Milton's God and the Sacred Imagination

by

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Abstract

The poetic effectiveness of Milton's God is a fundamental critical issue in *Paradise Lost*, and the thesis addresses this concern by first surveying the various representations of God contained in the Hebrew scriptures. To speak of the biblical God, one must first understand the tremendous diversity of his portrayals: he meets with some people in human form, and with others as a voice, a light, or an awesome presence. Milton's God shares less with the God of Genesis than he does with the God of the prophets; yet Milton's representation demonstrates that though Eden will be lost, God will continue to manifest himself to those who seek his face. The cosmology of the epic reveals both the immensity of creation and the intimacy of its Creator, since the entire world is filled with the glory of God, and yet the garden where Adam and Eve live is an archetypal sanctuary and their bower a type of Inner Temple. Milton's justification of God's ways rests upon the timelessness of God; events that appear anachronistic at first are used to establish a context that looks beyond the strict limits of human time. On the one hand, the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Apocalypse are separate events that have not yet come to pass; but on the other hand, Milton shows how these events are simultaneously present and completed in God's presence. From God's throne, we participate in a cosmic perspective where the categories of past, present, and future are compressed into one time: we are before and beyond time. Such a transcendent perspective engenders a powerful truth: before Adam and Eve have been tempted, God's grace and mercy have found them out and they have been restored. Though Eden must be lost, the paradise of God's presence will remain. Adam and Eve will fall and the legacy of their rash act will be paradoxically for all time, but not forever. God will restore his people and wipe away their tears, and, in the context of Milton's depiction of God, that time of redemption is now.
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Introduction

And the knowledgeable will be radiant like the bright expanse of sky,
And those who lead the many to righteousness will be like the stars
forever and ever. (Daniel 12:3)

Writing to his son, John Quincy Adams counsels him to read the Bible, for no other book “in the world deserves to be so unceasingly studied, and so profoundly meditated upon as the Bible.”¹ To study the Bible is to contemplate the human soul, to witness acts of selfishness alongside selfless pursuits of what is noble and good. As a boy, John Milton would have heard numerous sermons compelling him to follow hard after the writings of the Bible and the lessons drawn from it by English commentators. He attended church and catechism at All Hallows, where the respected Puritan minister Richard Stock (1559?-1626) preached twice on Sunday and catechized the parish children for an hour before school.² The Bible supplied the young Milton with many excellent examples of religious verse while providing him with a master narrative to assimilate and justify the classical sources he visited nightly. In the Bible we see both the lofty heights and the dark depths charted by the human experience. It is a book, as Heinrich Heine says, “Big and wide as the world, with its roots in the abysses of creation and towering up into the blue mysteries of the heavens.... Sunrise and sunset, promise and fulfillment, birth and death, the whole drama of mankind, everything is in this
book.... It is the Book of Books. If the Scriptures recorded only the events of humanity’s earliest hours, then it should remain for us a curious artifact, one to be displayed alongside other faded historical remains. Yet it possesses a greater power—the ability to influence character. Perhaps it was this quality that compelled Milton’s father to present him with a 1612 edition of the King James Version on his fourth birthday.\textsuperscript{4} Regardless of his father’s motives, the Bible profoundly influenced Milton, and we see in his poetry the truth of William Riley Parker’s claim that “its diction, its imagery, its rhythms, early became a part of him.”\textsuperscript{5}

It was more than three hundred years ago that John Milton published \textit{Paradise Lost}, which provides a sustained and comprehensive Christian vision of creation and of the God who set it in place. Time has proven Milton’s account of humanity’s first moments to be an imaginative triumph, providing a far richer and more detailed record than the one contained in the first three chapters of Genesis. Indeed, the story of creation that opens the book of Genesis is unique from other creation accounts for its lack of interest in the heavenly realm and for its economy of words. The scarcity of celestial detail did not prevent Milton from speculating about the nature of God, angels, chaos, demons, heaven, hell, and earth in his own creation narrative. \textit{Paradise Lost} and Genesis both express the belief that the universe is the purposeful outcome of divine intelligence and love, that it is the product of a self-sufficient, self-existing God, who is a transcendent Being outside of time and space, and like the stars, both works seek to lead the many to righteousness.

It is precisely at this point that the controversy begins, since Milton’s depiction of God is often regarded as the least successful feature of his epic. How could a talented
Christian poet like Milton be regarded as portraying so poorly that which was most important to him? Harold Bloom, for instance, believes that God is the poem’s “one major aesthetic mistake.”\(^6\) Bloom’s romantic precursors have famously stated this point in other ways. William Blake interpreted Milton’s alleged error of representation as evidence that he was “of the devil’s party without knowing it.”\(^7\) While Percy Shelley disdained Milton’s God, he found in Milton’s devil a moral being “far superior to his God.”\(^8\) I remember sitting in my undergraduate class on Milton, thrilling to my instructor’s enthusiasm for the character of Satan, and then watching a curiously disinterested calm descend upon the classroom as we discussed the achievements of book 3. W.B.C. Watkins argues that passion is always stronger in Milton than reason, and we know that the study of God consumed and inspired this Christian prophet; so, how can it be that his God should be regarded as poetically arid?

In answering this question I wish to take a different approach to Milton’s representation of God. Generally, Milton’s God is approached in terms of theological integrity and complexity, as confirming, correcting or repudiating other theological doctrines; thus, one can find numerous critics who find in his God a case for or against Arminianism, Socinianism, or Calvinism. It is customary to approach Milton’s depiction of God as the rational and thoughtful outpouring of Milton’s well-considered religious beliefs; indeed, Milton devoted his life to a contemplation of the Christian God. But it is my contention that we should consider Milton’s portrayal of God as a triumph of the human imagination. Richard Strier argues that theodicy is a quintessentially rationalist project, and, by undertaking this venture, Milton departed from the main currents of reformed thought as expressed by Luther and Calvin.\(^9\) Milton understood well the peril of
writing a theodicy; as Dennis Danielson states, “If Milton presents a God who is wicked, or untruthful, or manipulative, or feeble, or unwise, then his epic poem must suffer accordingly.” Alastair Fowler dramatizes precisely this point when he contends that if “one is left at any doubt as to God’s Justice and love, the poem has failed, not on a single count, but altogether.” Fowler is correct, for Milton’s stated objective in writing his epic was to “assert eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men” (1.25-26).

A formulation such as Danielson’s or Fowler’s is troubling because it raises the stakes to such an extreme level and because it asks us to judge the poem’s final success by our response to the main character. Tobias Gregory articulates what many of us have experienced, which is that a poem’s “failure or success is not an all-or-nothing affair, and ... it depends much more on its capacity to fascinate new readers after the world has changed than on its capacity to convince readers ... of the author’s theological views.” Gregory strikes an important key: we can like the work without agreeing with the author. And it is also true that we may dislike some of the characters in a literary work and still enjoy it immensely; in truth, audiences may even disagree with the author and force an unintended outcome. We have only to recall Charles Dickens’ quick provision of an alternate ending for Great Expectations, or the stage history of George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion to witness the power wielded by an audience. To see The Professor and Eliza Doolittle (as played by Rex Harris and Audrey Hepburn) join in matrimony is to agree with the audience against the social commentary of Shaw.

To bring a seller of flowers and a professor of phonetics together against the intentions of the author is substantially less disturbing than judging one of the greatest poems in the English language by its representation of God, because a consideration of
Milton’s God leads us to reflect on the nature of the Christian God. If Empson is right and Milton’s God is only “less wicked than the traditional Christian one,” then Milton has succeeded only in diluting the revulsion we feel for God. In formulating a response to the debate over Milton’s God, I believe that we must momentarily push aside the critical controversy and begin afresh with some basic questions. I am reminded of and encouraged by Balachandra Rajan’s remark that “originality in Milton criticism is only attained by resolute attention to the obvious.”

My thesis strives to focus this degree of attention on Milton’s depiction of God by sharpening our understanding of some obvious features. First, we need to understand the uniqueness of Milton’s God in contrast to the Hebrew Scriptures. There is an unstated belief among many readers that Milton’s God is but a versified transplant of the biblical God; yet a closer look reveals that Milton’s God is substantially different. We need to read God differently from the other characters of *Paradise Lost*, because God is beyond human time; indeed, he contains all time. In constructing a context suitable for ultimate Being, Milton introduces scriptural references from the entire spectrum of the Bible; thus, we find in his God imagery from the book of Genesis and Revelation, and many of the events which surround the Father and Son participate in the time of the New Jerusalem, even though in human time these events occur before Adam and Eve’s fall. To construct a context that is beyond the limitations of human time, Milton introduces imagery from other events in the epic and the Scriptures to show how one moment in God’s courts contains all moments. For instance, when the Father demands that “[man] with his whole posterity must die” (3.209), the Son is shown “beyond compare,” radiating the glory of the Father’s grace and mercy, which “first and last shall brightest shine” (3.134). The
verbal evidence points to an angry and just God; the visual evidence to his mercy and compassion, which has been extended to the human race before the Father has spoken.

Milton’s theodicy is more than a strictly rationalist project; it is a flight of the human imagination into the realm of the timeless. *Paradise Lost* provides an opportunity for readers to see the events of the epic and time itself from the perspective of God. Milton’s depiction of God is a sustained and coherent window into the Eternal and touches upon the limits of imaginative literature as it brings a world beyond time to our inward eyes. Theology for Milton is not divorced from the rich, vital world of the passions; rather, it is the vessel into which his passions are poured.

Depictions of God are exclusive to the Hebrew writers; yet within this authorship there exists a tremendous diversity. Chapter 1 surveys the nature of Hebraic representation and the various portraits of God while arguing for the imaginative accomplishment of the writers in their depictions of God. It is common to hear of Milton’s God and the biblical tradition, as though Milton had only to turn to Scripture to find a monolithic portrait of God that he could turn into verse. Such an over-generalization, however, condemns itself to an impoverished reading of the Scriptures in general and Genesis in particular, since it tacitly assumes a consistent and unified portrayal of God, so that one may speak of Milton’s depiction of God as it relates to Genesis, the Pentateuch, or even the Old Testament. The implicit belief is that Milton’s reading of the Bible left him with a single authoritative rendering of God, which he then carefully studied and applied to his epic.

Northrop Frye has shown how, as a sacred book, the Bible is built around a single organizing pattern whose key points are creation, fall, redemption, and Apocalypse. Yet
we are mistaken if we believe that representations of God are similarly organized. James Sims contends that Milton was acutely aware of problems concerning the copying of biblical manuscripts and the transmission of texts, and I wish to bring to light some of the obvious differences within the Hebrew Scriptures, for they do not provide a single portrait of God; rather, we find various and conflicting records of God’s appearances. Milton “believed in Scripture as the word of God [and he] shaped his poetry according to his understanding of that Scripture.”\(^{16}\) But “that Scripture” presents accounts of God that refuse to be easily reconciled. The God of the Bible is uncanny, for, on the one hand, the accounts of God are familiar and well known; they are stories that many have heard from childhood; yet they are also remarkably complex and difficult to define. God appears to Abraham as a desert nomad with two companions and he also appears to him as a voice; furthermore, he enjoys a covenant meal with the seventy elders of Israel, and yet he tells Moses that he cannot be seen for death will be the result. We are in error if we assume that God is uniformly presented; but we are similarly misguided if we believe that the Hebrew tradition provided Milton with a single legacy, perspective, or narrative. There is no single way to speak of God without reducing or neglecting conflicting accounts. Some scholars have responded to the variety of representations by attributing various accounts to different authors, replacing Moses the writer with the shadowy figure of the redactor. I choose to focus on the diversity of God’s depiction in the Hebrew Scriptures in order to demonstrate the multiplicity of portraits that Milton encountered.

To form a picture of God implies a conception that is cerebral and visual, and Chapter 1 explores the nature of Hebrew representation as it contrasts with the Greek mode. The Hebraic method is notable for the degree to which crucial details are left
unexpressed and unseen; indeed, Erich Auerbach finds in important episodes a conspicuous lack of visual cues.\textsuperscript{17} We are given only an impression of how people, places, and structures looked without a concrete sense of their actual appearance. Our investigation of God is complicated, because we cannot attribute his lack of physical detail to him alone—it is a commonplace of Hebrew writing. In order to provide a better understanding of the salient features of Hebraic representation, I turn my discussion to the account of David and Goliath, for the Hebrew mind can be witnessed through the particulars of this episode. A greater understanding of the Hebraic mode prepares us for a discussion concerning the visions of God contained in Isaiah and Ezekiel. These two accounts are vital to an understanding of Milton's God, since Milton's depiction of God has more in common with these prophetic accounts than it does with the representations of God in Genesis. Surveying the Hebrew Scriptures reveals the tremendous diversity of God's appearances and accentuates the difficulty of assimilating these portraits within a single work like \textit{Paradise Lost}.

The complexity of God's image is manifested by a general survey of the Hebrew Scriptures, but it is also witnessed by a close examination of Genesis 1-3, which contains representations of God so various that critics now generally believe them to be the work of at least three authors, referred to by the designations J, E, P. The authorship of Genesis 1-3 is complicated and so is the representation of God that it contains. The challenge of Genesis has elicited a variety of responses, from traditional critics who strive to diminish or reconcile the discrepancies between the accounts, to those who regard Genesis as the accumulated work of a variety of authors.
Chapter 2 examines the differences between the creation account of Adam and Eve in Genesis and in *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s account of humankind’s first moments reveals an altogether different vision from that contained in Genesis 1-3. Unlike the God of Genesis who walks with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, Milton’s God appears only once to Adam, who is in a dream-like state. Eve sees God not at all, and it is Raphael not God who converses with the human pair. Milton’s interpretive liberty in recasting Adam and Eve’s experience of God is informative. First, by examining the interaction between God and Adam and Eve in Genesis and in *Paradise Lost*, it becomes clear to what extent Milton consciously departs from biblical precedents. Second, it is telling to observe where Milton chooses to part with the biblical account, since by changing the degree to which Adam and Eve see God, Milton signals his own conception of how God would have appeared in the garden; in the epic, Adam and Eve do not walk with their Creator in the cool of the evening. Jason Rosenblatt argues that before the fall Adam is compared with figures from the Pentateuch who enjoyed “easy intimacy” with God. But how intimate is Adam with God? Milton imbues his account with an abiding sense of God’s majesty and mystery, so that, even in the middle of Eden, in a state of perfection, Adam can at best see only a glimpse of God.

How very different indeed is Milton’s depiction of God from the Genesis account. The fissures in narrative and composite texture of Genesis, so diligently chronicled by scholars, are less apparent in Milton’s retelling; however, *Paradise Lost* is not a remedied version of Genesis nor does it constitute a subtle negotiation between the alleged narratives; instead, Milton’s epic projects a different vision of paradise altogether. Milton’s account is original in its conception of paradise as a place from which
humankind begins their journey to a greater intimacy with God; Eden is perfect; yet its glory merely foreshadows the radiant excellencies of heaven. While Adam sees very little of God’s physical presence, his continued obedience will enable him to behold greater revelations. The Fall changes this, but not before Milton emphasizes God’s majesty and love for his creation. The promise of the prophets is the promise of future blessings, a looking forward to a time when creation and Creator shall be reunited. For Milton’s Adam, it is only once, in a state akin to a prophetic trance, that he comes to speak with God, and throughout his celestial colloquy, God remains obscured behind the veil of his brilliant holiness: a curtain that will not be rent asunder until the day that time shall be no more, “And Earth be chang’d to Heaven, and Heaven to Earth / One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end” (7.160-61).

Adam and Eve behold very little of God’s physical appearance, which is made poignant by Milton’s depiction of the many places where God will reveal himself to their children beyond the garden. Exile brings with it the greater threat of alienation from God, and it is this ominous dread that animates Adam’s lament: he fears that future generations shall be similarly separated from God. Michael Lieb interprets Adam’s speech literally, reading it as representative of the many meetings that Adam enjoyed with God.¹⁸ I believe the opposite to be true; that is, Adam’s lament expresses what Adam wishes he could have told his sons; but, more importantly, it presents a powerful vision of God’s future goodness.

Chapter 3 investigates Adam’s farewell to Eden and argues that his words should be considered even as we recall the nature of his visit with God in the earlier books, because such a recollection engenders a far more comprehensive knowledge. Adam’s
elegiac farewell communicates not only his sorrow at leaving Eden and the life he enjoyed there, but also it contains a most consoling prophecy—despite Adam and Eve’s act of rebellion, God will remain intimately involved in the lives of their children. Adam mourns the loss of Eden, equating it with the similar loss of God’s presence; however, the trees, mounts, pines, and fountains where Adam wishes he could have met with God are the very places where God will manifest himself to Adam’s children. These places will become charged with the significance of God’s presence and the promise of his final restoration. Despite the sins of Adam and his children, God will seek his people and restore them to himself—he will be their God, and they will be his people. Adam’s lament intimates the covenant that God will establish with his people at these physical locations. Not even outright and deliberate sin will separate creation from the love of God. Adam’s sorrow contains within it God’s promise, a promise that though Eden be lost, the God who created it will be found.

One need not look solely to the future to find God, however, for all of creation reveals his presence—heaven and earth of his glory are full. Chapter 4 examines the cosmos of Paradise Lost by comparing the physical regions of hell, heaven, and Eden, arguing that their depiction presents a picture of creation that is at once immense and intimate. All creation owes its existence to God, is sustained by him, and will return to him. Milton impresses on readers the scale of creation, the tremendous distance between heaven, hell, earth, and the stars; yet as we contemplate these regions, it becomes clear that the magnitude of God’s creation is overshadowed by his immediacy. Also, we find physical features to manifest spiritual truths. Hell, for instance, is the only region not to be surrounded by walls, and the lack of boundaries reflects the fallen angels’ lawlessness
and eternal wandering. Hell is a vast empty region; by contrast, the garden is closely walled in by trees. Eden’s natural defences frustrate Satan’s advance, and Milton’s depiction of the garden is notable for the way that it participates in sanctuary imagery: we should consider the garden as an archetypal tabernacle and the inner bower as a Holy of Holies. I trace the parallel between Milton’s description of Eden and Ezekiel’s vision of the temple and argue that Milton is depicting paradise as more than an especially fertile piece of Mesopotamian farmland; it is an archetypal sanctuary, a place where God dwells and should be worshipped.

