpability is maintained throughout by the archangel, not least in reply to Adam's repeated evasions of his accountability.³⁴ After the fourth vision, he carefully traces back the origins of the sin of those who slay their brothers to that of Cain (xi.675–80). The parallel is obvious and acceptable, yet there is more than the lack of formal resemblance to Adam's exclusion of himself. Similarly, he wonders (I believe, genuinely) at God's forbearance in dwelling with the Israelites, who have

29. Madsen, p. 113.

30. Madsen, p. 101.

31. Note that in the Miltonic universe it cannot be otherwise, for time is not intrinsically "devouring." It has become so perverted by its alliance with death through sin (cf. ix.70). When it is already "devouring" (cf. x.605–06) history can obviously not serve as a refuge from it since human history is its manifestation.

32. Loewenstein, p. 95.

33. Cf. xi.494–98, 674, 754–58; and see also xi.448–49, 461–65.

34. Cf. xi.475–77, 518–19; xii.83–84; also xi.632–36.

been given many commandments. The contrast is further complicated by the fact that the lines come immediately after the first tentative formulation of the *felix culpa* paradox:³⁵

but now I see
 His day, in whom all nations shall be blest,
 Favour unmerited by me, who sought
 Forbidden knowledge by forbidden means.
 This yet I apprehend not, why to those
 Among whom God will deign to dwell on earth
 So many and so various laws are given;
 So many laws argue so many sins
 Among them; how can God with such reside? (xii.276–84)

Michael's answer is bluntly to the point. "Doubt not but that sin / Will reign among them, as of thee begot; / And therefore was law given them" (xii.285–87). Adam must learn that his sin has become an integral part of the new world order. More than that, he has to learn how to live with that knowledge. The way out is provided through an ever clearer understanding of sin's ultimate wages.

Death is one of the central themes of the visions. Threatened in the injunction against the tree, Adam and Eve knew about it in paradise but did not know it. In fact, Milton introduces the concept as early as possible, both chronologically and narratively. Adam learns about death on the first day of his life from God in the sole command he has to keep (viii.327–33), and he mentions it in the very first speech we hear from him (iv.425–27). Raphael also reminds him of the threat in case he disobeyed (vii.544), but given the immortality of angels, his warning tale of the war in heaven cannot provide substantial information about the meaning and nature of death. Eve eats death, but still does not know it (ix.792). Adam, mortal after the fall, vainly invokes it, without actually knowing what he is so dreadfully craving for (viii.331). It remains for Michael to educate Adam about death. As the reader witnesses the teaching process, dramatic irony feeds on two sources, textual and extratextual. First, the reader naturally knows what death is. Living towards the end of the long history which is about to be revealed to Adam, she has all too clear a concept of it. Second, she is also aware from God's commission to Michael that death is the "final remedy" (xi.62) against a perpetually fallen existence. Adam must also learn

35. On this long-debated critical issue, see esp. Dennis R. Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1982), pp. 202–27.

these lessons. And he had better be a fast learner, for he starts from a rather elementary stage.

When Cain slays Abel in the first scene, Adam promptly grasps the gruesomeness of the situation but not yet its true import (xi.450–52). He needs Michael to point it out to him that he saw Abel die. And his response, “Alas, both for the deed and for the cause! / But have I now seen death? Is this the way / I must return to native dust?” (xi.461–63). There is something deeply ironic in his preoccupation with himself and the eagerness with which he tries to seize the opportunity to turn the discussion to his favourite subject. “The princely hierarch” (xi.220), however, is patient with his student and explains to him,

Death thou hast seen
 In his first shape on man; but many shapes
 Of death, and many are the ways that lead
 To his grim cave, all dismal; yet to sense
 More terrible at the entrance than within. (xi.466–70)

Three lessons are offered here as Michael not only satisfies Adam’s original enquiry, but takes him a step further. It would be a grave oversimplification to assume that death can be recognised by a single shape. It is not identified by its outward form.³⁶ More important than the particulars of death’s appearance is the fact, Adam’s second lesson, that they are “all dismal.” Yet, and this is the third point, dying is worse than death. Adam’s Hamletian fears are unfounded. This is the first time Michael alludes, ever so remotely, to death as part of God’s redemptive plan. But he is a good teacher and knows that the goal cannot be reached so directly. He therefore goes back to Adam’s original question. Since the outward appearance of death is not the point, the angel volunteers a quick lesson on the subject so that his student does not get hung up on such inessential a detail. Bodily ailments and disfigured bodies teem in the vision to give Adam a crash course on the variety of ways out of this life. Repeating the cycle of his private wailing, Adam first wishes to reject life altogether, for the non-existence of his posterity seems preferable to their misery if born.³⁷ He then submits to the justness of God’s forsaking the evil generation³⁸ and, upon being instructed about more temperate ways to exit the world, decides to seek good death, quitting life soon but

36. Cf. ii.666–67.

37. Cf. x.725–70 and xi.504–06.

38. Cf. x.819–34 and xi.526–29.

painlessly.³⁹ He is making progress, but he still finds life a “cumbrous charge” (xi.549), to which the archangel responds with the aphoristic instruction, “Nor love thy life, nor hate; but what thou liv’st / Live well, how long or short permit to heaven” (xi.553–54). From a preoccupation with death, whose place in the divine plan is subtly signalled again, Adam’s attention is redirected to life and its responsibilities. With that, the first major phase of his education in matters of death is completed.

The rest is less detailed and more implicit, and Adam’s interest turns from himself increasingly to his progeny. The fourth pageant (xi.638–73) shows Adam new faces of death and his descendants as “Death’s ministers” (xi.676), but it also introduces a new theme in Enoch “Exempt from death” (xi.709). Michael quickly points out the moral of the story, “to show thee what reward / Awaits the good, the rest what punishment” (xi.709–10). This is the first clear hint of an alternative to death’s finality. The theme of one just man amid universal corruption is repeated on a larger scale in the next revelation when the entire human race is wiped out by the flood except Noah and his immediate family (xi.712–53). When the covenant with Noah crowns book xi in the last vision (xi.840–67), it shows that God can “raise another world” (xi.877). Not only is the first era of the world thus brought to an end and replaced by a better one to which the promise is given that it will never be destroyed by another flood (xi.892–95), the great turning point from one epoch to the next also foreshadows the final renewal of creation. The covenant of unfailing “Seed-time and harvest, heat and hoary frost” (xi.899) is to stand “till fire purge all things new, / Both heaven and earth, wherein the just shall dwell” (xi.900–01). It is not to be missed that the purging of the earth by fire is presented in this context emphatically not as a threat of the last judgement but as a promise of the new heaven and new earth. Book xi thus concludes with the first glorious announcement of the new home awaiting the righteous beyond the end of this world and thus also beyond death. The covenant of the rainbow rectifies time on yet another level. The seasons are here formally adopted into the divine plan. Climatic change first came into being as a result of sin,⁴⁰ but now God renews the cycles of nature as a sign of his steadfastness. They “Shall hold their course” (xi.900), the promise runs. Climatic seasons no longer symbolise instability in their change over against the uniformity of eternal spring, but they come to represent constancy in their never-ending cycles and dependable recurrence.

39. Cf. x.771–82 and xi.547–52.

40. Cf. x.649–56, 678–79, and my “Milton’s Sun in the Zodiac,” *Notes and Queries* 250 [n.s. 52] (2005) 307–10.

In book xii, the theme of death recedes into the background only to step mightily forth in Jesus' resurrection in the penultimate scene. Since the Messiah's coming is foretold over and over again,⁴¹ the topic is latent but not absent. Now surge up all previous allusions in their full meaning. The Son "dies, / But soon revives, Death over him no power / Shall long usurp" (xii.419–21). He will pay the "ransom . . . which man from Death redeems," (xii.424) and will destroy the enemy "Defeating Sin and Death, his two main arms" (xii.431). His death will bring "life to all who shall believe / In his redemption" (xii.407–08). For them, the punishment of Adam's race undergoes radical transformation in three steps, by acquiring an adjective, evolving into a simile, and turning into a metaphor. Death's finality is first contained by the critical imposition of "temporal" limitation on it, then it becomes "like sleep," and finally is no more than "A gentle wafting to immortal life" (xii.433–35).⁴² That concludes Adam's education on the subject. He has been taught not merely to recognise death in its varied shapes but, chiefly, to understand its true significance not only as punishment for his disobedience but as a gateway to new life. All he now has to see is a glimpse of the "New heavens, new earth, ages of endless date / Founded in righteousness and peace and love, / To bring forth fruits, joy and eternal bliss" (xii.549–51), which is duly granted him at the end of the last pageant.