Adam and Eve’s bower is more than a rustic lodge, and the sanctuary imagery implies the bower to be similar to the Holy of Holies. The bower provides Adam with a place to enjoy Eve’s “sweet reluctant amorous delay,” since it is here that they can be alone; no creature dares enter this sacred place, “Such was thir awe of Man” (4.705). The bower is a type of sanctuary where Adam and Eve enjoy continual and unrestricted access to God; they abide in God’s presence. They do not build this “sweet recess”; it has been “planted” by God for their enjoyment so they can meet with him. Milton’s depiction of God is not limited to a vision of his ineffable glory as it appears at a single point in time; rather, we discern his nature by examining the details of his creation. The earthly temple is a powerful symbol, containing the promise of a higher communion and compelling us to consider the original communion enjoyed by our first parents. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton would have us look back neither with fondness nor regret; rather he would have us look within, to the paradise that transcends any earthly temple, and leads us forward in hope and devotion to the final sanctuary.
Chapter 5 explores the nature of God’s “fragrant” words in book 3. To associate God’s words with fragrance is without biblical precedence, but Milton achieves a profound connection between the properties of odour and the magnitude of God’s grace. Milton uses aroma to establish a direct link between God’s fragrant words in book 3 and the ritual of burnt offering recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Through odour, Milton draws our attention to the particular properties and practices of this ritual, while portraying their fulfillment through the Son, who offers the prayers of Adam and Eve, “clad with incense,” to the Father. The soothing aroma of Israel’s offerings looks forward to the Son’s sacrifice on the hill of Golgotha; yet the Son is depicted in Paradise Lost as already interceding for Adam and Eve with the full authority of his post-resurrected state. Through his use of fragrance, Milton demonstrates how our categories of past, present, and future, appear as one before God; through aroma, Milton depicts a God who beholds all time and whose grace transcends it.

For God to establish a covenant and grant peace to his people requires sacrifice, and only the Son can reconcile fallen humanity with God. The smell of peace between God and his fallen creation is the scent of the Son’s sacrifice, which has already been given and accepted. By examining the burnt offering ritual we can reflect upon how it anticipates the intercession of the Son and marks the significance of God’s fragrant words, for God, too, is offering a sacrifice. Milton depicts the Son in his intercessory role; yet he conflates the moment of the Son’s intercession with his role of Saviour and final judge of the world; the Son is shown fulfilling roles that in human time he has yet to occupy. This blurring of time and contexts provides us with a perspective of the Son as
he is manifested throughout eternity, inviting us to behold eternity from God’s perspective.

*Paradise Lost* is unique not only because it is Milton’s most sustained and comprehensive vision of the cosmos, but also because it provides a vehicle for him to portray God imaginatively. Such an enterprise endowed Milton with the liberty to consider what it is like to call worlds into being, to see all places and times at once, and the timelessness of God’s grace and mercy. Chapter 6 defines God’s speeches in book 3 within the context of his timelessness. God’s grace is manifested through Milton’s depiction of the Father and Son’s transcendence, since before Satan has tempted Adam and Eve the Son has offered himself on their behalf, allowing them to be called the “Sons of God.” The Father’s speeches require a greater context, and we must consider the visual and even aromatic events which are presented simultaneously. “Mercy first and last shall brightest shine,” declares the Father, and even before he has spoken these words the Son, who is the agent of this mercy, is seen “beyond compare.” At the very centre of the epic is the Son, whose exaltation begins the time of the epic and whose six days of creation begin human time; and it is through him alone that humankind will enter the presence of God, where time shall be no more.

Before his creation has fallen, God has restored them to himself; God is far greater than any paradise they might inhabit for he inhabits them, and the paradise of God’s covenant is without end. God’s speeches *unfold* in time, but Milton depicts them as *enfolding* all time. What God says is complete and completed, and this completedness, profound in itself, enables a perspective of the grace that is at the foundation of his vision, and the context of timelessness that Milton establishes proclaims the power and
glory of God. God’s ways are indeed just and justified by Milton, who leads readers on an imaginative flight beyond the stars to a knowledge of God’s eternal grace and love so that they may be led to righteousness.
Introduction Endnotes

1 John Quincy Adams, Letters to His Son On the Bible and Its Teachings (Auburn, NY: Derby and Miller, 1849), 118-19.
5 Ibid.
6 Harold Bloom, Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to Present (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 93.
17 Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Books, 1957), 17
Chapter One

Representations of God in the Hebrew Scriptures

It is a critical commonplace that Milton's depiction of God the Father in *Paradise Lost* is heavily indebted to the Bible. However, trying to define the nature of Milton's borrowing is surprisingly difficult: surprising because as one investigates the God of Hebrew Scripture, one discovers varied, heterogeneous, and often contradictory portraits. In order for Milton to draw upon the biblical tradition he had to decide what precisely this tradition expresses and what is most essential to it. I wish to contend against the notion that Milton had only to reach for the Hebrew Scriptures in order to find a consistent and unified portrait of God. God is portrayed variously, and what distinguishes his appearances are the range of their depictions; God appears not only in unapproachable light and glory, but also as desert nomad and dinner guest—sometimes the people with whom he visits are unaware that they are entertaining a divine guest. But to interrogate the range of God's representation requires first an analysis of the nature of that representation in the Hebrew Scriptures, since the Hebraic mode is vastly different from either classical or modern.

The Scriptures provide us with a picture of who or what God is, and of humanity's relation to him. Yet to form a picture of God implies a conception that is cerebral and visual, and it is in this visual element of God's portrayal that Milton's depiction aligns itself with the prophets. Exploring the God of the Pentateuch, where he is not only the God of majesty and glory, reveals how he is often depicted as adopting a physical body, eating and talking with his people as an equal. That God appears to
Abraham as both a nomad and a voice need not be taken as evidence for different authors, nor as signifying the world of old tribal myths, since God may indeed manifest himself variously; and in the Hebrew Scriptures God is remote and personal. In particular, I will argue that Milton’s representation of God shares little with the God of the Pentateuch, who is presented in a human form. I am not concerned with the problems of biblical authorship or translation, but take as my focus the various visual representations of God. Since God the Father’s appearance is exclusive to the Hebrew writers, my study will concentrate on their depictions, investigating what I see as the two poles of his depiction: on the one hand, God is shown to appear as an ordinary person, someone with whom people eat, talk, laugh, and even argue; but God is also presented as majestic and holy, the God of Light and Glory who exists beyond the realm of human comprehension.

C.S. Lewis has established an important distinction between the Bible as a literary source and as a literary influence: “A source gives us things to write about; an influence prompts us to write in a certain way.” I am not concerned with distinguishing between these two categories in Milton. And while our reading of Paradise Lost demonstrates the tremendous amount of material from the Bible that Milton incorporates into his epic, we also witness the originality of Milton’s style. The crucial question lies not in locating the source of Milton’s material, however, but in demonstrating how an awareness of the biblical context can enlarge our understanding of Milton. The theoretical principle behind these thoughts is that of Northrop Frye, who argues that the central activity of criticism “is essentially one of establishing a context for the works of literature being studied. This means relating them to other things.” In short, I want to relate Milton to the Hebrew
Bible in order to demonstrate the uniqueness of Milton's depiction of God. For Harold Bloom, this relation is evidence for "anxiety of influence," a theory in which the later poet is interpreted as having to overcome the crippling presence of the stronger precursor. In Bloom's framework, "Influence is Influenza—an astral disease. If influence were health, who could write a poem? Health is stasis."\(^3\) I do not intend to interpret *Paradise Lost* as the legacy of Milton's *agon* with Scripture, nor do I wish to grapple with the psychological dimension of influence. Instead, I want to shed light on the difficulty of placing Milton's God within the biblical tradition, and how the very notion of a biblical tradition of representing God is misguided.

In discussing this tradition, I follow James Sims, who defines Scripture as that which "excludes the apocryphal, the noncanonical, and ... is limited to the interrelationships and literal meanings of the texts that comprise Scripture and to what can be reasonably inferred from those texts ... treating the Bible as one inspired book."\(^4\) It seems likely that when Milton read the Bible he would have accredited "That shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed" with authorship of the Pentateuch, rather than a J, E, or P writer. Regardless of what Milton believed, Scripture would have forced him to decide which episodes he would omit or marginalize and which he would incorporate into his own portrayal of God the Father.

Our word "tradition" derives from Latin *tradere*, "give over, deliver."\(^5\) From this etymology derive such modern words as "data," that which is given, and "edition," a piece of writing "given out." Robert Claiborne defines tradition as that which is "given across from one generation to another."\(^6\) A tradition is a belief or practice that has been handed down to a succeeding generation; but it need not always signify something...
positive or beneficial, for a “traitor” also “gives across” something to the enemy; hence, such secondary words as “treason” and “betray” also find their etymological origins in “tradition.”7 Thus, a tradition can supply a succeeding generation with something valuable or detrimental to its well-being; but even this sense of tradition is problematic, because it interprets tradition as transmitting a coherent and singular belief, custom, or opinion. To speak of Milton and the classical or biblical tradition is to imply that these two traditions presented Milton with two different but monolithic legacies, perspectives, or narratives. In truth, there is very little convergence of belief between Homer, Virgil, Horace and Ovid regarding the nature of the gods, and there are even significant differences between Homer’s depiction of Zeus in *The Iliad* and in *The Odyssey*. We similarly err if we hold the Hebrew God to be uniformly represented.

The various depictions of God have been interpreted as evidence of the different conceptions of God held by the J, E, and P writers. In this source criticism model it is held that,

in J, God would speak with men directly, His personality strongly evident;
in E, His messages would tend to come in dreams or by angels speaking from heaven; in P, He was majestic and remote, planning the progress of events towards the establishment of an ecclesiastical state.8

It is customary to distinguish between God’s transcendence and immanence by noting that P emphasizes God’s sublimity and exclusivity, while J concentrates on his willingness to meet with his creation. That God presents himself to Moses as a voice, a radiant light, a pillar of fire, a cloud, even showing Moses his back, need not necessitate the presence of multiple authors, however, since these depictions may signal the variety
of ways that God has chosen to present himself, forming a large pattern composed of individual episodes. As Robert Alter concludes, "the biblical text may not be the whole cloth imagined by pre-modern Judeo-Christian tradition, but the confused textual patchwork that scholarship has often found to displace such earlier views may prove upon further scrutiny to be purposeful pattern."  

The Hebraic and Homeric Modes of Representation

While there may be a divergence of sources within Scripture, a sense of unity abides. Within the larger trajectory of the narrative, readers can witness the development of themes and the rich contrast evoked by similar episodes and events. Northrop Frye expresses well this theme of diversity and unity when he argues that the Bible is the only form which unites the architectonics of Dante with the disintegration of Rabelais. From one point of view, the Bible presents an epic structure of unsurpassed range, consistency and completeness; from another, it presents a seamy side of bits and pieces which makes the Tale of a Tub, Tristram Shandy, and Sartor Resartus look as homogeneous as a cloudless sky ... we find that the sense of unified continuity is what the Bible has as a work of fiction, as a definitive myth extending over time and space, over invisible and visible orders of reality, and with a parabolic dramatic structure of which the five acts are creation, fall, exile, redemption, and restoration.
This sense of “unified continuity” is especially noticeable in the emphasis the Hebrew writers place on individual development, of God actively participating in people’s lives. People in the Bible change; they undergo trials and who they are at the end of their lives is dramatically different from who they were to begin with, if they have allowed God to shape them.

In Erich Auerbach’s moving and insightful work *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, the Homeric and Hebraic modes of representation are compared; and Auerbach argues that Homer’s main characters remain static, fixed from the very first: “Achilles and Odysseus are splendidly described in many well-ordered words, epithets cling to them, their emotions are constantly displayed in their words and deeds—but they have no development.” Even after enduring the vicissitudes of his epic journey, Odysseus “is exactly the same as he was when he left Ithaca two decades earlier” (17).

Let us compare Odysseus with David, Auerbach contends, and we find ourselves with two very different conceptions of the human. Unlike Odysseus, David begins as an unknown shepherd boy with no hopes of monarchy. He ends, however, as an “old king, surrounded by violent intrigues, whom Abishag … warmed in his bed, and he knew her not” (17-18). Between the dialectic of young shepherd and old monarch, lies a journey in which David develops, expands, and rises in importance.

The crucial difference between David and Odysseus can be attributed to the active and transforming role the Hebrews gave to God. Jeremiah is expressive of this vital difference when he records the word of the Lord saying, “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are
ye in mine hand, O house of Israel” (Jer 18:6). Jeremiah recalls the earlier imagery of Adam being formed from the Adamah, for with Adam, too, God was the potter, forming him with his hands from the red clay. The sense of God moulding and shaping the vessel of Israel is instructive, since it implies that although God is fashioning the clay into something different, he is not changing its essential nature: it is still clay. God not only calls and chooses his people, but he “continues to work upon them, bends them, kneads them, and without destroying them in essence, produces from them forms which their youth gave no grounds for anticipating” (17).

In Paradise Lost, we find our stereotypes challenged, for change is everywhere. The garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, even heaven and its occupants, are involved in a continual process. While the physical conditions of hell, heaven, and the garden are ideally suited to their inhabitants, they also are places that are modified and shaped by their inhabitants. Heaven is a place of complexity, and its citizens must strive to consider and actively pursue the ways of God. J. Martin Evans urges us to consider hell as God’s penal colony, a place of punishment and hard living conditions. But in hell the fallen angels are left to their own devices, building cities, composing poetry, discussing philosophy, and Satan is even left to escape. In Milton, challenge and change are essential for an ideal human life and necessary preparation for the life to come. For Barbara Lewalski, “Milton does not conceive of ideality as static perfection but always associates it with challenge, choice, and growth.”

Auerbach’s comparison between the Homeric and Hebraic styles contains a valuable study of the difference between their representations of reality. Concerning the Homeric style, Auerbach argues that its basic impulse is
to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations. Nor do psychological processes receive any other treatment: here too nothing must remain hidden and unexpressed ... any such subjectivistic-perspectivistic procedure, creating a foreground and background, resulting in the present lying open to the depths of the past, is entirely foreign to the Homeric style; the Homeric style knows only a foreground, only a uniformly illuminated, uniformly objective present.

(6-7)

By “foreground,” Auerbach means that all of the events of the narrative and the actions and thoughts of the characters are kept before the audience. The whole procession of phenomena makes its way from beginning to end across the stage, which is wholly visible to our eyes. Thoughts and actions are fully explained and illuminated. We do not glimpse the hidden psychological depths so characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures. Auerbach arrives at this insight by exploring the meeting between Abraham and God, when God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his son, elucidating the range of what is not known. For instance, since God is speaking to Abraham he “must come from somewhere, must enter the earthly realm from some unknown heights or depths. Whence does he come, whence does he call to Abraham? We are not told” (8). We are not told where Abraham is: inside, outside, in Beersheba or elsewhere, nor are we told what he was doing when God called. We need only compare this to Hermes’ visit to Calypso, Auerbach says, where “command, journey, arrival and reception of the visitor, situation and occupation of the person visited, are set forth in many verses” (8-9).
Let us apply Auerbach’s insight to *Paradise Lost* and we find evidence for both modes of representation. When Raphael visits with Adam in the garden, for instance, we are given the precise details of his journey. God commands Raphael to converse with Adam “as friend with friend” (5.229). Raphael then travels from heaven to the eastern cliff of paradise (5.247-75); his arrival and reception are clearly set forth (5.287-320; 360-70); and Milton devotes many verses to the location and occupation of Adam and Eve. In addition, we are given the reason for Raphael’s visit. His journey is prefaced by God’s commenting that Satan has “disturb’d / This night the human pair” (5.227), and that Raphael needs to remind them of their freewill (5.236) and Satan’s plot (5.239).

In Auerbach’s paradigm, this celestial visitation would be classified as Homeric, yet Adam’s first meeting with a divine being is essentially Hebraic. After he is created, Adam asks who has made him, and “how may I know him, how adore” (8.281). Suddenly, God appears and taking Adam by the hand leads him to his new home. After Adam is transported to the garden, God “from among the Trees appear’d” (8.313). In these instances, we cannot be certain whether the divine being is the Father or the Son, since he is only referred to as a “shape divine” (8.295) and a “presence divine” (8.314). It would seem that this is the Father; since he tells Adam that he is the “Author of all this thou seest” (8.317); but the Son is the agent of Creation, and it is plausible that he is now visiting with Adam. Perhaps the ambiguity is meant to suggest the presence of both Father and Son, since both are present at creation. Though Adam does not know who this presence is, he recalls how “Rejoicing, but with awe, / In adoration at his feet I fell / Submiss” (8.314-16). In contrast, when Raphael enters the garden, Adam, “though not aw’d / Yet with submiss approach and reverence meek” (5.358-59), approaches his
unknown guest. In both instances, Adam is “submiss” and reverent, but God alone inspires “awe.”

Auerbach’s definition of the Hebraic mode of representation applies well to Adam’s experience of God, since we are not told where God has come from, what physical form he has taken, nor whether this is the Father or the Son. Similarly, when Adam leads Eve back to their bower, we realize that God has departed unnoticed. Presumably he has returned to heaven; however, his omnipresence means that in some form he is still present. In contrast, when Raphael departs, we are told he has returned “up to Heav’n” (8.653). While Raphael possesses a definite physical body, the entity with which Adam converses is less defined. Of the being with whom he first conversed, Adam remembers only that he was a “shape divine,” a “vision bright,” that he fell at his “feet” (8.315), and that he fashioned Eve “with his hands” (8.469).

For Auerbach, it is this dearth of visual detail in such a significant encounter that distinguishes the Hebraic mode. In visualizing Abraham’s visit with God, Auerbach argues that

if we conceive of Abraham in the foreground, where it might be possible to picture him as prostrate or kneeling or bowing with outspread arms or gazing upward, God is not there too: Abraham’s words and gestures are directed toward the depths of the picture or upward, but in any case the undetermined, dark place from which the voice comes to him is not in the foreground. (9)

That so much remains unexpressed is for Auerbach the central difference between the Homeric and Hebraic method. Whereas Homer relates all external phenomenon in vivid
detail, the Hebrew writers conspicuously avoid giving their readers such visual aids. In Abraham’s meeting with God, God is presented more as a voice than as a character who converses with Abraham on the same level.