There is more to Adam's education than a lesson about death. He also has to come to terms with foreknowledge. After the first two distressing pageants, Adam mistakes the third, "the tents / Of wickedness" (xi.607–08), for a pleasant sight and calls Michael "True opener of mine eyes" (xi.598). Nevertheless, after the fifth vision, of the flood, again somewhat misunderstanding what he sees, he dismisses foreknowledge altogether.

Oh visions ill foreseen! Better had I
Lived ignorant of future. . .

.....

Let no man seek
Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall
Him or his children, evil he may be sure,

41. Cf. xii.125–26, 148–51, 232–35, 240–44, 289–96, 310–14, 327–30, and 358–71.

42. There are only two further occurrences of the verb stem in the epic: Satan "Wafts on the calmer wave by dubious light" (ii.1042) towards heaven, and those "Who after came from earth, sailing arrived [there], / Wafted by angels" (iii.521–22). The evidence is scant, but *wafting* seems to be a verb of approaching heaven in the vocabulary of *Paradise Lost*, and, if the reader picks up the echoes, it serves to contrast the divergent destinies of fallen angels and humans.

Which neither his foreknowing can prevent,
 And he the future evil shall no less
 In apprehension than in substance feel
 Grievous to bear. . . (xi.763–76)

Adam's education, whose success can be measured by his answers which oscillate between two extremes in book xi, arrives at its first hopeful stage at the close of that book, after the vision of Noah's survival. This time he conjectures rightly and has a shrewd guess as to the meaning of the rainbow. He is rewarded with Michael's compliment, "Dextrously thou aimst" (xi.884). As has been seen in his partial realisation of the significance of the serpent's curse, his intellect has lost some of its prelapsarian strength, but it is still formidable. And the pattern essentially remains the old one with one notable modification. Foreknowledge is still granted on condition of obedience, which is now primarily faith. In paradise before the fall, knowledge was Adam and Eve's decisive relationship to the divine order. In the fallen world, God's presence is veiled, or veiled at least are the powers of the human mind to discern that presence. The noetic effects of sin are permanent, and the place of prelapsarian knowledge is taken by postlapsarian faith, which itself is an act of response if I may so distinguish a complex existential stance that discovers its object in a gesture of trust from the direct and immediate grasp of the intellect in knowledge. What remains the same is that the faithful can infer the future from the past, relying on God's mercy experienced and promises given. Adam now ventures his interpretation of the rainbow immediately after reconsidering the antecedents, that is, the past, of its bestowal.

Teaching Adam to Read History as Comedy

In order to see the course of human history in proper light, Milton's rich concept of a potential sinless edenic development without the fall must be recalled.⁴³ Humans by long persistence in obedience were to become perfected and raised on a par with the angels, and ultimately God was to be all in all. The achievement of that unity would have been the alternative ending point of history in doomsday's stead. What commences after that point is the same in both cases. What has become different because of the fall is not the purpose but the course of history. What many critics are concerned about is, therefore, precisely the *patterns* of the alternatives, mainly that of

43. Cf. Ittzés, "Till by Degrees," esp. pp. 147–49.

actual human history. Northrop Frye contrasts the cyclical view of time with the linear model. After Adam's

fall, human beings began to experience time in the way that we still do, as a combination of a straight line and a circle. The straight line, where there is no real present and everything is annihilated in the past as we are drawn into an unknown future, is the fallen conception of time. The unfailing cycle of seedtime and harvest, established after the flood, represents the element of promise and hope in time, and imitates in its shape the circling of the spheres.⁴⁴

Much as I agree with his first statement (human experience of time as a combination of linearity and cyclicism), I think Frye is mistaken in associating fallenness with the former, and hope with the latter, element. In his fascinating book on exactly this subject, David Bebbington makes the explicit claim that "such [cyclic] views tend to be pessimistic." Then he goes on to say,

The second school of thought is especially associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition. History is seen not as a cycle, but as a straight line. The historical process begins at a particular point, creation; and it continues under providential guidance to its goal, the last things. In between there are divine interventions, most notably (in the Christian view) in the coming of Christ. The guaranteed future makes this view characteristically optimistic, although not without reservations.⁴⁵

Herschel Baker sees the assertion by early Christians of history's teleological nature, inherently linked with linearity and excluded from circularity, as the beginning of a completely new era in the writing of history: "When the Fathers of the Church declared that just as God had brought the whole creation into being, so He would bring it a close, they made a revolution in historiography."⁴⁶ It can be safely assumed, then, that the Christian view of history is linear, and despite Frye's claim hope is not generated by the cyclical element but by God's promise for the future which is thus not (completely) unknown. As we have seen, the hope associated with

44. Frye, p. 36.

45. David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), p. 18; see also the relevant chapters in their entirety, "2 Cyclical history" (21–42) and "3 Christian history" (43–67).

46. Herschel Baker, *The Race of Time: Three Lectures on Renaissance Historiography* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1967), p. 53.

the first covenant, the rainbow after the flood, is not so much a result of the *circularity* of the natural cycles as of the assurance of their *continuity* till the promised end. It is in this context of God's covenant with humanity that Adam first exhibits progress in his responses to Michael's gradual unfolding of the future. The central theme of book xii, which witnesses and brings about the completion of Adam's education, is a better understanding of the covenants.

Visions are succeeded by pure narrative, or rather, external visions by internal ones,⁴⁷ in book xii. Adam's interpositions grow less numerous, Michael's interpretations shorter and more intermingled with the very description of the visions, which simultaneously become longer. Even more important is the variation in the overall structure of the second set of visions. In book xi, the pageants follow a linear pattern. Abel's death is multiplied in the lazar-house, Cain's race dwells in the tents of wickedness and multiplies his sin by waging war against brotherly cities, finally the adulterous generation is wiped out by the flood.⁴⁸ Only the last vision, of Noah's survival, tries to balance the picture (xi.840–67). Notwithstanding that Adam mistakes the significance of some visions, the first five are all of wickedness, sin, corruption or their punishment. Abel's saintly sacrifice (xi.436–42), Enoch's bare escape (xi.664–71), and the prophecy of the impending flood (xi.626) only foreshadow things to come. Book xii, on the other hand, exhibits a rather different structure. Its most characteristic feature is the rushing forward to the coming of the Messiah, repeated time and again. It is no longer a linear pattern. Adam is given the foregone conclusion over and over again. Furthermore, the incarnation (that is, the totality of the Messiah's life) is the thematic centre of book xii, and it is antitype and type at the same time. According to C.A. Patrides,

With the Incarnation, the vision in *Paradise Lost* reaches its climax. Before the coming of Jesus, events have meaning only in so far as they herald his way "by types / And shadows" (XII,232f.). After his advent, all events are likewise related to him by reversion to his Incarnation, which is a historical verity.⁴⁹

The incarnation is foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifice of animals (xii.290–306), in Moses' and Joshua's offices (mediator, xii.240–44; leader of the people into the promised land, xii.310–14), but it is itself a type of the final victory to

47. Cf. Loewenstein, p. 122.

48. Cf. xi.429–47, 477–93, 556–92, 638–73, 712–53.

49. Constantinos A. Patrides, *"The Grand Design of God": The Literary Form of the Christian View of History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 87.

be revealed on judgement day. Thus from the narration of the historical event of the incarnation, the story repeatedly runs forward to that ultimate end.⁵⁰

I have suggested that hope is generated by God's promise to bring human history to the same close as without the fall. Now I must add that hope is maintained by the recurrent depiction of the fulfilment of that promise. The visions in book xii are more hopeful than those in book xi. There are still plenty of reasons to be dejected, from Nimrod's tyranny to Israel's sins, from the Messiah's death to the corruption of the church and much between and beyond.⁵¹ Nor are Michael's summary judgements on the general progress of history any more encouraging: "so shall the world go on, / To good malignant, to bad men benign, / Under her own weight groaning" (xii.537–39).⁵² The balance, however, is more carefully provided here than in the previous book, by Abraham's faith, God's presence with Israel, the Messiah's victory over Satan, the church's growth, the perseverance of the righteous and many more details.⁵³ This paradigm is strengthened by the permeation of history, or rather of Michael's historical narrative, by the assertion of God's fulfilment of his redemptive plan.