Kenosis: The Nature of Hebraic Representation

Current criticism tends to ask something about the nature of the cultures or societies which “produce” certain texts. Auerbach does this when he concludes that “the concept of God held by the Jews is less a cause than a symptom of their manner of comprehending and representing things” (8). For Auerbach, when the Hebrew writers came to “imagine” or conceive of their God, they did so in the way that they imagined other things. I disagree. Instead, I believe that the style of Hebraic writing originates from Yahweh’s second commandment: “Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth” (Dt 5:8, emphasis mine). To have no graven images is to have no idols; yet this commandment may also be held responsible for the lack of description so characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures.

We might say that God is not depicted because he exceeds the human capacity to describe Ultimate Being; but in the Hebrew Scriptures descriptions are visibly bereft of detail. When the prophet Samuel is sent to anoint David, thus marking him as God’s choice for the next King of Israel, we read that David is “ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance” (1 Sm 16:12), but this is the extent of his physical description. We
read that David is handsome without actually being told what he looked like. Tracing the
correlations between Hebrew faith and Freudian psychology, Harold Bloom argues:

The preferred biblical way of representing an object is to explain how it
was made. We are not told how the Ark of the Covenant, the Desert
Sanctuary, the Temple, and Solomon’s Palace looked, because the stories
of how they were built is what constitutes depiction. And though we are
told that Joseph, David, Absalom were outstandingly handsome, again we
are given only an impression, with no sense of their actual appearance.14

The lack of physical description allows for a universalizing of perspective. Regardless of
readers’ cultural definitions of beauty, they can project their own conception of what is
beautiful onto the person or object. David’s beauty is thus liberated from the cultural
limitations of his time, since no concrete description prevents readers from forming a
personal image of his beauty. It is this characteristic which allows William Phelps to
observe that

in nearly all old books, the pathos that drew tears from contemporary
readers often obtains either smiles or yawns from later generations; but the
scenes of sentiment in the Bible are so deeply founded on human nature,
that they impress the twentieth-century reader with as much force as in the
time when they were written.15

If, for instance, we were told that David’s beauty was owed in part to his prominent nose
or craggy beard, we should form quite a different picture of him. Absalom, for instance,
is without blemish and has a tremendous head of hair, producing five pounds annually (2
Sm 14: 26); ultimately, his hair is his undoing, yet beyond these notable exceptions no
description is given of his visible person.

The scarcity of visual cues conspicuously diminishes the presence of the writer.
Let us think, for instance, of how Charles Dickens might have described David’s beauty.
Such a depiction would be memorable, and it would carry with it the unmistakable
Dickensian style. That is not to say that there is a type of anonymity or homogeneity to
the Hebrew style: each writer possesses certain characteristics that are embedded in his
writings, and it is these distinctive traits that enable critics to trace the J, E, P, or D
narratives. However, we do not walk away from our encounter with Scripture musing
how no writer can describe a flaming chariot like Ezekiel or a seraph like Isaiah. Everett
Fox argues that Genesis is different from other creation accounts in ancient literature and
folklore, “in that like the rest of the Torah, it downplays the heroic element of the
people’s origins and in its place stresses God’s role in them.”16 The act of composition
itself exhibits a kind of kenosis, of the author emptying himself out before his God, since
it downplays the author’s role while emphasizing the authority of God. The narrative is
written in a manner that makes it difficult to worship the writer’s ability to describe, even
to record events, as in other Western literature. Who, indeed, can describe purgatory
better than Dante?

The Hebraic mode of writing is itself an act of humility; and the lack of physical
detail compels readers to reflect upon the spiritual dynamic: David’s beauty is a minor
feature compared to his faithful obedience to God’s prompting, and Absalom’s hair gets
in the way of his obedience. We are always to consider the wider spiritual implications of
an event, which transports us to a meditation of the spiritual realm, not the physical.
When the Israelites battle their opponents, for instance, the emphasis is either on Yahweh’s provision or on the people’s sin, which has now led to their being punished at the hands of foreign armies, rather than the splendour of their weapons and the mighty hands that wield them—the physical world is secondary.

This rendering of an image without description is exhibited in the numerous battles between Israel and the Philistines, and in particular by the contest between David and Goliath. Chaim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, in their study of biblical warfare, make several important observations about this incident. First, Saul’s army is “inferior to the Philistines in armaments of all kinds, and it completely lack[s] chariots.”17 Saul, therefore, was forced to adopt a defensive position: he dared not push out into the open plain, remaining instead at the mouth of a mountain valley. Precisely where these armies are located is uncertain.18 But neither side possesses the necessary strength to break through the enemy lines, which makes this battle “not one of movement, in which there is spoil for the taking, but a long-drawn-out (v.16) and sedentary war.”19 The Israelites are at a disadvantage, but the Philistines are unable to capitalize on it, and the prolonged standoff requires David to bring provisions to his brothers.

That the Philistines should offer to have the battle decided in a single contest between two warriors is unusual—this is the only episode of its kind in the Hebrew Scriptures. Indeed, the name “Goliath” is foreign, and the practice of a champion, “a man who fights between battle lines”20 is one that is more Greek than Hebrew. Herzog and Gichon emphasize this foreignness when they interpret Goliath as “clad in full Homeric panoply.”21 And for Samuel Pratt, Goliath is reminiscent of “Homer’s Ajax, and, indeed
the process of the engagement between the giant and David, is, in many particulars, like
the ceremony of the single combat of Telamon and Hector."

Goliath’s equipment is unusual and there is an apparent contradiction found in 2
Samuel 21:19, where it is recorded that, “Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the
Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s
beam.” Whether this is a copyist’s error or another name for David is not clear. Elhanan
is mentioned again in 1 Chronicles 20:5, but here he is recorded as slaying Goliath’s
brother, Lahmi. I am not worried about arguing the historical accuracy of this account,
like Herzog and Gichon who contend that “endocrinology has been marshaled to prove
convincingly that limited eyesight, common in tall, strong people, could have hampered
Goliath’s capability to react correctly to David’s aiming his sling.” Rather than
rationalizing the fabulous and conflicting features of the narrative, I wish to focus instead
on how the conflict is presented, because it illustrates the nature of Hebraic
representation.

More than enemies meeting, the battle between David and Goliath presents us
with two paradigms of belief in opposition. It is telling that Goliath is granted the more
thorough physical description, for he comes against the Israelites incorporating all the
features that we normally associate with epic characters, and the Hebrew writer focuses
his descriptive energy onto the uncircumcised Philistine:

And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named
Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had an
helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and
the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had
greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam; and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him. And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. (1 Sm 17:4-10)

Goliath incarnates everything that we would expect of a “champion.” Standing a towering nine feet nine inches, he is an awesome physical presence. Robert Alter notes that in the Hebrew Scriptures “full-scale descriptions almost never occur, Goliath himself being one of the few marginal exceptions.” The description, however, marvellously conveys a vivid image of Goliath without actually giving any of this warrior’s physical features. We are not told how Goliath’s muscles bulged as he flaunted his mighty spear, nor how his helmet would have “made [him] look particularly terrifying.” Rather than tell us how strong Goliath is, the writer reports how much his spear weighed, adding emphasis by noting separately the weight of spear shaft and the spearhead; he is depicted solely in terms of his weapons. Goliath “moves into the action as a man of iron and bronze, an almost grotesquely quantitative embodiment of a hero.” Yet we are not given a summary of the mighty deeds Goliath has accomplished with his thirty-three pound spear, nor are we shown the powerful arm that hoists this tremendous weapon. Our
eyes are averted from Goliath the person onto the weapons he carries. Goliath carries the latest and best weapons, and he is as well-protected as humanly possible. But he is Godless.

Several aspects concerning Goliath's lack of physical description warrant our attention. First, it is possible that the lack of physical description occurs because very little can be seen, "to show that the Philistine was protected as well as possible, so that his assailant would have no possible opening." Essentially a human tank, Goliath's extensive armour seals him off from our eyes. Peter Miscall interprets the preponderance of weaponry as rendering him a "big man encumbered by heavy armour with little range in combat and vulnerable to an attack launched from a distance." Second, it can be argued that in reality Goliath's lack of description is no different from any other scriptural portrait: David is "ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to" (1 Sm 16:12); King Saul is "a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" (1 Sm 9:2).

The Israelites are terrified because Goliath is physically larger than any one from their ranks, and he wields weapons of which they can only dream. But their focus is not to be on what is seen but on God who is unseen; and when we come to God's answer to Goliath, we encounter someone who is his opposite: David is small, slight, and young. The writer emphasizes this disparity by describing David's appearance after Saul equips him:
And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said to Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. (1 Sm 17:38-39)

To walk in borrowed equipment would no doubt be difficult, especially for a young shepherd whose only experience was preventing a bear and a lion from devouring his flock. But the image addresses the faith of Saul, who believes that strength is to be found in the physical realm alone. David’s decision to refuse this armour for his own meagre clothing is a visible refutation of his fellow soldiers’ faith in physical objects; in contrast to the well-clad Philistine, David steps forward clad only in the assurance of his God’s provision.

So David advances in his shepherd’s clothing, carrying a staff, a sling, and five smooth stones. The image is sublimely ludicrous: a young shepherd with a slingshot squaring off against a legend. There would seem to be more than a little of the humour that Herbert Brichto finds to be characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, the lesson for readers is obvious: “the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hands” (1 Sm 17:47). Furthermore, David’s triumph over Goliath draws our attention not to David’s use of the sling but to his faith and obedience. The victory is a type of kenosis since it emphasizes David’s inadequacy and God’s strength—without God, David would have failed. In reading this account, we do not marvel at David’s remarkable use of his sling but at God’s use of David.
Goliath and David’s physical appearance is not depicted in detail by the writer, but they are presented as real people fighting a real battle. Let me extrapolate my observations concerning this episode onto the larger issue regarding the appearances of God. An absence of detail in the description of God does not imply the absence of God. In truth, God is depicted as fully as many other characters. In analyzing God’s request that Abraham offer up Isaac, Auerbach argues that if we picture Abraham bowing with outspread arms or gazing upward, “God is not there too.” Only one person occupies the scene. For Auerbach, “God is always so represented in the Bible, for he is not comprehensible in his presence, as is Zeus; it is always only ‘something’ of him that appears, he always extends into the depths.” This is correct regarding the testing of Abraham, though it is impossible to know how much of God appeared with his voice; and if the rest of the Bible were to present God as only a voice, cloud, pillar of fire, bright light, or as an inward prompting, then we should agree with Auerbach. But God does appear in a bodily form, meeting with Abraham by the oaks of Mamre as a desert traveller.

God is not only an abstract idea or concept, nor is he bound to the strict conventions of reason or logic; rather, he enjoys a freedom that transcends human categories. We witness this in God’s physical manifestations when he participates in human affairs and visits his creatures as an equal. It is logical that God should enjoy a physical form, even though he is free from substantiality. Yochanan Muffs develops this logic by arguing that,
While the ancient Israelite was forbidden to make any concrete and plastic image of God, it would have been strange indeed if God, the source and creator of the human personality, did not Himself have a real and concrete personhood, something which He so generously bestowed upon man, His creation.

And if God is somehow a person, He must logically have a form which can be seen even though this form was free from substantiality. Thus, Moses and the Elders actually see the physical manifestation of the Lord sitting on a throne supported by a dais of lapis lazuli. Similarly, Ezekiel sees the Lord as a man sitting astride his movable throne made of fiery angelic beings. What profoundly shocking, mysterious images dance before our eyes, enough to stimulate and nourish the imaginations of a thousand painters and poets.33

History bears testimony to the painters and poets who have had their imaginations stimulated and nourished by the "mysterious" appearances of God; but what is "profoundly shocking" is that despite these physical manifestations of God, Milton chooses to marginalize God’s corporeality. In Paradise Lost God is “High Thron’d above all highth” (3.58); he is the awesome God who dwells in unapproachable light, and even the Son is depicted continually as shining "beyond compare." The disparity between God in Genesis and in Milton is made especially clear in God’s meeting with Adam and Eve, and in the next chapter I will explore the differences between the Genesis account of God walking in the garden and Milton’s. In confronting the God of biblical tradition, Milton
encountered diverse accounts that betray the idea of tradition as the uninterrupted transmission of a singular belief.

In contrasting the Homeric mode of representation with the Hebraic, Auerbach argues that Homer concentrates on presenting a uniformly illuminated and uniformly objective present. Within the Homeric narrative frame, there are no unexpressed psychological depths but an immediate present in which all of the character’s thoughts and actions are externalized. There is a delight in physical existence, and in enjoying all the pleasures of this world. In the Hebraic text, Auerbach finds the opposite to be true, for here the emphasis is on background not foreground, with the most important features remaining unexpressed. The most important feature, of course, would be God: where is he, what is he doing, where has he come from, what does he look like? Yet all these vital details are conspicuously absent from this account, so that when God speaks to Abraham, we cannot locate him within the picture.

This is only one manifestation of Yahweh, however, and Auerbach’s analysis is strained when we apply it to the occasions when God does appear on the same level as the people he visits. To accommodate the variety of God’s appearances requires a more dynamic framework: he is a God who may choose to appear as discreetly as a desert nomad. He may speak to Job from the midst of a mighty whirlwind (Jb 38:1), or he may cover Moses’ face with his hand and then remove it so Moses can see his back (Ex 33:23). He allows Jacob to wrestle with him. In the Sinai Theophany, we encounter a picnic scene, with Moses and the seventy elders of Israel sitting and eating a covenant meal with him (Ex 24:9-11). And he permits Abraham to argue with him regarding the number of righteous needed to spare Sodom.
Perhaps no depiction of God is more astonishing than when he visits with Abraham and tells him of the planned destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This is an extremely perplexing account, due in part to its alleged composition; Jacob Licht remarks that “the piece cannot be properly called a single, well-integrated story; but it is not a bunch of quite independent stories either.”

It begins rather serendipitously, with Abraham finding relief from the desert sun:

And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre; and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant; Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hastened to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. (Gn 18:1-8)

Bruce Vawter argues that “these verses introduce what is at one and the same time one of the most sophisticated and the most naïve of the portrayals of Divinity which it has been
given to the Yahwist to create.”

God appears in a cloud not of glory but of dust, walking out of the desert and up to Abraham’s tent. The meeting is bereft of emotion save for Abraham’s excited preparations and politeness. It seems peculiar that God should choose to appear with no special effects, because this meeting is miraculous—the intersecting of the Creator with his creation. God has chosen to appear to the work he has fashioned out of clay; yet he appears almost nonchalantly with two mysterious others.

While it is not clear that Abraham recognizes his visitors as divine, there are no clues to indicate that he believes they are only desert travellers. His form of address does not change; yet by the end of this passage, it is clear that Abraham knows he is entertaining God. E.A. Speiser notes how throughout the entire episode Abraham addresses his visitors with Adonai, or “dny,” which can represent doni “my lord” (singular), donay “my lords” (ordinary plural), or donay “my/the Lord,” the special form with long third vowel, which is reserved for the Deity. By the end, Abraham is certain that his visitors are divine, but he continues to address them the same way. Vawter notices how the “three men” seem “at times to become two men or even one man and eventually are denominated angels, [and] certainly signify in this story Yahweh, the only Lord of Israel.” This flux leads Vawter to conclude “beyond doubt that the story derives from a polytheistic source and that it has undergone a minimum of revision in its adjustment to the Yahwism of the Bible.” For Charles Ryrie, “three men” means that “one was the Lord, Yahweh, the other two, angels.” To make this distinction, however, Ryrie must read ahead to the next chapter where the two angels continue on to Sodom. Speiser interprets the ambiguity of these persons’ identity as expressing Abraham’s
courtesy, since “his spontaneous hospitality to seemingly ordinary human beings is thus all the more impressive.”

God is here, but we are no closer to seeing what he looks like than when he speaks out of the whirlwind to Job; yet we cannot say that he is not in the picture either. Auerbach’s claims that Yahweh is to be imagined either further within the scene or outside of its immediate borders is incompatible with this episode, since Abraham is talking directly with God: they are on the same level. The only person who is not pictured is Sarah, who has stayed in the tent. If we must picture the physical features of the people involved, then we rely as heavily on our imagination as we do with David and Goliath. God and the other “two men” constitute as much of this scene as Abraham. That God enjoys the food and rests in the shade intimates his participation in a physical realm—his form is as physical as Abraham’s.

Abraham addresses all three of his visitors with the same appellation, and it is curious that they first speak in unison, “And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife?” (18:9). Herbert Brichto argues provocatively that Abraham knows immediately that these visitors are divine, shown by his initial act of obeisance and the manner in which he pleads for them to stay, “My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant” (18:3). Brichto speculates that this is Yahweh choosing to reveal “Himself simultaneously as One and three, three men—never called angels—who put away a feast worthy of Rabelais’ Gargantua or Pantagruel; who splits himself into two parties: one a party of two heading for Sodom, the other a party of one remaining behind, to be engaged by Abraham in a debate on justice.” God may appear as he chooses, though it is strange to imagine him splitting himself into two different
groups, which is Brichto’s contention. What is clear, finally, is that God is as physically present in this scene as Abraham and Sarah.

My point in this exploration is not to argue that centuries of criticism have overlooked an important consideration, or that Brichto’s reading is the more compelling. Instead, I wish to focus attention on the variety of God’s appearances. We are misguided if we hold that God is never seen, for he is as visibly and forcibly presented as Saul, David, Goliath, or Abraham. A conception of God as someone who appears randomly and in various forms would seem to contradict what he himself has to say; namely, that “you cannot see My face, for no man may see Me and live” (Ex 33:20). This apparently straightforward statement is perplexing since nine verses earlier we read that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11).

Isaiah and Ezekiel’s Representation of God

We cannot relegate sightings of God to the old mythic world of the J narrative, since God appears beyond the time of the Pentateuch. Isaiah records possibly the best known account of divine revelation. It is generally conceded that there are two Isaiah authors, and of the first Isaiah’s style, Samuel Driver writes that its dominant characteristics “are grandeur and beauty of conception, wealth of imagination, vividness of illustration, compressed energy and splendour of diction … No prophet has Isaiah’s power either of conception or of expression; none has the same command of noble thoughts, or can present them in the same noble and attractive language.” Such lofty expression is what we should expect of Isaiah, because he is the prophet who “was
associated with the sanctuary and its worship. Isaiah’s account of God is distinguished by its sublimity, and I quote at some length to provide an adequate sense of this visionary encounter:

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the Temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. (Is 6:1-8)

These eight verses touch upon the limits of what critics used to call the “sublime.” God’s presence is overwhelming: the foundations tremble, the Temple fills with smoke, and God is “high and lifted up.” A sense of holy occasion solemnizes the passage, wrought by the angel’s singing, the billowing smoke, and the indescribable glory of God filling the Temple. In truth, this is a critical moment in Israel’s history; King Uzziah’s death marks
the end of an era of strength and prosperity, bringing “a time of decision and destiny.”

God’s revelation to Isaiah begins and confirms his prophetic role. Yahweh’s revelation and his purification of Isaiah’s lips (the instruments of praise), demonstrate the active role God will take in meeting with his people and his enabling them to meet with him.

Isaiah’s experience is difficult to define: is it prophetic or autobiographic?

Above all, the holiness of God is emphasized, with the threefold use of “holy” drawing attention to the Lord’s holiness: “In Hebrew, a word is sometimes repeated for emphasis … Threefold repetition, though rare, is a particularly forceful way of emphasizing an idea.”

Luis Alonso-Schokel helps us to appreciate the significance of this repetition when he points out that,

Although Hebrew prosody as a rule prefers two-part constructions (gemination, hendiadys, parallelism), here several times we come across three-part constructions in the text: three pairs of wings, three [exclamations of] qadosh [“holy!”] … three actions of the seraph, three propositions in his discourse, three components in Yahweh’s discourse (eyes, ears, heart), threefold devastation (city, houses, fields). The basis for this fact lies … not in Hebraic practice … [but is] to be explained by a crucial element that the poet brought to his vision as the experience itself, that being the threefold Qadosh [“Holy, holy, holy”].

The repetition is a form of the Hebrew superlative—supreme holy is Yahweh, and this passage gives a profound statement on the holiness of God. Isaiah immediately recognizes his own unworthiness in God’s presence; and the seraph performs an act of
absolution, which intimates the profound potential of the burning message Isaiah will bring to the people, but it will go unheeded.

Holiness is a theme that unifies the book of Isaiah, and in this context it refers to God's transcendent sovereignty over the world and to his moral authority which derives from his royal position. "Holiness for Isaiah had at least two basic meanings," states James Newsome. "The first is a sense of physical separation and elevation ... second ... the sense of moral integrity." What is common to both these senses is the otherness of God; his creation cannot approach him without his intervention and aid. John MacArthur notes that Isaiah's "diction is opulent. Figures of the utmost boldness and loftiness crowd one another ... form[ing] a marked contrast to Ezekiel and Jeremiah whose figures are often homely and commonplace." While Isaiah's artistry compels John Eaton to call his the "greatest of prophetic books—in size, in poetic brilliance, and in the range of its vision," Ezekiel uses his skill to identify the incommensurability of creation and Creator.

God's revelation to Isaiah would have been a stunning visual event, yet little time is spent presenting us with physical details of God. We are told the seraphim have six wings, but can only conjecture what these wings looked like and how they were attached. Though the seraph is a spiritual being, it uses the tongs to place a burning coal on Isaiah's lips. Isaiah's experience encompasses the range of physical sensation: he hears the seraphim; he sees the Lord; he smells the smoke; he feels the Temple's foundations shake; he tastes the burning coal. Despite these descriptions, the reason for this experience, God, is not depicted. Isaiah says that he "saw the Lord sitting on a throne," but this is all that is said of the Lord's appearance. The dearth of visual features
demonstrates two aspects of Isaiah’s experience—his humility and God’s majesty. The Hebrew word for “glory” can also be translated as “radiant presence,” a term by which the priests referred to God’s indwelling in their midst (Ez 1:28). In Isaiah’s experience, God’s holiness makes it impossible to behold him.

Speaking with a stormy eloquence, the prophet Ezekiel presents us with another vision of God. His phrases are rough-hewn; they jar our ear. His is the voice of one “crying in the wilderness,” the uncivilized prophet delivering God’s stern judgment on the civilized decadence of his people. “Ezekiel is the wild soothsayer,” Victor Hugo comments, he is

a genius of the cavern, whose thought is best expressed by a beast-like growling. But listen. This savage makes a prophecy to the world—the prophecy of progress ... Isaiah overthrows? Very well! Ezekiel will reconstruct. Isaiah refuses civilization; Ezekiel accepts, but transforms it ... It is man’s consolation that the future is to be a sunrise instead of a sunset. Time presents works for time to come; work, then, and hope! Such is Ezekiel’s cry.

Hugo is characteristically romantic in his unbounded enthusiasm for Ezekiel, since there is little consolation or hope in Ezekiel’s fierce prophecy against Israel. In truth, God promises Ezekiel that he will be ignored: “the House of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted” (3:7). For his efforts, Ezekiel is promised exclusion and ridicule; the burning coal of God’s message will scar the prophet. Ezekiel was unique because he “acted out many of his messages to the people instead of delivering them orally.” God commands
him to lie upon his left side in front of Jerusalem for three hundred and ninety days (4:5), and then to lie upon his right side for forty days (4:6); being commanded to bake with “the dung that cometh out of man, in their [Israelites] sight” (4:12). Ezekiel will suffer visually, so that the people may see plainly the magnitude of their sin.

Norman Gottwald argues that Ezekiel’s language reflects the severity of his message, likening his “bold and jabbing style” to “gobs of pigment smeared on canvas.”

A salient characteristic of Ezekiel’s writing is its realism; he possesses a mathematician’s delight in precise detail. Robert Pfeiffer notes that “the details of the ship of Tyre are so true to life that Ezekiel 27, together with the Odyssey and Acts 27, is one of the most important literary sources for our knowledge about ancient navigation.” Like Isaiah, Ezekiel records a powerful and original vision of God. Though his account is “true to life” he describes God by means of what is around him, never presenting the centre of the vision. Ezekiel’s vision includes angels; but where Isaiah encountered two seraphim, each having three sets of wings, Ezekiel sees four cherubim, “and every one had four faces, and every one had four wings” (1:6). While the seraphim’s countenances are likened to that of a man, Ezekiel’s account of the cherubim is less human, since of their four faces, “they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle” (1:10). Robert Chisholm observes that Ancient Near Eastern sculpture contains many similar images of part-human, part-animal throne bearers, which demonstrates God’s accommodating of himself to the cultural situation of his people.

Ezekiel’s vision of the wheels is a bizarre and arresting image. Whether we may connect Ezekiel’s vision of the wheels to the phenomenon of extraterrestrial life is not
within the scope of my discussion. I am interested in what follows, for Ezekiel’s dazzling visions of the wheels, creatures, and firmament are all overshadowed by the appearance of God, who is “above the firmament that was over their heads” (1:26). Ezekiel’s visionary experience concludes with a vision of God:

Above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about it. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. and he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. (1:26-2:1)

Ezekiel’s vision begins with him looking upwards and away (to the north), yet his gaze returns to the earth with his description of the cherubim. Ezekiel then spots the wheels, which touch the earth and reach into the sky; and the description of the wheels and their turning returns our gaze to the heavens, leading us up to encounter the pinnacle of Ezekiel’s vision, because at the highest point, above the wheels, angels, and firmament is God, seated on his throne. Precisely what Ezekiel sees of God is unclear, and it is perplexing that he can discern any feature. Around the throne is fire; above and below the figure’s loins is fire, which is surrounded with brightness like a rainbow. Given the
radiant brilliance of this image, how can Ezekiel determine the presence of “loins?” Does he intend “loins” to mean the centre of this vision?

It is customary to represent God by means of synecdoche, of which “the hand [is] by far the most ancient … [and is] widely illustrated from Paleo-Christian times through the Protestant period of Milton himself.”

Ezekiel provides many details about the cherubim, the wheels, and the fire, but these features divert our eyes from the God who is depicted only as radiant light surrounded by fire. As soon as he appears Ezekiel and Isaiah fall on their faces, which contrasts with Abraham’s experience, when God appears to him by the Oaks of Mamre and he does not prostrate himself; instead, he prepares a meal for them to enjoy together. In Isaiah and Ezekiel, God’s countenance is obfuscated by his glory; it is his brightness alone that they can see. For Abraham, God appears as just another desert traveller.

God’s brilliance so overwhelms Ezekiel that he is prevented from seeing much of him. Anderson observes how “Ezekiel has often been likened to Calvin, because of his emphasis on the majesty of God.” Such a likeness is apt because it is God’s glory and the people’s apostasy that Ezekiel emphasizes. While Ezekiel provides lucid details about the cherubim, all that he records of God is the “appearance of his loins.” Above and below the appearance of these loins emanates the appearance of fire, which then has “brightness around it” (1:27). God’s appearance is similar to the wheels, since his loins form the centre around which the appearance of fire radiates, and around that is yet another sphere of brightness; but with the wheels, Ezekiel can discern eyes, wheels turning inside wheels, and the direction the wheels are moving. As Ezekiel looks upon this brightness he looks upwards. His gaze has followed the cherubim’s descent, been
returned to the firmament by following the wheel’s rim, and has now settled upon the highest point—God on his throne.

This progression prepares us for the final dramatic movement, which is the collapse of the prophet before his God: “And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake” (1:28). In the space of one line, Ezekiel’s gaze plummets from the throne of God to the earth beneath him. The transition is brusque, showing us how quickly Ezekiel is humbled by God’s presence. Ezekiel’s depiction has been exclusively visual to this point, save for the sound of the cherubim’s wings (1:24), but now his face is buried in the ground and he can see nothing, only hearing the “voice of one that spake.” At this point, Ezekiel’s ocular account ceases. No more of God is seen, save only a hand holding a roll of a book” (2:9) which is “in my mouth as honey for sweetness” (3:3). Ezekiel’s record stresses the ineffable glory of God. So powerful is his encounter with God that a glimpse of his glory lays the prophet flat.

“Thron’d inaccessible”: Milton’s Holy God

The accounts of Ezekiel and Isaiah are rhetorically brilliant, with the drama of the prophet’s call matched only by the poet’s skill in recording it. In their visions of God, the capabilities of rhetoric are pushed to their utmost. A sense of solemn occasion dominates their vision of God, and we see in these accounts the prophet using the skills of the poet to convey the power of God’s glory. Both Ezekiel and Isaiah stress their own inadequacy within God’s awesome presence, and both are essentially passive spectators. Yet how different are these encounters with God from those experienced by Moses, Abraham, or
Jacob. It is almost inconceivable to picture the God of Ezekiel on the heights east of Hebron haggling with Abraham over the number of righteous required to spare judgment; it is equally baffling to imagine the God who commissions Isaiah and Ezekiel arguing with Moses over his willingness to speak with Pharaoh. With the prophets there are none of the subtle traces of humour we find in God’s meeting with Abraham. Solemnity dominates their accounts—we are led into the Temple of the Lord, into the Holy of Holies. How Isaiah or Ezekiel “sees” God is more consonant with Auerbach’s analysis, since with Abraham, God is on the same level, even eating the same food, which requires a very different conception of God than that presented by the prophets, for whom God is enthroned, “lofty and exalted”; his train fills the Temple and his holiness demands reverence and atonement. Sacredness pervades Isaiah and Ezekiel; and to “see” God is to be overpowered, to witness at once the incommensurability of God and man. The prophetic accounts do not provide a physical depiction of God, though they graphically represent the features accompanying his arrival. The God of the prophets is not bargained with nor is he entertained as a houseguest; he demands and is deserving of praise; he is “high and lifted up.”

This is also how the Father is depicted in Paradise Lost. In Milton’s epic, there is never a time when the Father is not on his throne. Even when he accompanies the Son during the six days of creation, we discover that “he also went / Invisible, yet stay’d (such privilege / Hath Omnipresence)” (7.588-90). When we first encounter God, he is “High Thron’d above all hight” (3.58) with his angels about him as thick as stars (3.61). In the angelic hymn of celebration that concludes the celestial council scene in book 3, the angelic hosts offer a “sacred song” of praise to the Father and the Son. Godhead is
presented as transcending all categories of conceptualization, and God is celebrated as follows:

Thee Father first they sung Omnipotent,
Immutable, Immortal, Infinite,
Eternal King; thee Author of all being,
Fountain of Light, thy self invisible
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit’st
Thron’d inaccessible. (3.372-77)

Immutability, immortality, and infinity position God beyond the limits of human comprehension. Like Isaiah and Ezekiel, God’s “glorious brightness” defeats any attempts on the part of the writer to ascribe physical attributes to this supreme being. Unlike the prophets, Milton must be drawn up to heaven to encounter this radiant presence; God does not descend to the earth. God’s brightness, his being a “fountain of light,” provides light so that the poet can see; yet it is this same light which prevents the poet (and the angels) from seeing God himself.

God is inaccessible, not only to a human audience, but to an angelic one as well. Milton’s depiction of God plays on the paradox of conceiving the incomprehensibility of God. So bright is God, so dazzling his presence, that even his angels are unable to behold him. Apparently, God is aware of his brilliance and so he shades the “full blaze” of his radiant beams, but it avails not:
when thou shad'st

The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud

Drawn round about thee like a radiant Shrine,

Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,

Yet dazzle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim

Approach not, but with both wings veil thir eyes. (3.377-82)

That God should shade his beams expresses his awareness of the angels’ limited faculties, and it also implies his desire not to overwhelm them. Even so, the “brightest seraphim” cannot approach and must veil their eyes. This recalls the imagery of Isaiah 6:2, where the seraphim similarly cover their faces; but in Isaiah, they apparently cover their face to protect the prophet from their radiant appearance. In Milton, the seraphim cover their faces to shield themselves from God, for not even the holiest of God’s attendants dare approach him.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the arrival of God need not correspond with an experience of the sublime; indeed, some of his appearances are not visionary at all, but common. It is fascinating to read of Moses’ death in Deuteronomy, because it is told that God himself buries Moses’ body (34:6), and that “since then no prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (34:10). However, judging from Abraham’s experience, he, too, knew the Lord face to face, but the manner in which he “knew” God is very different from that of Moses, Isaiah, or Ezekiel. These differences cannot be solely attributed to the difference of people or ages, for the God who promises Abraham a son, appears quite differently when he asks him to sacrifice that son. To reach
into the Hebrew Scriptures in order to find a single, unified, and static tradition of depicting God is to reach in vain.

What then shall we say of Milton’s God and the biblical tradition? First, we should understand something of the nature of Hebraic representation, for its manner of depiction is unique. Second, we should realize how diversely God is portrayed, since his manifestations span the spectrum of human experience: from desert nomad to unapproachable light. Milton’s task of making God an active character in his epic was far more difficult than reaching for the Bible of his youth. The range of God’s depictions can be divided into two categories. One, God is anthropomorphic: he adopts a human form and appears without drama to share a meal with his creation; two, God appears in majesty and holiness and the human spectator falls in reverent awe. These categories are artificial and potentially reductive, but they bring to light an important aspect—Milton’s God most closely resembles the God of Isaiah and Ezekiel.
Chapter 1 Endnotes

13. Lewalski, 466.
18. Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, for instance, argues the valley itself to mark “the boundary between the opposing troops which day by day occupy the declivities and form a ‘battle line’ about halfway up the sides of the valley, returning to their camps at night.” (*1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 148.
19. Ibid., 150.
20 Hertzburg, 148.
21 Herzog and Gichon, 93.
23 Herzog and Gichon, 93.
24 Alter, 81.
25 Hertzburg, 149.
26 Alter, 81.
27 Hertzburg, 149.
29 The number of stones may be prophetic in that David and his servants will eventually kill Goliath’s four brothers (2 Sm 21:22; 1 Chr 20:8).
31 Auerbach, 9.
32 Ibid., 12.
36 Speiser, 129
37 Vawter, 226.
38 Ibid., 226.
40 Speiser, 130.
41 Brichto, 240.
44 Ibid., 73.
47 Newsome, 69.
50 Eaton, 68.
51 Ibid., 72.
56 Chisholm, 232.
58 The rainbow may be intended to recall God’s promise to Noah that he would not destroy the earth again with water (Gn 9:12-17).
60 Anderson, 140.
Chapter Two

The Sublime and the Intimate: Creator and Creation in Genesis and *Paradise Lost*

Milton was an enthusiastic reader of the Hebrew Scriptures, and his knowledge of the biblical languages and of the literature surrounding Scripture enabled him to engage in sophisticated dialogue with the Bible and its commentators. In a letter dated March 27, 1627, Milton thanked his former tutor, Thomas Young, for his gift of a Hebrew Bible, "and professed to 'rejoice and almost exult' that this 'Father' and 'best of Teachers' has now become an equal friend." Reading through his copy of Scripture would have brought before Milton not a single representation of God, but many. It is one matter for a reader to find God under a tree enjoying a meal and to then read of him descending clad in the panoply of his glory; and it is quite another matter to confront these depictions as a poet whose goal is to "justify the ways of God to men." For in daring to make God a "character" in his epic, one who speaks, moves, and has what we may consider a personality, Milton had to form a coherent and consistent portrait of God, and, as argued in the preceding chapter, this is a tremendous undertaking. To speak of Milton and the biblical tradition is to overlook a fundamental truth—God is portrayed variously in the Scriptures, with no seamless transmission of a single "tradition" of Godly depictions. The Hebrew God confounds systematizing.