Adam's response to these visions does not include sadness. He loathes Nimrod; he is displeased, but he does not sorrow: "O execrable son . . . wretched man!" (xii.64–74). Adam is lauded by Michael for his contempt like he was commended for his interpretation of the rainbow after the flood: "justly thou abhorr'st / That son" (xii.79–80). More often than not, Adam's reaction is jubilation. After the announcement proper of the incarnation, his state is deftly contrasted with his earlier anguish.

He ceased, discerning Adam with such joy
 Surcharged, as had like grief been dewed in tears,
 Without the vent of words, which these he breathed.
 O prophet of glad tidings, finisher
 Of utmost hope! (xii.372–76)⁵⁴

Adam's responses ought not to be automatically considered normative. But Michael, who is reliable, corrects him in book xii far less frequently than in the preced-

50. Cf. xii.329–30, 369–71, 458–65, 539–51.

51. Cf. xii.24–37, 40–62, 101–09:115–20, 167–68, 176–90, 280–90, 316–18, 335–36, 337–45, 351–56, 356–60, 404–414; 493–94, 507–30, 531–35, 537–41.

52. Cf. xii.105–06, 336.

53. Cf. xii.14–24, 126–34, 195–216, 223–35, 244–60, 261–69, 315–16, 320–34, 346–51, 361–71, 393–404, 420–35; 485–92, 502–04, 536–37.

54. Cf. also xii.273–79, 467–78.

ing book. Lastly, Adam arrives at a balanced reaction of contentment. He is no longer overwhelmed by joy, but departs “Greatly instructed,”

Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill
Of knowledge, what this vessel can contain;
Beyond which was my folly to aspire.
Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,
And love with fear the only God, to walk
As in his presence, ever to observe
His providence, and on him sole depend. . . (xii.557–64)

Michael terms this “the sum / Of wisdom” (xii.575–76).

David Loewenstein expresses a somewhat different view when summarising Adam’s education. He warns against the overstressing of “the progressive typological revelation of Michael’s prophecy.”⁵⁵ He is certainly right to say that

[i]n a sense, then, Adam learns from Michael’s prophecy a difficult historical lesson Milton himself had learned during his many years as a controversial prose writer: postlapsarian history has always been a convoluted and uneven process – neither completely linear, nor completely regressive. Rather world history, like history of Milton’s own nation, has tended to vacillate between periods of progress and decline.⁵⁶

Yes, *in a sense*. In the sense that history is not a strictly linear (or, more accurately, monotonous) function of development from good to better. It has ups and downs, local minimums and maximums. But Loewenstein goes, I think, too far when he draws the conclusion, “If Michael’s sequence of human history conforms most nearly to any one imaginative shape or modality, it is that of tragedy.”⁵⁷

Milton, I have argued, does acknowledge a basic direction in which history is moving, from the predominant despair of book xi to the prevailing hope and joy of book xii; from and through sin and wickedness to the regeneration of the world in both books; “From shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit” (xii.303); from the results of the first Adam’s disobedience to the reconstitution of the unity of God and humans through the obedience of the latter. “[S]upernal grace contend[s] / With sinfulness of men” (xi.359–60), and, there can be no doubt about it in Michael’s nar-

55. Loewenstein, p. 121.

56. Loewenstein, p. 113.

57. Loewenstein, p. 122.

rative, it overcomes. The very theodical purpose of *Paradise Lost* shows that Milton thought it important to assert providence against the unfulfilled millenarian expectations of his age. The conviction presupposes Milton's belief in heavenly providence, which is the ultimate source of Christian optimism as regards the historical process. In a far more general context, David Bebbington also contrasts Christian confidence in the future with disappointed millenarianism. He approaches the issue from the opposite direction, but his conclusion is essentially the same.