By examining Milton's depiction of the relationship between Adam and Eve and God, I will shed light on Milton's conception of God. Diverging from Genesis, Milton incorporates into his narrative a perspective that places God, as encountered by Adam
and Eve, much closer to those accounts recorded by Isaiah and Ezekiel. Milton modifies the God of Genesis in favour of a more sublime and majestic portrait. In this regard, I depart from the argument made by Jason Rosenblatt, who contends that, “before the Fall, Adam is compared with figures from the Pentateuch, most notably with Abraham and Moses, who lived in the days of easy intimacy between humankind and God. After the fall, the Hebrew Bible’s heroes, images, and events are devalued peremptorily.”

In short, I will contest this notion of “easy intimacy” between God and Adam, for the relationship Adam enjoys with his Creator shares surprisingly little with that of Abraham and Moses, and even less with the Adam of Genesis. This is not a consequence wrought by the Fall, as Rosenblatt contends, but the abiding reality of God’s presence in *Paradise Lost*. Even in the middle books, William Kolbrener observes, “even in the ‘morning hymn’—God remains ‘invisible’ ‘or,’ at best, ‘dimly seen / In these thy lowest works’ (5.157-58).”

The promise of the return of “one first matter all” seems “not to have any consequence even for the pre-fallen Edenic pair searching for His presence.” And it is precisely at this time of pre-fallen life that we would expect Adam and Eve to experience most fully God in a physical form.

The liberty Milton takes in interpreting Adam and Eve’s experience of God is doubly informative. First, I will examine the interaction between God and Adam and Eve in Genesis and in *Paradise Lost*, and I will argue that Milton willingly chooses to depart from biblical precedence. Second, it is telling to observe where Milton’s account departs from the biblical account, since by changing the degree to which Adam and Eve see God, Milton signals his own conception of how God would have appeared to our first parents. Milton’s Adam does not participate as fully in his relationship with God as does the
Adam of Genesis. Hugh MacCallum regards Milton’s Adam as having talked “face to face with God.” But that is to have over-identified him with the Adam of Genesis, for Milton allows his first man no such luxury. I mean to imply not that Milton’s account unintentionally places him in the Devil’s party, but that Milton’s description of God in the garden bears more in common with the God of the prophets than it does with the God of Genesis.

Milton could have chosen to present God in a more physical and visible form. Instead of expanding upon the Genesis account, where Adam and Eve walk and talk with God in the cool of the evening, Milton fashions his account in the prophetic mode, where God appears in his glory and is presented with high artistry. In *Paradise Lost* Adam and Eve, though unfallen and newly formed, experience God in a manner similar to the postlapsarian prophets. Milton finds for his precedent not the episodes where God appears in modestly human terms, but rather those events where God is “seen” in all his glory and majesty. The wandering God who appears as a desert nomad to Abraham is marginalized, and in his place we find a God who is “thron’d inaccessible.” A sense of majesty accompanies every depiction of God in *Paradise Lost*, and Milton never allows his readers to forget that his God is an Awesome God.

Milton seems to have understood something of the two viewpoints of creation, since, as in Genesis, *Paradise Lost* contains two perspectives of creation. The first, told to Adam by Raphael, provides a general overview of the six days of creation; the second, which Adam relates to Raphael, gives us a richly detailed record of Adam and Eve’s creation and their first moments together. First, Raphael tells Adam that
he form'd thee, Adam, thee O Man

Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breath'd

The breath of Life; in his own Image hee

Created thee, in the Image of God

Express, and thou becam'st a living Soul.

Male he created thee, but thy consort

Female for Race: then bless'd Mankind, and said

Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth,

Subdue it ... (7.524-32)

Raphael’s account is closer to chapter 1 than to chapter 2 of Genesis, since it does not mention Eve’s being fashioned from Adam’s rib, implying that Adam and Eve were made simultaneously, after the creation of the plants and animals. Interestingly, Milton includes the verbs “form’d” and “breath’d,” which critics consider to be the hallmark of the J writer. Milton presumably knew nothing of the distinction among J, E, or P writers. Rather we can follow C.A. Patrides when he summarizes that, “To the orthodox the entire Pentateuch beginning with the first chapter of Genesis—written, it was traditionally believed, by Moses—constituted an infallible history of the origin and initial progress of the human race.”6 Even so, Milton does graft the two Genesis accounts together, for while he uses the verbs from chapter 2, he echoes the style of chapter 1 when he has Raphael tell Adam that, “in his own Image hee / Created thee, in the Image of God / Express” (7.526-28). These lines resonate with Gn 1: 27-28: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the
earth and subdue it.” Milton repeats many of the same words as the second account (Authorized Version), which recognizes the distinctiveness of the two creation accounts while subtly asserting their union. Rather than have this account by Raphael precisely express the first creation account in Genesis, Milton has Raphael add the crucial terms “form’d” and “breath’d” from the second account, essentially marrying the two, which renders these two accounts as two views of the same phenomenon.

The Intimacy of the Genesis God

In depicting God, however, Milton appears less concerned with writing in a style answerable to the Scriptures. Milton’s attention to the subtleties and nuances of Genesis constitutes a curious contrast to his apparent departure from that text’s depiction of God interacting with Adam and Eve. In *Paradise Lost*, God maintains a peculiar distance from his creation, and his depiction is ambiguous. Adam’s retelling of his creation to Raphael, which provides a second, “man’s-eye-view” of creation, demonstrates this detachment. This episode presented Milton with a superb opportunity to describe God; yet Milton does not provide a scene in which God and Adam converse as they do in the Genesis account, or as we read that God and Moses or God and Abraham did. Instead, Adam encounters God in a state hovering between reality and the unconscious, like a prophet in the throes of a vision.

In order to emphasize the singularity of Milton’s treatment of Adam and God’s relationship, let me begin with a few remarks concerning Adam’s first thoughts. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam relates to Raphael the earliest moments of his dawning
consciousness. First, we should notice the tremendous difficulty Milton places before himself, since he does not envision Adam’s consciousness as developing; rather, Adam is already developed; immediately he begins to process external phenomena. Milton does not have Adam, as a child, gradually begin to take greater notice of his environment as his faculties develop and increase. He does not gradually wake from his unconscious slumber and begin to observe his own features and those of his environment with a similarly waking comprehension: there is no rift in Adam’s consciousness. He begins thinking with the same ease and instinct with which he stands: “rais’d / By quick instinctive motion up I sprung” (8.258-59).

For Adam to stand is as natural as it is for him to think. It would seem logical that Adam would learn to use his cognitive faculties even as he exercises them to locate himself; instead, he is completely and instantly cognizant. Adam’s unfallen reason leads him, in the space of twenty-five lines, to realize that his existence must be the work of “some great Maker then” (8.278). Adam sees first the sky and the sun: “Straight toward Heav’n my wond’ring Eyes I turn’d, / And gaz’d a while the ample sky” (8:257-58). That Adam’s gaze should be “straight toward heav’n” implies that he is lying on his back and that in an unfallen world the creature will instinctively look to the source of its creation.

Milton achieves a splendid contrast here between Adam lying on his back and the earlier record of Satan outstretched on his back in hell. For Adam, it is natural that his eyes should move “straight toward heav’n,” since he is stretched out with his back on the ground. In this position, his eyes begin their first moment of consciousness by looking upon “heav’n.” By clarifying that his eyes are “wonder’ing,” Adam implies that it is not only his eyes that have “wandered” up to the heavens but his thoughts, too, and such a
contemplation is full of “wonder,” since it settles on the source of his existence. Not so Satan. We first encounter Satan in a similar position: he is on his back “talking to his nearest Mate / With Head up-lift above the wave, and Eyes / That sparkling blaz’d, his other Parts besides / Prone on the Flood, extending long and large / Lay floating many a rood” (1.192-96). Since Satan is lying on his back, he should be looking upward to heaven, as Adam does. By saying that Satan is talking with his “Head up-lift above the wave,” we can infer that Satan has bent his neck and is not looking up. Satan’s defeat and exile to hell should turn his thoughts toward heaven and God; yet, even here, forced onto his back, Satan bends his neck and thoughts away from his Creator. The contrast is subtle but telling: Adam lying on his back turns his wondering eyes to heaven, while Satan, in the realm of eternal wandering, kinks his neck to conspire with Beelzebub against heaven.

But Adam is also alone. He does not immediately see God; rather, he postulates God’s presence by examining himself and his surroundings. Adam’s first moments are wonderful, and he possesses all the charm and vitality of a child rejoicing in the delightful reality of young life: this is morning gladness at the brim. Marjorie Nicolson remarks that “we feel the pleasure of watching a child in the scene in which Adam discovers his body, now walking, now running, in the sheer joy of using his limbs.” Adam also discovers his faculty of reason, which guides him to his Maker. Observing the natural phenomena of his surroundings, as Adam narrates to Raphael,

Thou Sun, said I, fair light,
And thou Enlight’n’d Earth, so fresh and gay,
Ye Hills and Dales, ye Rivers, Woods, and Plains
And ye that live and move, fair Creatures, tell,
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
Not of myself; by some great Maker then ... (8.273-78)
The word “and” conveys the equality and communion of all creation. The hills, dales, woods, plains, and sun, and all that lives and moves, point to the presence of a maker. The word “fair” suggests the general pleasantness and the equitable existence of all creation: this is a world of perfect justice, a world that is “fair.” All creation joins together in manifold witness of its Creator. It is through his careful interpretation of this “fair” world that Adam comes to realize the existence of God, which echoes a similar belief expressed in *The Christian Doctrine* when Milton argues that God “has left ... so many traces of his presence through the whole of nature, that no sane person can fail to realise that he exists.”

That Adam should come to faith by hearing and contemplating is for Kolbrener evidence that “Hobbes had made his way in Milton’s Paradise.” For Hobbes, the basis of all knowledge is sensation, and the cause of all sensation is motion. The progression of Adam’s observations, from the “ample skie” to the “birds on the branches warbling,” implies an innate knowledge that gradually encompasses larger portions of creation. In beholding his world, Adam learns to wonder at the beauty and craftsmanship of every creature, and is led to recognize the presence of its author.

Adam inherently quests to discover his origin. Earlier, we read that man is made “not prone/ And Brute as other Creatures, but endu’d / With Sanctity of Reason ... and from thence / Magnanimous to correspond with Heav’n” (7.506-11). Merritt Hughes traces the belief in the creation of humanity to correspond with the Creator “through classical literature from Plato to Cicero and Ovid ... and it runs through hexameral
literature.” This tradition surfaces in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, when he equates such celestial conversation as the essence of peace:

Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise, your power is Immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning. And so we humans, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you . . . . You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.

To see creation is to witness the hand of its Creator, and to praise him is to participate in the joy that was intended for all creation. God has both “drawn” his creation in such a way that they long for him, and he “draws” them to himself: the beauty of creation, appreciated and reflected upon, inevitably leads Adam to ask “how came I thus, / How here” (8.277).

It is only after Adam’s logic has led him to postulate the existence of God and he has asked how he may “know him, how adore” (8.280), that he falls asleep and meets his maker. This is a radical revision. In Genesis, Adam does not need to reason his way to God; he is formed and awakes in the presence of God. God is not explicitly sought, because he is there, with Adam taking his first breath presumably within inches of God’s face. In Genesis, God forms Adam out of the red clay, the *adamah*, and then “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gn 2:7). The verb “formed” expresses the relation of the craftsman to the material and the sovereignty of the maker. Bruce Vawter notes that “formed” is “almost, though not quite, as much reserved for God in the Hebrew Old Testament as ‘created’.” The verb “formed” (*vayitser*) is frequently used of the action of a potter (*yotser*), so the image of creation
evokes the imagery of a potter shaping a vessel, an image Jeremiah invokes when he records God declaring, “Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel” (18:6). This image is widespread in the ancient world:

In Egyptian art the god Khnum is shown before a potter’s wheel busily fashioning man, and in the Wisdom of Amen-em-opert (chap.35), it is stated that ‘man is clay and straw, and the god is his builder.’

Mesopotamian texts, in particular, repeatedly feature this notion. The careful attention of the potter is indicative of the profound degree of intimacy that God has lavished on his creation; with his own hands he has shaped the very frame of man. The poetic imagery evoked by Genesis is made explicit in Job: “Consider that you fashioned me like clay” (10:9); “You and I are the same before God; I too was formed from clay” (33:6); and human beings are depicted as dwelling “in houses of clay, whose origin is dust” (4:19). The imagery expresses both the glory and insignificance of man, since God has formed him and breathed his own breath into him. Simultaneously, he is but dust formed from the earth, mere clay in the hands of his God. An oft-cited analogue is “homo ... humus.”

Vawter asks us to notice the “solemnity of the formula” rather than the action, for nothing, he argues, has yet been said “to distinguish man from the other animals who will also share a bodily form shaped from the earth and breathe the breath bestowed on them by the creator” (67). In fact, what distinguishes Adam from the other animals is the way in which God has formed him. Unlike the animals, Adam is formed by God’s own hands, implying a more intimate relation between God and Adam than between God and the animals that he has spoken into existence. Greater care is taken with Adam—only Adam
and Eve come into existence through the warm touch of God’s hands—they are of the utmost importance.

I border here on an anthropomorphism that Vawter is conscious to avoid. Simply because God “formed” Adam from the red clay need not imply that God has hands; but such an image does not necessarily signal anthropomorphism; rather it calls attention to the uniqueness of Adam’s creation. The point is not whether God has hands, but that Adam was formed in a manner different from that of creation. The Hebraist relates the intimate and personal connection between God and humanity, established at creation. Between God and the animals is the spoken word; between God and man is his touch.

This intimacy is enforced by God’s breathing life into Adam’s nostrils. To call into being suggests a degree of detachment not admitted by God’s “forming” of Adam. Longinus understood the awesome power contained in the Genesis account, choosing to include it as an example of “Great Writing,” for he argues that

the lawgiver of the Jews, no ordinary man, since he recognized and expressed divine power according to its worth, expressed that power clearly when he wrote at the beginning of his laws: ‘And God said.’

What? ‘Let there be light, and there was light; let there be land, and there was land.’ 14

Yet God does not say, “Let there be man, and there was man.” Instead, with his own hands God fashions Adam, and into Adam’s nostrils his own breath he breathes. Gerhard Von Rad argues that it is this divine breath, uniting with the material body, which “makes man a ‘living soul’ both from the physical as well as from the psychical side. This life springs directly from God, as directly as the lifeless human body received breath from
God’s mouth when he bent over it.”15 The immediacy of God and Adam is imagined more intimately by Kidner, who sees in this act of creation an image which is “warmly personal, with the face-to-face intimacy of a kiss and the significance that this was an act of giving as well as making; and self-giving at that.”16 Christian commentators like Kidner often associate this act with John 20:22, where Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit and the animating breath of the church. While the latter image is allegorical, the image of God breathing into Adam’s nostrils emphasizes a bond that is spiritual and physical.

It is difficult not to project onto this scene Elisha’s resurrecting of the Shunammite woman’s son, since when Elisha finds the child dead, he

lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm ... and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. (2 Kgs 4:33-34)

While Elisha brings the child back to life (with God’s power), God himself begins Adam’s life—God alone breathes life into a lump of clay. Adam’s life begins with God’s breath, and God’s active and personal role signifies that he is present; indeed, God’s breathing into Adam’s nostrils implies that God is bent over the man, his face just above him, his lips now touching what his hands have made. Von Rad notes how this passage (2:4-9) is “concerned with man, his creation, and the care God devoted to him.”17 Only when inspired with the divine breath does this adama become Adam. The word for breath is Nesama, and this “divine vital power is personified, individualized, but only by its entry into the material body; and only this breath when united with the body makes man a ‘living creature.’”18 Robert Davidson interprets the intensely personal way “in
which God breathed into his [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life ... [as indicating] that peculiar relationship between God and man which the creation hymn described in terms of ‘image’ and ‘likeness.’” Being in the “image” of God means that man possesses the very breath of God. Peculiar as this relationship may be, the Genesis account leaves little doubt about the unprecedented intimacy between God and Adam.

Adam’s Recollection of God in Paradise Lost

Milton incorporates the central features of Adam’s creation, but he does not emphasize the physical intimacy which we have witnessed Genesis to contain. As in Genesis 2, Milton has Raphael use the same two verbs to relate Adam’s creation. Raphael tells Adam that God “form’d thee, Adam, thee O Man / Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breath’d / The breath of Life” (7.524-26). As in Genesis, Milton has God form Adam and breathe life into him. If Milton had said only this of Adam’s creation, there would be little evidence of the prophetic mode. But since Paradise Lost is an epic retelling of the first three chapters of Genesis, it would seem logical to expect an expanded account of Adam’s creation. Indeed, given that Milton enlarges and enriches the creation of Eve, the animals, and the temptation and Fall, we should expect to find an amplified rendering of Adam’s creation and his first conscious moments.

We are not disappointed. One book later, Adam relates to Raphael his experience of creation. This imaginative account exhibits well the range and scope of Milton’s creative genius, since he imagines what it is like to be formed out of clay and breathed into by God. Structurally, Milton follows the biblical precedent by first giving a general
account and then providing the more explicit record, even as Genesis 1 provides an overview that is expanded by Genesis 2. Raphael informs Adam of the general features of his creation, and then Adam fleshes out the account by telling of his creation. And it is in Adam’s detailed account that Milton noticeably modifies the Genesis account.

Adam’s account is ambiguous in that he is remembering events: there is no omniscient narrator guiding us through the unfolding account. Given Adam’s prelapsarian condition, however, his memory may be presumed a reliable guide. At what point does Adam’s consciousness begin? In Genesis, it seems likely that he would have awakened and seen the face of God. At least, Adam would have gained consciousness in the physical presence of his maker, since God’s breath brings him to life. We have observed that Genesis 2 leaves us with an abiding sense of the physical intimacy of Adam’s creation, how God is present when Adam awakes. In Milton, Adam awakes completely alone,

As new wak’t from soundest sleep
Soft on the flow’ry herb I found me laid
In Balmy Sweat, which with his Beams the Sun
Soon dri’d, and on the reeking moisture fed. (8.253-56)

The intimacy is implied by Adam having found himself “laid” on the “flow’ry herb,” which suggests that someone has been very careful to lay Adam on a surface appropriate to the fragility of a freshly formed being. Roy Flannagan notes that this “would be the green growth near the ground, including grass and flowers but not shrubbery. ‘Herb’ would include everything next to the ground that does not have a woody stem; hence the softness.” Adam’s consciousness begins soon after he has been created, and his
awareness brings with it the realization that he is alone. Marjorie Nicolson suggests that Adam is created with the awareness of his own incompleteness, which is "augmented by the procession of living creatures that pass before him in pairs to be named." It is significant that Adam awakes to find himself alone, since it is precisely at this point where we would imagine God to be most present.

But God is not there, at least not in the same highly corporeal sense as in Genesis. Adam does not awake to find his Creator; rather a bed of herbs and a shining sun welcome his first moments of life. To assist our appreciation for the idiosyncratic nature of Milton's account, let us look at Michelangelo's depiction of Adam's first moments in his *Creation of Adam*:
This is one of the defining portraits of creation, and many of our own convictions about Adam’s creation are perhaps contained in Michelangelo’s masterwork. Adam is only one of the 300 figures painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, a work that required Michelangelo to spend four years on a scaffolding of his own design. What dominates the painting of Adam is a sense of beauty, grace, and sublimity. Helen De Borchgrave argues that the “mystery which surrounds the transcendent God, long white beard and hair streaming behind him, is enshrined in the mantle which enfolds him, and the angelic creatures within it.” Adam is not without his grandeur, for we feel along with Giorgio Vasari that he is “a figure of such a kind in its beauty, in the attitude, and in the outlines, that it appears as if newly fashioned by the first and supreme Creator rather than by the brush and design of mortal men.”

The positioning of Adam and God is significant as well, since the line of their gaze places God only slightly above Adam, and “proclaims a new ideal image of men and women: heroic, nude, and beautiful as the gods and goddesses of Greece.” More to the point here is the way in which Michelangelo depicts Adam’s first moments of consciousness—spent not alone but looking upon the face of God. In contrast with Milton’s account, Michelangelo’s Adam looks fully upon the figure of God. There is no dazzling cloud obscuring God from Adam’s gaze. The outstretched hands intimate a desire to connect and a warm, sensuous act of human flesh being touched by the Immortal; from the outstretched arm of the Creator flows the gift of life and the knowledge of its sacred giver. Their mutual act of looking imparts an unmistakable sense of God and Adam coming to know each other, and of their being able to look upon each other; Adam is able to behold God without shielding his eyes; he can even stretch his
hand towards him. But even so, "his glance meets that of Eve, who nestles yet unborn in the shelter of the Lord’s left arm. No artist ever achieved so dramatic a juxtaposition of Man and God." 

Michelangelo suggests Adam and God’s candidness and lack of shame by turning them towards the viewer. There is nothing concealed in their pose. It is interesting to note that Michelangelo positions Adam’s entry into the world of consciousness at the end of God’s finger (suspended very near to Adam’s), since the Hebrew Scriptures record that it was God’s breath that infused in him the spark of life. Michelangelo thus establishes a telling distance between Adam and God, for while God is depicted in a physical form, he is projected as a God who remains more distant than the God of Genesis, who brings Adam to life with his warm breath.

In Paradise Lost Adam awakes to find himself covered in “Balmy Sweat,” which calls to mind the image of a newborn, and yet it is the sun, not the Son or Father, that dries him off. The sun feeding “on the reeking moisture” suggests a natural intimacy, since it is helping creation by drying Adam, and it warrants several observations. First, these lines are noticeably similar to those in Andrew Marvell’s “Damon the Mower,” when Damon declares that,

I am the Mower Damon, known
Through all the meadows I have mown.
On me the morn her dew distills
Before her darling daffodils.
And, if at noon my toil me heat,
The sun himself licks off my sweat.
While, going home, the evening sweet
In cowslip-water bathes my feet.26

Here, Marvell captures the glorious sense of Damon’s near-Edenic experience of a world still fresh with the dew of creation. Marvell’s imagery lingers with the redemptive, since the bathing of Damon’s feet at “the evening sweet” signifies his being cleansed and refreshed at the day’s close. It also expresses beautifully the reciprocity of man and nature, for as Damon sweats, the sun licks off the moisture; however, in the cool of the evening, the moisture is returned, bathing the feet of the weary mower. The image of the sun licking off Damon’s sweat is striking in its similarity to Adam’s “balmy sweat” being consumed by the sun. Whereas Marvell seems to be evoking the imagery of a cow licking off her newborn calf (which creates a bond between them and is necessary to the calf’s survival), Milton’s imagery reminds us of Adam’s creation.

This sweat is wryly ironic, too, since while it refers to the fluid covering Adam and suggests the biblical use of balm as a healing ointment, it also looks forward to a consequence of the Fall; for God tells Adam, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gn 3:19). The difference between dust and an earthen vessel is partly one of moisture: out of the adamah Adam is formed, and to have the clay suitably prepared so that it may be formed requires a significant amount of water. Even as water allows clay pots to be thrown by the potter, so Adam is still moist with the liquid of his creation, and, much as clay is left to dry in the sun, so Adam has been set aside by God to dry.
Adam recalls that his first thoughts were of how he had come to be, and of how he might know and adore his Creator. These thoughts leave Adam troubled, and he remembers how,

Pensive I sat me down; there gentle sleep
First found me, and with soft oppression seiz’d
My drowsed sense, untroubl’d, though I thought
I then was passing to my former state
Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve:
When suddenly stood at my Head a dream,
Whose inward apparition gently mov’d
My fancy to believe I yet had being,
And liv’d: One came, methought, of shape Divine … (8. 287-295)

How different is Adam’s meeting with God here from that in Genesis. But several important considerations should temper our observations of Adam’s encounter with God. First, Adam is only a few hours old, and as he begins to fall asleep, he wonders if he may be “passing to [his] former state,” because sleep is a new phenomenon for him. Milton captures the sense of Adam softly passing from waking to sleep. C.S. Lewis notes how the syntax is deliberately ambiguous in order properly to render Adam’s “crumbling of consciousness.” In addition, it is with “soft oppression” that Adam’s “drowsed sense” is “seiz’d.” Sleep is both gentle and absolute. It comes upon Adam much like the fragrance of the flowers in which he lies down, and yet sleep “seiz’d” him, which implies its forceful and irresistible properties.
The event more closely resembles a “prophetic vision” than a physical encounter, for, as Adam sleeps, God appears in a dream but “suddenly.” The word “suddenly” is peculiar in this context, since it is unusual to recall a dream coming to us so quickly. It is as though when Adam closes his eyes, his inward eyes open and he sees a “shape divine.” By interjecting the word “suddenly,” Milton achieves a remarkable temporal effect. The sense of Adam gently drifting off to sleep obscures the clear boundary between waking and sleeping. As Adam begins to sleep, so he begins to wonder if he might be passing to his “former state / Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve” (290-91). Time’s passage is overshadowed by Adam’s contemplations, and echoes our own experience of reflecting upon some mighty idea as we fall asleep. The ephemeral quality of Adam’s transition to sleep, however, is shattered by the word “suddenly,” which connotes not only the instantaneousness of God’s appearance, but also the effect of Adam immediately discovering himself in an experience. It is more common to awake with a start than it is to dream suddenly, and the swift arrival of this dream implies that it is more than a dream.

The dreamlike features of Adam’s encounter with God intimate Adam’s uncertainty, for he says, “One came, methought, of shape Divine” (8.295). Since Adam is newly formed, it is logical that he would not know his visitor’s identity or the nature of his own dreaming. This is curious, however, since if Adam is able to intuit the presence of God through his reason, then one might assume that he would immediately recognize the sight of his Creator. As this divine apparition materializes, he takes Adam by the hand,
And over Fields and Waters, as in Air
Smooth sliding without step, last led me up
A woody Mountain; whose high top was plain,
A Circuit wide, enclos’d, with goodliest Trees
Planted, with Walks, and Bowers, that what I saw
Of Earth before scarce pleasant seem’d. (8. 301-306)

The alliteration of “smooth sliding without step” conveys the effortless sensation of Adam being easily transported to the mountaintop, while locating his experience within the liquid parameters of dream. After the fall, Adam will once again be led to a mountaintop by Michael, but will only be able to “see” after having “from the Well of Life three drops instill’d” (11.416) upon his eyes. To be guided to a mountaintop signifies the beginning of a prophetic experience, for it is on the mountaintop that the prophet or poet can be alone with his God or muse, the elevation enabling him to see further and more clearly. As Flannagan notes, Milton is also following the biblical precedent contained in Genesis 2:8, 15, where “Adam is assumed to have been created outside of Paradise and then placed in it” (443 n.85), but for Adam, the location is both physical and spiritual, and he awakens to find the dream a reality.

The sights of this lovely walled-in plateau and the fruits thereof stir Adam’s appetite. So beautiful is the garden that Adam knows he must be dreaming. But at that moment, “I wak’d, and found / Before mine Eyes all real, as the dream / Had lively shadow’d.” This is a stunning depiction by Milton, for the dream is capable only of foreshadowing the glories of this garden. For us, postlapsarian dreams of a perfect world are superior to actual existence; but here Adam finds his dream to be a poor imitation of
the real thing. Even a prophetic vision cannot match the splendid reality of God’s creation.

Adam's Visionary Encounter With God

God awakens Adam and then tells him he may eat of every tree save one. As in the Hebrew Scriptures, Milton provides no description of God's physical appearance. We are only told that this is a "shape divine." In addition, this knowledge is situated within the episode of Adam's dream, which adds to its ineffability. When Adam awakes and is fully conscious, he can tell Raphael only that "with awe, / In adoration at his feet I fell" (314-14): this is all we "see" of God after Adam's dream. What these feet looked like we are not told, and the emphasis is on Adam's obeisance, not God's feet. God is most fully realized in Adam's dream, since when Adam is awake he provides few details of how God has chosen to manifest himself.

God's portrayal is more complex, however, since it is clear that Adam is in fact "seeing" God: he is talking with him, and he names the animals in God's presence. God sternly tells Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (8.333-34). Yet Adam tells Raphael that "soon his clear aspect / Return'd and gracious purpose thus renew'd" (8.336-37). The word "aspect" derives from the Latin speicere, "to observe, look at," and, in the context of Adam's conversation, it appears to mean the appearance of God as viewed by Adam. Adam is describing a change of expression on God's face, but we cannot be certain since a person's "aspect" can be more than facial. We expect Adam to be more explicit in his depiction; in fact, Adam does not describe what God's
aspect is, relating only that his "clear" aspect "return'd," but what it returned to is not stated. The effect Milton achieves here is splendid, for he describes not God but Adam looking at God. Milton conveys God's changing countenance through the observation of it, which suitably relates God's dynamic and emotional nature. Adam is a kind of mirror in which we dimly see the reflection of God. We do not see God any more plainly than when he is presented in heaven.

Leland Ryken argues that "Milton's anthropomorphism takes the form of the rhetorical figure of synecdoche, in which a whole person is designated by one of its parts or aspect."\(^{27}\) In this instance, Milton's use of synecdoche is misleading, since it does not lead to the concrete realization of the whole. God's eye is the most frequently mentioned of his physical parts, and it is clearly synecdochic. When in book 3 God bends "down his eye / His own works ... to view (58-59), we recognize the eye to "convey a sense of his omniscience."\(^{28}\) Yet when Adam tells Raphael that "with awe, / In adoration at his [God's] feet I fell" (314-14), the rhetorical figure of synecdoche is inaccurate, since the feet do not signify the whole of God. It is difficult to define what figure of speech Milton is using here, since in Adam's experience God is present in a physical form; that is, in this manifestation God does indeed have feet, and Adam's mention of them is not representative of something else, but refers to God's actual feet. What we perceive as metaphorical or synecdochic is, in fact, actual—Adam has fallen at God's feet. If we recall Genesis 3:8, we may readily ascribe feet to God, since he is "walking" in the garden. But while we are allowed to see God's feet, and Adam prostrate before them, we are not permitted to see more. For example, what is the rest of the body like that is attached to the feet? In Genesis, we are only told that Adam and Eve "hear" the sound of
God walking, which implies that he has manifested himself in a human form even though it is not portrayed (but Adam and Eve’s physical form is not presented here either). The effect Milton achieves here is remarkable for its evasiveness: he ascribes feet to God, but he does not allow our inquiring eyes to see further.

Immediately after falling at God’s feet, Adam is “rear’d” by God, a pun since God has indeed reared Adam. God then directs Adam’s eyes away from him and onto the surrounding landscape: “Author of all this thou seest / Above, or round about thee or beneath. / This Paradise I give thee, count it thine” (7.317-319). The focus is guided toward creation and away from the Creator, and when our gaze is directed to the “Tree whose operation brings / Knowledge of good and ill” (323-24), questions concerning the appearance of God fade. Ryken summarizes Milton’s depiction of God’s physical features as tending “to concentrate on separate physical members, never encouraging us to visualize God as a total human form ... [D]espite the consistent portrayal of God in anthropomorphic images, we are not intended to respond to Adam’s description with a visualized conception of God as a human being.” In fact, beyond the presence of God’s feet, it is quite impossible to imagine what form God has chosen to adopt in his meeting with Adam. Unlike the Genesis account, where God walks in the garden and converses openly with Adam and Eve, Milton presents us with an abiding sense of God’s sublimity and mystery, so that, even in the middle of Eden in a state of perfection, Adam can at best catch only a glimpse of God’s feet or hands.

Adam’s experience relates the uncertain nature of God’s appearance. After naming the animals, Adam tells Raphael that he “to the Heav’nly vision thus presum’d” (8.356). This is still God, but Adam now beholds him as a “heav’nly vision,” which is
different from the God at whose feet he earlier fell. After asking this “vision” about his solitary state, the “vision Bright, / As with a smile more bright’n’d, thus repli’d” (8.367-68). This is not the first record of God smiling. In relating to Adam the events of the rebellion in heaven, Raphael recalls that God, “smiling to his only Son thus said” (5.718). Precisely how Raphael is able to see God smiling is not clear, since the “brightest seraphim” must use their wings to shield their eyes from God’s brilliant countenance (3.382). Abdiel, for instance, after returning from the rebel angels’ camp, is praised by God who reveals himself as “a voice / From midst a Golden Cloud” (6.27-28). It seems likely that the angels are able to see God more clearly than Adam, though this is only inferred. Adam’s recollection of God’s appearance, however, is less certain, and this is as close as Adam comes to describing God’s facial expressions. Yet we should not even assume that God is in fact smiling, since Adam maintains a subtle metaphorical distance by using the word “as.”

How complex and evasive Milton’s depiction of God is! First, God is not exactly in human form, but he is a “vision bright.” Second, the vision becomes “more bright’n’d,” and this brightness is so fierce that it prevents Adam from seeing much of anything, though he perceives that the “vision bright” has become even brighter. Adam likens this change to a smile. Presumably, the simile is between the vision becoming brighter and the way in which one’s face may be “lit up” by a smile. This is similar in effect to Adam’s remembering his first moments of life, when he recalls how “all things smil’d” (8.265); this refers to all creation, implying its perfect beauty and joy. In regard to God’s countenance, however, the simile ever so subtly suggests that God is, in fact, smiling. Now Milton does not have Adam say that God smiled; but even so the simile
implies that he is smiling. Milton provides a description of God smiling without actually depicting God smiling. Furthermore, as M.H. Abrams says, a simile is "a comparison between two distinctly different things." And in this instance the difference is between God and the smile. It is as if Milton is saying that God is smiling, but because he is infinitely greater than human features, a smile is "distinctly different" from his expression. Milton’s God is at once anthropomorphic (smiling) and distinctly not anthropomorphic. In these two lines, Milton expresses Adam’s sense of “seeing” God without “seeing” him at all.

The remaining portion of Adam’s encounter with God enforces this metaphorical distance. When Adam next describes God, he says simply that “th’Almighty answer’d, not displeas’d” (8.398). Here, Adam gives no clues to the Almighty’s countenance as he replied and does not even inform us of his tone, only that he was “not displeas’d.” Upon questioning God further on his solitary condition, Adam receives an “answer from the gracious voice Divine” (8.436). The voice is now “gracious,” which suggests a shift in tone from God’s answer that was “not displeas’d.” The dearth of physical description dislocates God by not fixing him in an exact location; instead, God is answering Adam in different voices from a variety of places. Since God is pictured only as an answering voice, he could be in any form and in any location. We do not know if God is standing beside Adam or hovering over him; indeed, God seems to be all around Adam. God’s presence dazzles Adam, allowing him to discern but various degrees of brightness and subtle nuances in God’s tone.

God’s voice changes from “not displeas’d” to “gracious”; but precisely how God’s tone is different is not clear; how God chooses to manifest himself to Adam is
similarly nebulous. We know that God has a hand, since it is Adam’s hand that God takes when leading him up the mountain (8.300), that God has feet, since Adam falls at them in adoration (8.315), and that he has a voice. Beyond these vague observations, Adam provides us with almost no description of God’s appearance. Milton could have presented God differently. Because Adam is unfallen, it is plausible that he could grasp more of God’s appearance than a postlapsarian creature can; and, presumably, life in the garden would have existed beyond the realm of simile or metaphor. Milton makes just this point when, after the fall, Adam is again given a mountaintop experience, but this time it is Michael, not God, who is his guide, which implies the chasm sin has made between Creator and created.

Before the fall, Adam would have enjoyed a more physical relationship with his maker, beholding more of God’s presence than anyone thereafter, prophet or patriarch. A sense of this intimacy between Adam and Eve and God is related in the Genesis account, “When they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Gn 3:8). The feeling of guilt is manifested by what Adam and Eve do rather than by what they say, but God’s presence intimates a ritual or habit, even as it implies that God has chosen to reveal himself freely in a human form. Vawter interprets this verse in the following manner:
When they hear the sound of God making his way through the lush undergrowth of the garden on what is presumably his daily stroll in the coolness of the evening breeze, they show at one and the same time their old familiarity with his habits and their new feeling of embarrassment at his presence.31

That God should enjoy a “daily stroll” through the garden denotes his active interest in his creation and in what Adam and Eve are choosing to accomplish within it. That they hear God moving through the garden means that he is physically present. God is heard because he is making noise, which is a physical phenomenon. Also, the sound heightens the sense of Adam and Eve’s guilt, for as Davidson observes, “the reference is not to anything God says. He does not need to speak to bring home to man and woman a sense of guilt. The sound of Him moving in the garden is enough.”32 Kidner makes a similar point when he argues that their fallen condition brings with it the “impulse to hide from the presence (literally, ‘face’) of the Lord.”33 Their futile attempt to hide from God can also be ascribed to their fallen logic, since they believe it possible to hide from God. In addition, it implies that they were accustomed to God appearing in a form similar to their own; that is, they were used to God appearing in a physical form that was restricted to one place in one time.