Millenarianism has in practice fostered confidence in the future . . . among thinkers following in the wake of Joseph Mede. Within Christianity itself, however, Augustine, the classical reformers and many biblical commentators have come to the opinion that there are inadequate grounds for taking the thousand years mentioned in the book of Revelation as a period of blessing before the end of time. . . . The note of hope retains its prominent place in the Christian view, because it is based on confidence in continuing divine control and expectation of ultimate divine victory. The millenarian stimulus to hope, however, appears to have been unjustified.⁵⁸

The underlying pattern of historical change in Michael's representation is comic in the technical sense. Perhaps it is only so from God's point of view, but the angel's narrative is as much a *divine comedy* as Dante's – and it is exactly this perspective that is granted the first man in the final books of *Paradise Lost*. Adam has, then, attained the sum of wisdom when he has seen human history in its entirety, its course finished. Marshall Grossman avers “that narrative is always constituted in an act of reflection – contingent experience becomes meaningful when it is understood as an episode in a completed story.”⁵⁹ Adam has been granted (fore)knowledge of the end of the narrative, he has been allowed to see the future as present. From now on he can keep it in his memory from where he can recall it: he can recall it as past.

Regina Schwartz's thesis, summed up in the subtitle of her imaginative essay, about “The Unendings of *Paradise Lost*” constitutes a serious challenge to my conclusion. For her, this is precisely

[t]he temptation . . . for Adam to *possess* that entire story, to “know” his future, rather than to determine it. . . . The temptation is to believe that the

58. Bebbington, p. 65.

59. Marshall Grossman, “Milton and the Rhetoric of Prophecy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis R. Danielson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1989), 167–81, p. 178.

sum of wisdom can be gained from reading – or seeing and hearing – the story Michael unfolds, and that wisdom can be thus summarized.⁶⁰

Two things ought not to go unnoticed. First, if it is indeed the temptation for Adam, he does not fall for it. He decides to “obey,” “love,” “walk,” “observe,” “depend” (xii.561–64), that is, to *act*, at least to act in the sense Northrop Frye or Stanley Fish used, following Milton, that verb.⁶¹ Second, there is a crucial yet unannounced shift in the focus of Schwartz’s text, from Adam to the reader. The first *temptation* is certainly assigned to Adam, but the parenthesised *seeing and hearing* (applicable to him) shows that the primary subject of *believe* and unparenthesised *reading* (hence, the object of the second temptation), is us. *We* must not think that wisdom can be summed up in a few lines.⁶² The second point is indispensable for Schwartz’s argument since her thesis of the epic’s unendings is only intelligible from the reader’s point of view. The unending is (or rather, some unendings are) generated, according to Schwartz, by the embeddedness of narratives and the contrast and disparity between the different levels.

Why is he [Michael] *pausing* at the great period [cf. xii.466–67], instead of concluding? And why *as* at the world’s great period, when Michael is indeed narrating the world’s great period? With that *as* Milton draws sudden attention to the fiction within fiction: Michael has reached the end of the world only in *his* story. But Milton will not let that end conclude, and so

60. Regina Schwartz, “From Shadowy Types to Shadowy Types: The Unendings of *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 24 (1988) 123–39, p. 134.

61. Cf. Frye, p. 21; Stanley E. Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (1967; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1971), pp. 195–96; and the *locus classicus* from Milton himself: “They also serve who only stand and wait” (“Sonnet xix”).

62. That is Schwartz’s warning. The main thrust of her article falls beyond the limits of my present topic, but it seems to me that, whether we like it or not, Milton may well have thought that wisdom *was* possible thus to summarise. For one thing, the core of Adam’s summary is “that to obey is best” (xii.561), and obedience is obviously the central issue of *Paradise Lost*. Adam can, and must, recognise its importance because he has become disobedient. His acknowledgement is therefore a return to eden, in his last speech in the poem, after a long spiritual journey – even before he is physically expelled. For another, Michael’s long list of what to “only add” to it (xii.581–85) may not be so loose a collection as Schwartz suggests: see 2 Peter 1:5–7 for its biblical subtext, and Fowler¹, pp. 637–38 (ad xii.581–87), who describes them as “constitut[ing] a complete world or microcosm” (p. 638). Finally, Adam’s last couple of lines are a confession of his faith in the Son as his redeemer (xii.572–73). This is the first instance of such an avowal from him, but I do not wish to labour the obvious by elaborating on its doctrinal centrality to Milton.

rather brutally recalls us to *his* story, and . . . he brings us back from the end of the biblical time to its beginning.⁶³

Schwartz's point, then, depends on the opposite direction of contrasted narratives, each driving from beginning to end. Her general thesis seems to be in some respect an elaborately developed version of Loewenstein's denial of a clearly linear or cyclical pattern, but this time not in Michael's narrative but in the overall design of *Paradise Lost*. With that, she indirectly asserts the forward thrust of the story unfolded by the archangel and admits that it leads up to the conclusion of history. There is, then, a direction in which God guides history, though its progress is certainly not straightforward; there is an end to which God will bring it, though its attainment is certainly not easy. That directionality and the promise of that end generate hope, which is the source of history as divine comedy. That is the lesson Adam has to, and does, learn in the closing books of *Paradise Lost*.

Adam's education curiously resembles the satanic circularity of past and future, but they should not be confused. The future is not wishfully postulated by himself; it is vouchsafed to him by an external power that alone has true prescience. He does not reinterpret his own past in order to prove the plausibility of a wished-for future; but when he sees the future in retrospect, he can realise the significance of certain elements of his past and grasp the full significance of his present condition. The understanding thus gained enables him to freely accept the future. Adam's access to foreknowledge in the form of unparalleled revelation might seem extraordinary at first sight. But in fact it is not. Having come down from the hill of speculation, Adam can only *remember* his vision. Moreover, what he saw was only in part real vision. The larger half of it was narrative: commentary or description. Created beings have never had substantially more knowledge of the future than regenerate humans, of whom Adam is the archetype. God has always *told* them his plans,⁶⁴ they could rely on his promises. They know what is going to happen as long as they take God's words seriously. The same option is open to Adam now. The revelation accorded him is essentially the promise of redemption already disclosed in the serpent's curse now made intelligible.

63. Schwartz, p. 128.

64. See, for example, the old prophecy of creation (i.650–54, ii.345–51, 830–37, iv.937–38, x.481–85), the council in heaven (esp. iii.271–349), the anointing of the Son (v.583–615), God's declaration of creation (esp. vii.139–81), of Adam and Eve's judgement (x.31–62), of the fallen course of history (x.613–40), the heavenly synod (xi.67–125).

Adam's Lesson in Typology

Since, to borrow Herschel Baker's formulation, "history – no longer just a record of events – [has become] a statement of divine intentions as they are manifested in creation,"⁶⁵ there is another level to Adam's education by Michael, whose "aim, then, is to offer Adam an introductory course of historical hermeneutics: its subject matter is the drama of the biblical history (though its text is yet to be written), the significance of whose scenes must be carefully scrutinized and interpreted."⁶⁶ The method of scrutiny and interpretation is typological. This blanket statement should not obscure the fact that typological patterns discernible at large in *Paradise Lost* are to be carefully distinguished from those available to Adam. Valerie Carnes makes the point clear.

Thus the Garden was essentially typological, literally teeming with types which . . . anticipated and prefigured a point in future time. Adam and Eve, however, were incapable of recognizing and correctly interpreting this basically symbolic structure. . . . For symbolic apprehension requires a kind of doubleness of perspective which prelapsarian man simply did not possess.⁶⁷

The distinction is all the more important to make because from the reader's point of view Adam himself is part of the typological pattern even in the last two books. Being the type of both Moses and Jesus, he is one corner of a peculiar triangle, while the other two also form a pair, Moses being simultaneously an antitype of Adam and a type of Jesus.

So law appears imperfect, and but given
With purpose to resign them in full time
Up to a better covenant, disciplined
From shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit,
From imposition of strict laws, to free
Acceptance of large grace, from servile fear
To filial, works of law to works of faith.
And therefore shall not Moses, though of God
Highly belov'd, being but the minister

65. Baker, p. 55.

66. Loewenstein, p. 101.

67. Valerie Carnes, "Time and Language in Milton's *Paradise Lost*," *ELH* 37 (1970) 517–39, p. 535.

Of law, his people into Canaan lead;
 But Joshua whom the gentiles Jesus call,
 His name and office bearing, who shall quell
 The adversary serpent, and bring back
 Through the world's wilderness long wandered man
 Safe to eternal paradise of rest. (xii.300–14)

Writing of this passage, Jason P. Rosenblatt contends that Adam does realise, at least in part, his typological role.

In these remarkably concise lines, Adam learns that he, like Moses, is a sinner excluded from sacred ground as a result of his sin, yet granted by God's grace a consolatory vision. At this moment, Adam recognizes his identity with Moses, though of course it is precisely this recognition of shared inadequacy and of the need for a great redemptive force (whose birth is announced less than fifty lines later) that dissolves the relationship.⁶⁸

That Adam *learns* (that is, is told) is obvious enough; that he *recognises* I find more questionable. Adam is being educated in typology, but there is no indication of his progress. This is not to say that the *reader* does not comprehend the pattern either, but that is a different issue altogether.