Genesis presents an intimate and physical relation between Adam and Eve and God. They know approximately at what time he can be expected to visit them, implying “old familiarity” and routine. The image of God walking in the garden implies that he has chosen to manifest himself in a human form. In Paradise Lost, God does not enjoy a daily stroll through the garden. It is not God but Raphael who spends time conversing
with Adam and Eve—God spends very little time at all with Adam and even less with Eve. In the Genesis account, God’s presence is manifested equally to them both, not as a vision to Adam or a voice to Eve. In Genesis, God forms Adam with his hands, breathes into him, and speaks freely with the man and woman. Genesis provided Milton with ample opportunity to depict God visually, as he revealed himself to Adam and Eve. Yet, Milton downplays this interaction, keeping God the Father inconspicuous.

The Ineffable God: Adam and Eve’s Encounter With God

The remoteness of God is especially noticeable in Eve’s recollection of him. Unlike Adam, Eve sees nothing of God; she hears only a voice. Upon awaking from her creation and observing the natural world, Eve gazes into the smooth surface of a lake. So moved is she by her image that she might have stayed there indefinitely, “Had not a voice thus warned me, What thou seest, / What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself, / With thee it came and goes; but follow me” (4.467-69). It is not clear that this voice is God’s, since it is only “a voice.” Only after Adam tells Raphael that Eve was led to him “by her Heav’nly Maker, though unseen, / And guided by his voice” (8.485-86), can we be certain of the source of the voice. But even so the voice possesses a remarkable authority; “what could I do,” asks Eve, “But follow straight, invisibly thus led” (4.475-76). To follow an invisible entity is a perplexing enterprise, though presumably the voice continued to be heard so that it could be followed.

There is something of a processional quality to Eve’s advance, and Von Rad interprets this episode in Genesis to show that “God himself, like the father of the bride,
leads the woman to the man.” Milton, too, incorporates in his account the anticipation and joy of a wedding ceremony, for Adam notices that she is not “uninform’d / Of nuptial Sanctity and marriage Rites: / Grace was in her steps, Heav’n in her Eye, / In every gesture dignity and love. / I overjoy’d could not forbear aloud” (8.486-90). So moved is Adam by Eve’s approach that he discovers himself “overjoy’d.” We should pause to notice, for a moment, how exquisitely Milton captures the sense of Adam’s prelapsarian joy that is being expanded by Eve’s presence. Since Adam is unfallen, he is full of joy; however, in uniting with Eve, Adam’s joy is multiplied. Adam did not lack joy before Eve; rather, God has so blessed Adam with Eve that he now finds his joy overflowing its original bounds. Adam is perfect but not immutable, and God’s gift of Eve increases Adam’s joy beyond his ability to define. That God does not lead Eve by the hand and that she does not fall at his feet emphasizes how her encounter with God is different from Adam’s. Rather than have God manifest himself to Eve as he does to Adam, Milton has Eve hear and follow a voice to the true complement of her image. By drawing our attention to Adam’s joy and the pristine beauty and sanctity of this first wedding, Milton directs our eyes to rest fully on Adam and Eve, and God departs secretly from the scene.

Part of the vagueness surrounding Milton’s presentation of God to Adam and Eve is attributable to their being “newborns.” When he first experiences sleep, Adam wonders if he may not be passing to his “former state / Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve” (8.290-91). Since he is only a few hours old, this is a reasonable assumption, and it is only after he falls asleep that God appears and leads him into the garden. Adam awakes and finds “all real, as the dream / Had lively shadow’d” (8.310-11). In this astonished condition, God, “Up hither, from among the Trees appear’d” (8.313). Having wakened
from his dream, Adam “sees” God materialize, and after conversing with God, Adam’s energy is spent and he “sunk down, and sought repair / Of sleep, which instantly fell on [him]” (8.457-58). Adam’s sleep frames his physical encounter with God, since when he awakes and sees Eve, God is “unseen” (8.485) and leads Eve with his voice. In the place of God stands Eve, Adam’s soul mate, and she is wholly visible to his eye.

Adam’s encounter with God is framed by his sleep, which blurs the edges of his remembrance. It is as though this episode is more nearly a dream than a conscious waking moment. The parallelism is without flaw: Adam falls asleep and awakes to a meeting with God, then he falls asleep and awakes to meet Eve, and now God is invisible. The transition from God, Eve, and Adam to Adam and Eve alone is seamless. Adam’s gaze, and the reader’s, is now seized by the appearance of Eve, not the Creator, who presumably has disappeared back into the trees whence he came. As Adam first fell asleep vexed with his solitary state, he now awakens to his true complement. Within this frame, another sleep cycle marks Adam’s conversation with God. Thus, Milton encloses his depiction of God visiting Adam and Eve within the context of Adam’s two sleeps.

A pervading sense of ambiguity defines the nature of Adam’s contact with God. Unlike the Genesis account, which emphasizes the physically intimate relationship Adam and Eve enjoy with God, Milton draws attention to the difference and distance between God and Adam. In Genesis, both Eve and Adam enjoy daily visits with God, and it appears that they speak with him face to face. The image of God bending over the red clay, with his lips so near, perhaps even against Adam’s, denotes an openness and physical intimacy which Milton chooses not to depict. Even Michelangelo’s rendering of the creation account, where God holds Eve under his arm and Adam looks freely and
openly upon the face of God, conveys a greater sense of God’s physicality. In place of the anthropomorphism of Genesis, Milton has Adam, hovering in a pseudo-conscious state, encounter something that resembles a “shape divine”; only once does God present himself to Adam in this form, and Eve not at all. Milton is elusive in his depiction of God’s meeting with Adam, declining to portray God in the terms with which he is presented in Genesis. Adam’s encounter is thus recast in a more consciously rhetorical and less visually defined manner. The figures of synecdoche and metaphor serve to bring Adam and the reader into an apprehension of a sublime God that is iconoclastic.

Despite being unfallen, Adam must prove himself faithful to gain greater exposure to God. In Genesis, Adam and Eve participate in a physical relationship with God, while in *Paradise Lost* Milton imagines the creation of Adam and Eve as constituting only the beginning of their relationship with God. As their faithfulness is tested and proven, as each day illustrates the triumph of their will and fidelity to God, so they trace the upward progression to their Creator. Time will bring to pass greater manifestations of God, allowing creation to move ever closer to him. Milton has God say that humanity will dwell on earth,

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till by degrees of merit rais’d
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tri’d,
And Earth be chang’d to Heaven, and Heaven to Earth,
One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end. (7.157-61)
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This is how Adam and Eve’s proximity to God was to have developed, and Milton’s emphasis on height and elevation calls attention to the vast distance that Adam and Eve’s
obedience would have compassed. U. Milo Kaufmann reads in this passage God’s promise of goods which transcend paradise, for “Eden constitutes one version of the marriage of earth and heaven, but by no means the only one and plainly not even the best.” Kaufmann finds in Milton’s depiction of paradise evidence of a larger shift in seventeenth-century thought, which is “a shift from static pastoral enclaves to images of joyful career and idealized process. Felicity becomes inseparable from openness and change.”

It is this capacity for change which defines Adam and Eve’s experience of paradise, and even of God. There is little doubt that earth has been created lower than heaven, but even so time and faithfulness will enable this creation to enjoy an increasing capacity for beholding God. As Adam and Eve stand, so they will come to experience more of God’s presence. Milton’s portrayal of our first parents emphasizes their mutability. Even though they have been made perfect, it is only through their continued faithfulness that they will advance nearer to him. Yet how different this is from Genesis, where Adam and Eve begin with complete access to God, conversing with him daily as he walks in the garden. God’s daily stroll through the garden implies that Adam and Eve need not aspire to heaven, but rather, Eden is heavenly enough that God can manifest himself—much as he is—within it. In Genesis, Adam and Eve participate in full and complete communion with God. They experience God more fully than their children will, for they see God not in a vision, but face to face. For Milton, such physical intimacy is only to be attained “under long obedience tri’d.” Adam and Eve must first prove themselves worthy and capable of their freedom; only then will they behold a fuller manifestation of God.
Our reading of Adam and Eve’s single meeting with God provides a very different sense of Milton’s representation of God than is traditionally understood. In contrast to Genesis, God in Paradise Lost does not walk “with” his creation in the “cool of the evening,” nor does he appear openly to them. In her mention of Milton’s depiction of God, Barbara Lewalski comments that he found biblical warrant for portraying God as an epic character, “who expresses a range of emotions … who makes himself visible and audible to his creatures by various means, and who engages in dialogue with his Son and with Adam.” But not with Eve. And, as I have sought to clarify, the nature of God’s visible self-revelation to Adam is at least ambiguous and noticeably unlike the very visible and physical relation that both Adam and Eve enjoy with him in Genesis.

Milton’s conception of Adam’s colloquy with God is closer to the visionary experiences of the prophets. As in the accounts of Isaiah and Ezekiel, God is depicted as a blinding light, ineffable and all encompassing. So majestic is he that Adam immediately collapses in reverence at his feet. It is God who “rears” Adam so that he may stand in his presence, even as God commands the spirit to enter Ezekiel and set him upon his feet (Ez 2:2), and as God sends the seraph to place the burning coal upon Isaiah’s lips so that his iniquity may be removed and his sin purged (Is 6:6-7). In the prophetic visions of God, a profound sense of solemnity and occasion dominate. We cannot forget the sacredness of the prophet’s call nor can we fully comprehend the unique manner in which God manifests himself. In the prophetic accounts, the skills of the poet are employed to convey properly the magnificence of the event. We do well to recall Rosenblatt’s
observation that Adam speaks with a boldness reminiscent of Abraham, for while the
prophet humbly assents to God’s prompting, Adam dares to enquire of God’s ways. But
even so, Adam’s daring illustrates even more explicitly how different his experience is
from Abraham’s, who has the audacity to haggle with God over the number of righteous
required to spare Sodom; and while Abraham may dispute with God, Moses flatly refuses
to carry out God’s bidding. God appears to Abraham as a desert nomad, so ordinary as to barely warrant attention, and enjoys a midday meal with him. His form is physical and ordinary, though Abraham knows that this is no common guest. Although Adam may echo Abraham’s words, God is to him a “vision bright,” a “gracious voice divine,” a force so powerful that conversation with him must soon drain him of strength.

How very different indeed is Milton’s depiction of God from the Genesis account. *Paradise Lost* is not a remedied version of Genesis nor does it constitute a subtle negotiation between the alleged two Genesis narratives. Instead, Milton’s epic projects a different vision of paradise altogether. Milton’s departure from Genesis is especially noticeable in his treatment of Adam and Eve’s experience of God. That God should fashion Adam from the red clay with his own hands, breathe into him the warm breath of life, and then visit with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening, provides a more anthropomorphic and uncanny sense of God than that afforded by Milton’s depiction of Adam talking with the “shape divine.” In Milton’s epic, the sublimity of God remains the foremost consideration: he is radiant, dazzling, ineffable, and incorporeal. Though Adam speaks with him, he can only vaguely discern his features within the cloud of his radiant beauty, and Milton conspicuously denies his Adam the easy access and physical intimacy that the Genesis account accords him. Milton’s depiction of God is less in the tradition of
the J, E, P, or Moses narratives and closer to those visionary accounts recorded by the prophets. The promise of the prophets is the promise of future blessings, a looking forward to a time when creation and Creator shall at last be reunited. For Milton's Adam, it is only once, in a state akin to a prophetic trance, that he comes to speak with God, and throughout his celestial colloquy, God remains obscured behind the veil of his brilliant holiness: a curtain that will not be rent asunder until the day that time shall be no more, “And Earth be chang’d to Heaven, and Heaven to Earth / One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end” (7.160-61).
Chapter 2 Endnotes

4 Ibid.
9 Kolbrener, 142.
12 Vawter, 66.
16 Kidner, 60.
17 Von Rad, 76.
18 Ibid., 77.
19 Davidson, 31.
21 Nicolson, 277.
25 Ibid., 445.
28 Ibid., 132.
29 Ibid., 131.
31 Vawter, 81.
32 Davidson, 41-42.
33 Kidner, 69.
34 Von Rad, 84.
36 Ibid., 7.
37 Lewalski, 420.
After having eaten of the “fruit of that forbidden Tree,” Adam and Eve are told by Michael that they must leave the garden of Eden. This is one of Milton’s most moving scenes, and the pathos evoked by our first parents’ realization of the consequence of their act grows with their burgeoning understanding of the sober new world they are to inhabit. All the action of the epic has been moving towards this wrenching moment; yet so poignant and powerful is Adam and Eve’s lament for their native soil that it strikes with unanticipated vigour. Michael Lieb argues that Adam’s sorrowful evocation provides readers with “the most comprehensive statement concerning God’s presence.”¹ In leaving Eden, Adam eloquently expresses the intimacy he had enjoyed with God, and perhaps it is only in leaving the garden that Adam comes to appreciate fully what he had enjoyed. Adam’s regret, however, is not only for those experiences that will never be enjoyed again, but also for those experiences that had not yet been—and now never will be. To be removed from the garden threatens the far greater loss of God withdrawing his presence. Adam’s lament refers to life in the garden, but it also expresses what he wishes he could have said. As we hold in our memory the nature of Adam’s visit with God in the earlier books, Adam’s lament exquisitely communicates his sorrow at leaving Eden and the intimacy he enjoyed there with God; but within his grief is a most consoling prophecy—despite the sin of Adam and Eve, God will remain involved in the lives of their children. Adam mourns the loss of Eden, and yet those places in the garden where he wishes he
could have told his children that he met with God will be the places outside of the garden where God will meet with Adam’s offspring and restore them to himself—he will be their God and they will be his people. Adam’s lament contains the promise that though Eden be lost, the God who created it will himself be found.

In this chapter, I will explore the significance of Michael’s meeting with Adam, and argue that Milton’s likening of Michael’s descent to the angels’ appearance to Jacob at Mahanaim and to Elisha at Dothan are fundamental to our reading of Adam’s lament because they demonstrate God’s active presence in the lives of Adam’s sons. Milton’s references to these biblical episodes draw readers beyond the immediate events of Adam’s fall and point to the promise of restoration. Second, I will contend that Adam’s desire to raise altars signifies his desire to meet with God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, altars are a visible declaration of one’s devotion to God, and it is Adam’s sons who will raise the altars that Adam wishes to have raised. Then, I will explore the master images of mounts, trees, pines, and fountains as they are developed in the Scriptures. Two points will be emphasized: one, these are places where God reveals himself to Adam’s children; two, each place is an image of final restoration. I will close the chapter by arguing the latent promise of Adam’s lament: paradise is lost, but God will be found. As Milton reveals the magnitude of Adam’s sorrow, he surveys the majesty of God’s grace.
The promise of God’s abiding presence is expressed throughout *Paradise Lost*, but even so it achieves greater urgency with Adam and Eve’s exile. The loss of Eden threatens the loss of communion with God. Since all prelapsarian life originates with God, the implicit promise is that it will similarly find its end in him as well. The Fall severs this natural progression, and Adam and Eve correctly interpret their loss of Eden as more than the vacating of a parcel of Mesopotamian farmland; their expulsion is physical and spiritual. Milton, however, draws attention to God’s provision, and the arrival of Michael and his radiant band of angels enforces this promise. While they are sent to remove Adam and Eve from the garden, the angels’ arrival is presented in terms that promise future concord.

Michael and his band of angels descend, yet while Adam quickly discerns Raphael as a “Heav’nly stranger” (5.316), Michael’s approach is less assuredly beheld. Adam witnesses this heavenly phenomenon, observing “Morning Light / More orient in yon Western Cloud that draws / O’er the blue firmament a radiant white, / And slow descends, with something heav’nly fraught” (11.204-207). Milton’s portrayal of Michael’s descent is exclusively visual, while Raphael’s flight incorporated a range of physical sensation. When he shook his plumes, for instance, “Heav’nly fragrance fill’d / The circuit wide” (5.286-87). Adam discerns Michael’s approach only generally because “doubt / And carnal fear that day dimm’d Adam’s eye” (11.211-12). Adam’s diminished sight beholds the angels’ descent as a general phenomenon; he cannot discern if this slowly descending light is a natural occurrence or a heavenly one. Presumably, with
unfallen sight, Adam would have seen that this was more than a “radiant white” light 
descending. His prelapsarian intellectual facility lingers, and he intuits that this is 
“something heav’nly fraught” (11.207). The narrator agrees, “He err’d not, for by this the 
heav’nly Bands / Down from a Sky of Jasper lighted now / In Paradise, and on a Hill 
made halt” (11.208-10). Adam’s sight is not what it was; as C.A. Patrides puts it, Adam 
is “no longer able to read the book of nature as infallibly as he used to.” Adam can still 
recognize that this dazzling sight is celestial. The correspondence between seeing and 
comprehending is not what it was, nor does Adam see with the clarity he earlier enjoyed. 
Now, he must ponder events to understand their significance, unlike his natural 
instinctive reasoning that soon led him to understand that he was the work of “some great 
maker” (8.278). The seamless connection between cognition and recognition is now rent 
asunder; to borrow Geoffrey Hartman’s terms from his discussion of Wordsworth, we 
can say that Adam’s cognitive acts are now acts of “re-cognition leading to recognition.”