Readers of *Paradise Lost* are well immersed in time; there has been a long stretch of history before their beginnings. God has acted throughout that history and revealed himself both in the old and in the new covenants. "The meaning of the Old Testament dispensation [was not revealed] until it had been abrogated,"⁶⁹ but in the act of its completion it *was* revealed. When the antitypes appeared, the types were also recognised in their full significance. Belated progeny of Adam can be educated in the working of typology by investigating a large body of evidence: types and antitypes disclosed alike. That is not the case with Adam. He is at the very beginning of human history; no types have yet been revealed, let alone fulfilled. Rather, in him and paradise are the first types being revealed, but he needs more. For his education both a text and a vantage point of interpretation must be provided. The text is, of course, the ultimate (biblical) one and so is the position momentarily granted him: looking back from judgement day. And it is Michael's visions that make the provision.

68. Jason P. Rosenblatt, "Adam's Pisgah Vision: *Paradise Lost*, Books XI and XII," *ELH* 39 (1972) 66–86, p. 70.

69. Madsen, p. 113.

The final vantage point can be of use only if one has learned on the way what to look for once there. So the archangel educates his pupil. Adam is to recognise types and antitypes; he is to learn typology. I believe this instructional design informs the structure of the last books. Book xi is itself the type of book xii, wherein the repetitive pattern is to drive home the point to Adam: the river-dragon Pharaoh as the type of Satan; Moses and Joshua prefiguring Jesus; the forty years in the wilderness fulfilled in human history at large; animal sacrifice as the *figura* of the crucifixion; the law foreshadowing the gospel; the corresponding covenants as well as the incarnation and the last judgement.⁷⁰

Michael in effect begins to turn his pupil into a kind of semiologist, training him in the art of reading and interpreting God's signs in fallen history and its evil ages, so that in the future Adam will understand the symbolic nature of God's presence and how to trace "the track Divine" (xi.354).⁷¹

In the historical visions, Adam is given the text he has to learn to decode. He is simultaneously taught the method of interpretation and the right attitude towards both the text (history) and the discovered meaning (redemption) in order to be fully prepared for existence in time as we know it.

Human time is thus redeemed in more ways than one. It is sanctified by God's elevating it, chiefly by the incarnation, to the level of salvation history. This is "objective" time in which not only potential fall but also potential redemption is actualised. For Adam, subjectively, human time has been cleansed through his education. He was created an adult;⁷² he had neither adolescent years nor a far-ranging genealogical tree. He had neither private nor "social" or "national" history. This gap is closed when he is given (a) history, when he is given the future as present which then recedes into the past. He is now able to perceive human time as the framework within which God's revelation and deliverance unfold. With this knowledge, however, Adam has become more than a *type* of regenerate humans; he has become a "typical man."⁷³ He has been prepared for life and history as we know it, but if Milton achieved nothing more than bring Adam to us, he has failed at least by his own standard. Readers and readings of *Paradise Lost*, however, bear witness that Adam was not alone on the way, but we have also completed a cycle of fall and regeneration

70. Cf. xii.190–92, 231–34, 240–44, 291–92, 300–06, 310–14.

71. Loewenstein, p. 108.

72. Cf. Ittzés, "Till by Degrees," p. 153n.

73. Fowler¹, p. 581 (ad xi.368–69), with a reference to D. H. Burden.

with him. The reader has also been educated in temporality: how to exist in the world as God's regenerate people. She has been taught to interpret the signs of time, to recognise the nature of foreknowledge, to grasp the meaning and place of death in God's plan, to discover his purpose in the course of historical events. In short, she has been taught true patience and confidence in God as lord of time and history. In addition to the skills the reader has acquired and perfected with Adam, two images have been imprinted on her mind to remain with her. On the one hand, the angels' glory and irrevocable fall provide a contrasting parallel against which to measure the fate of humans in order to understand God's mercy aright. On the other, paradisaical perfection is held up as an ideal to which to strive with now-renewed powers until God indeed brings history to the promised end.