As Michael descends to earth, so Adam and Eve must descend into the world 
from their garden of bliss. But, simultaneously, Milton interjects hope, reminding us of 
God’s earlier command to Michael that he “dismiss them not disconsolate” (11.113). 
Adam and Eve will not return to the garden, but they will not leave God’s presence. 
Milton intimates this promise in his description of Michael’s descent, for he comes clad 
in the panoply of his celestial glory:

Not that more glorious, when the Angels met
Jacob in Mahanaim, where he saw
The field Pavilion’d with his Guardians bright;
Nor that which on the flaming Mount appear’d
In Dothan, cover'd with a Camp of Fire,
Against the Syrian King, who to surprise
One man, Assassin-like had levied War,
War unproclaim'd. (11.213-220)

Unlike his other descriptions of heavenly beings descending, here Milton restricts his allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures, and these references are well suited to this occasion. First, the anadiplosis “war” emphasizes the combative element contained within these allusions, for both Jacob and Elisha are, to the human sight, in physical danger: Jacob in returning to his homeland and the brother he cheated, and Elisha in being the target of the Syrian army. Anna Nardo argues that these two occasions exemplify the primary tasks of angels in human history: guarding the good and chastising the wicked (though angels often serve as messengers, too). Both Jacob and Elisha are chosen by God, and once again they are given ocular proof of his abiding presence. Regardless whether the opponent be one’s wronged brother or an enraged king, God’s grace is sufficient.

Jacob’s experience at Mahanaim is important to Adam’s lament because with it Milton reminds readers of God’s intervention in the lives of Adam’s children. The angels do not know the vital role they will play in the future of humanity; neither can Adam and Eve know that God will be intimately involved with their children. The angels’ appearance at Mahanaim occurs as Jacob is crossing a border, and Michael, too, has been sent to prepare Adam for crossing the borders of Eden. But while Jacob is following God’s prompting to return to the land of his Fathers, Adam is leaving the land of his Father. In the Jacob narrative, Mahanaim marks the place where Jacob has recently finished settling his affairs with Laban, and is now preparing to meet with Esau:
And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place. And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim. And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. (Gn 31:55-32:3)

The episode marks a transition in Jacob’s life, for his dealings with Laban have been settled, but now he returns to his homeland and a potentially greater threat—Esau, the brother whom Jacob had cheated. And it is at this place where the narrative cycle leaves Jacob’s troubled dealings with Laban and returns to his relationship with Esau, which was the focus of the earlier chapters. Milton’s invoking of Jacob’s experience at Mahanaim draws from an episode that is vigorously debated, for critics are divided as to whether the appearance of the angels constitutes a separate episode, marks the beginning of a new section, or completes the previous one beginning with 31:1.

Mahanaim comes from the Hebrew meaning “two camps,” and certainly there is a “two-ness” about the events. The Jacob-Esau saga now replaces the Jacob-Laban cycle. Gordon Wenham observes how these narratives are intertwined and furthered by the “overall palistrophic arrangement of the Jacob cycle,” since the incident at Mahanaim (32:2-3) “parallels his experience at Bethel [28:12,17,19].” The “whole narrative is based on the premise that Jacob is returning to his homeland and to his father Isaac.” Within this larger cycle is Rachel, who has deceived her father and fled from him after misappropriating his household gods, which “represent the patriarchal blessing and inheritance.” Such deception hearkens back to Jacob’s earlier act of misappropriating
Isaac’s blessing, after which he fled. The Hebrew text is even more precise in its correspondence, for the verb used to describe Laban’s search for his missing gods in 31:34, 37 (he “felt” for them, from the stem mas hash) is the same verb used to describe Isaac’s “feeling” of Jacob’s hands in 27:22, and there is even a curious foreshadowing of the servants “feeling” for Joseph’s cup planted in Benjamin’s sack (44:1-3, 11-12). Bruce Waltke draws to our attention the “two-ness” of this passage when he contends that “the narrator employs the number two throughout the scene: two camps, two families, two meetings—one with God and Esau—and two brothers.” While more than two critical camps have amassed around this scene, there is critical consensus that Mahanaim makes use of a larger chiastic pattern.

Jacob’s meeting with the angels at Mahanaim mirrors the vision he experienced at Bethel in several important ways. First, in both instances, Jacob encounters a theophany as he crosses the border into another country. At Bethel, as he leaves the land of Beersheba and journeys toward Haran, Jacob sees the angels ascending and descending on the ladder stretching to heaven, and the “Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed” (28:13). Similarly, in Paradise Lost, it is when Satan is crossing a boundary (3.496) in his journey from hell to earth, that he views a set of stairs ascending to the wall of heaven (3.503); these stairs “were such as whereon Jacob saw / Angels ascending and descending” (3.510-11). Clifton Allen observes that, “as Jacob was visited by angels when he left Palestine, he was met by them when he returned.” But while the staircase assures Jacob, its presence invites and mocks any attempt Satan might make to ascend the stairs to heaven. Jacob awakes and cries “This is the gate of Heav’n”
(3.515; Gn 28:17). Gates are thresholds that allow and restrict both entrance and exit, and God sends angels to escort Jacob; but as a fallen angel, Satan can only look upon the gate in despair. Roland Frye interprets Satan’s position, looking down “with wonder at the sudden view / Of all this World” (3.542-43), as an unwitting parody of God, “for as the Deity traditionally stood at the head of the ladder looking down in blessing, Satan here stands at its foot looking down with malevolence.”

Von Rad, Wellhausen, and Allen have speculated that the account of Mahanaim may constitute a North Israelite version of the Penuel story, because they are so similar. H.C. Leupold instructively comments that “it is quite appropriate that here at the borders of the land of promise they [the angels] put in their appearance. Their object was, without a doubt, to afford Jacob reassurance at a time when he was about to need it sorely.” This is not his first assurance, “angels had reassured Jacob at Bethel (ch.28) … but now especially because Jacob was following a course prescribed by God.” John Walvoord and Roy Zuck note that “the expression ‘the angels of God’ occurs only in 32:1 and in 28:12 in the Old Testament” and Jacob’s response at Bethel, “This is the gate of heaven” is echoed when he exclaims, “This is the camp of God.” Kidner voices a common view when he remarks that the “force of the name Mahanaim, ‘double camp,’ is that Jacob’s own company, as he could now see, was matched by another.” This sense of doubleness is vital to our understanding of Mahanaim, for it enforces God’s promise to counter any human threat. As Everett Fox explains, “From this starting point everything is subsequently a matter of ‘two camps’ or two levels: the divine and the human.”

The parallelism extends further, since what happened at the naming of Bethel on Jacob’s departure reoccurs at Mahanaim. For Adam Clarke, this episode demonstrates to
Jacob that he is "under the care of an especial providence, and ... to confirm his trust and confidence in God." The appearance of God's host galvanizes God's promise to Jacob that he is not alone, for God has sent an army of angels to protect him as he prepares to meet with Esau. It is this sense of God's dwelling with Jacob that Milton invokes, for he records that Jacob saw "The field Pavilion'd with his guardians bright" (11.215).

"Pavilion'd" means that the angels have in fact pitched their large tents ("pavilion'd") with him. They are dwelling with Jacob. It is vital that Milton includes "pavilion'd," since the meaning of Mahanaim definitely does not include tents. It is surprising, then, to read Roy Flannagan's comment that "Jacob in Genesis 32:1 sees a place covered with tents of angels, [and] he calls it 'Mahanaim,' which means 'tents,' a word accommodated by Milton's 'Pavilion'd.'" In fact, Milton's use of "pavilion'd" over-determines Flannagan's reading, for Mahanaim means "two camps" and specifically derives from a verb meaning, "to decline, bend down, encamp." The verb emphasizes the angels' active role in protecting and dwelling with Jacob. Where there is a camp, there would be tents, but this is secondary to the central image of the angels' "bending down" to protect Jacob. Yet Milton, by using the word "pavilion'd," draws attention to the imagery of the angels tenting (dwelling) with Jacob. It is precisely this promise that God makes to his people, when he promises to "dwell" (shekina) among them. Michael Lieb remarks that "Shekina, 'the dwelling,' represented the majestic presence or manifestation of God which had descended to 'dwell' in this mundane sphere, sent forth by God, or come from him, to 'dwell' among men." The active role assumed by God's choosing to dwell is reflected by Milton's decision to change "Pavilion" from a noun into a verb, thus implying the vigorous act of God's dwelling, which is for all time.
Jacob need not fear, for God is with him (Gn 28:15), and Milton alludes to this promise by mentioning the experience of Elisha at Dothan; Michael and his descending band of angels are not only like those seen by Jacob at Mahanaim,

Nor that which on the flaming Mount appear'd
In Dothan, cover'd with a Camp of Fire,
Against the Syrian King, who to surprise
One man, assassin-like had levied War,
War unproclaim'd. (11.216-220)

Milton’s depiction of Michael’s descent incorporates details from the Jacob and Elisha narratives. The word chosen by the Hebrew writer to describe these fiery angelic beings is used only here (2 Kgs 6:17) and in Jacob’s experience at Mahanaim (Gn 32:2). C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch argue from this that Elisha’s revelation of the fiery horses and chariots is in fact “based upon Jacob’s vision (Gn 32:2), in which he saw a double army of angels encamped around him, at the time when he was threatened with danger from Esau.”

An examination of Elisha’s situation sheds light on Milton’s allusion. The episode spans the course of two chapters (6-8), and is placed within the threat of Syrian attack. The King of Aram (Syria) had been planning numerous surprise attacks on the Israelites, but each time he found his enemy waiting. Certainly, he declares, one of his own men must be a traitor (6:11); but no, replies a servant, “Elisha the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (6:12). It is with no small degree of humour that the king decides to attack Elisha, who is at Dothan, for it would seem that if Elisha could foresee an attack on Israel, he could predict an
attack on himself. Nevertheless, the king sends his powerful army to Dothan. They arrive at night and surround the city (6:13,14), alarming Elisha’s servant:

And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! How shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

(2 Kgs 6:15-18)

Ocular sight versus spiritual vision forms the contrast, and it can be no accident that when Jacob and Elisha’s servant have their eyes opened to the angelic host, they witness a phenomenon that is not arriving but has been present for some time. Significantly, as T.R. Hobbs notes, “Only here and in 2 Kgs 4:33 does Elisha pray.”21 While his earlier prayer brings a child to life, the prayer he now utters brings spiritual sight to his servant, which contrasts with the eyes of the Syrian host, who despite witnessing Elisha’s prophetic revealing of their secret attacks, still believe they can take him with physical force. Keil and Delitzsch interpret this act of opening as analogous to a “translation into the ecstatic state of clairvoyance, in which insight into the invisible spirit world was granted.”22 More than a flickering vision, however, these angelic beings are substantial and formidable; they are
symbols of the protecting powers of Heaven, which surrounded the
prophet. The fiery form indicated the super-terrestrial origin of this host.
Fire, as the most ethereal of all earthly elements, was the most appropriate
substratum for making the spiritual world visible."^{23}

After peace with the Syrians is secured, Ben-Hadad, the Syrian king, again attacks
Samaria, the earlier lesson apparently forgotten or disregarded, but now he decides to
starve the Israelites into submission. So bleak do things look for the people, that king
Joram encounters a woman who agreed with another woman to make a meal of their sons
(6:28-30). The scenario seems more appropriate to Jonathan Swift, yet it underscores the
grisly reality of the Syrian siege. Walvoord and Zuck argue, “Elisha had told Joram that
God had said he should not surrender to Ben-Hadad but should wait for divine
deliverance.”^{24} Since no help has come and it is unimaginable that things could
deteriorate further, Joram, rather than address his own apostasy, resolves to have Elisha
put to death. Yet deliverance is at hand; for lepers, deciding they have nothing to lose,
enter the Syrian camp to find that the enemy has fled, leaving their supplies behind (7:3-
9). What caused this timely exodus was the Lord, who “had made the host of the Syrians
to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they
said unto one another, Lo, the King of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the
Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us” (2 Kgs 7:6).

Milton’s allusion to the angels’ appearance at Mahanaaim and Dothan is well
suited, then, to Michael’s visit with Adam. Like Jacob and Elisha, Adam is being given
providential care, for the angelic hosts are not only coming to root Adam and Eve from
the garden, but also to provide protection in the world they are to inhabit. The fiery
angels, which appear to Jacob and Elisha, serve to protect. The miracle is not their appearance, but that human beings have been allowed to see them. The bifurcated nature of sight/insight prepares us for Michael’s meeting with Adam, since Michael has been sent by God to expel Adam and Eve, yet Milton invokes those occasions where angels come to protect God’s people. As Michael and his host descend, Milton compels us to recall the angels’ providential role. In addition, both events begin with conflict and end in peace. Jacob and Esau part in animosity but are reconciled after a significant change in their lives: “In Jacob, God brought about a spirit of humility and generosity. Esau was changed from seeking revenge to desiring reconciliation.” At Dothan, the people are graphically reminded that Yahweh, not Baal, is their provider. The descending angels will remove Adam and Eve from the garden, but they will also watch over them in the new world. Michael is both the executor of God’s judgment and one of the agents of his grace.

Michael cannot know that angels will be sent to protect Adam’s children at Mahanaim and Dothan. The names resonate not with Michael but with us, the readers, for we understand the important future role of the angels. Similarly, Adam cannot understand how crucial mounts, trees, pines, and fountains will be for his children. The arrival of Michael and Adam’s lament both rise in importance when viewed through the lens of futurity. Mahanaim and Dothan signify more than their physical properties; they are filled with meaning because of what happens there. In like fashion, the mounts, trees, pines, and fountains that Adam mentions will become significant symbols. God will reveal himself to Adam’s children; but Adam cannot know how crucial these locations will be in testifying to God’s abiding presence.
As symbols, Mahanaim and Dothan direct us not only to rely upon our sight, but also to seek insight. The Fall brings a diminished capacity to see things as they really are, and so in book 12 when Adam can no longer sustain the effort required by his visionary experience, Michael translates the vision into words that Adam can hear. His physical eyes can no longer apprehend the luminous spirit world, though an inner vision is still possible. Elisha and Jacob saw two camps simultaneously, though briefly, and yet it is the angelic host that constitutes the greater reality. Milton thus prepares us for Adam's lament by reminding readers of those places where God chose to intercede. Even as Michael arrives to expel Adam and Eve, Milton beckons us to recall how angels will protect their children.

Adam and Eve seek relief from their guilt by praying to God, and afterwards, Adam tells Eve, "Methought I saw him placable and mild, / Bending his ear" (11.151-52). Ironically, it is after the Fall that Adam appears to see God more plainly than he had earlier, for he discerns God "bending his ear," intimating a more conspicuous detail than that engendered by his visit with the "shape divine." In the place of blinding light, Adam discerns a remarkably anthropomorphic deity bending its ear towards him. At this point in the narrative we would expect to see the least of God; yet Adam now perceives God "bending his ear."

There is a telling difference between the arrival of Michael and the earlier visit of Raphael, for now Michael must adopt a shape different from his celestial one. He is "Not in his shape Celestial, but as Man / Clad to meet man." His vestments are military, as Nicholson notes, and now he must conceal his celestial brightness so that Adam may
behold him. Being clad "as Man" draws attention to Michael's act of inclining or bending down (Mahanaim) from the celestial world to converse with the one who is fallen.²⁶

"So Many Grateful Altars"

After Michael tells Adam that he must leave Eden, Adam articulates the intimacy he had enjoyed with God. "The most comprehensive statement concerning God’s presence," argues Michael Lieb, "is made by Adam himself when he realizes he may no longer ‘dwell’ in ‘Paradise.’" Milton relates the force of Michael’s sentence on Adam by having Eve respond first. So horrified is Adam at Michael’s stern sentence that he is momentarily struck dumb. Michael addresses Adam; but Eve responds first. When Adam does speak, he surveys the profound scope of his loss. "This most afflicts me," Adam laments,

that departing hence,
As from his face I shall be hid, depriv’d
His bless’d count’nance; here I could frequent,
With worship, place by place where he voutsaf’d
Presence Divine, and to my Sons relate;
On this Mount he appear’d, under this Tree
Stood visible, among these Pines his voice
I heard, here with him at this Fountain talk’d:
So many grateful Altars I would rear
Of grassy Turf, and pile up every Stone
Of luster from the brook, in memory,
Of monument to Ages, and thereon
Offer sweet smelling Gums and Fruits and Flow’rs:
In yonder nether World where shall I seek
His bright appearances, or footstep trace? (11.315-329)

Lieb sees in this passage an evocation of Shekina: “the Dwelling Presence of God.”28 It is those particular manifestations of God’s glory that prompts the erecting of altars to worship him. Lieb observes how the stones “of luster from the brook” reflect God’s “bright appearances.” For Lieb, “the place of worship, even as the product of Nature, reflects the radiance of the presence itself,”29 and God is continually represented in such terms of brightness and light. God’s presence, omnipresent and spiritual, is without limit and need not be restricted to a single physical manifestation.

Lieb’s emphasis on light and presence devalues the significance of the stones being drawn from the brook, for this action is proleptic of a significant historical event: the crossing of the river Jordan, which is the final obstacle between the Israelites and the Promised Land. Yet God miraculously intervenes, for as “the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water … the waters … stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam … and the people passed over right against Jericho” (Jos 3:15-16). To commemorate this event, God commands Joshua to have twelve stones taken from the Jordan so that an altar can be built,
That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan. (Jos 4:6-7)

According to Leland Ryken, “It is no exaggeration to say that the most visible sign of one’s devotion to the true God in the worship of the old covenant is the building of altars or traveling to them for acts of sacrifice or offering.”

Altars are physical and stationary. As markers, they call attention to a significant act that occurred at a specific location; thus, after many of the major biblical events, an altar is constructed. Such a physical sign must be interpreted, since one naturally enquires regarding the significance of an unnatural monument, and this dialogue helps preserve the memory in the mind of the speaker even as it begets memory in the mind of the listener. The altar is to remind future generations of God’s intervention at a particular time and place. The effect Milton accomplishes is thus twofold: fallen Adam wishes that he could have remained faithful and erected altars to commemorate God’s presence in this land of promise, but his lament brings the latent promise of God’s miraculous transport of Adam’s sons into the Promised Land.

Such a promise comes with an enormous price. The central purpose of an altar is to provide a place for blood sacrifice; it is the place of slaughter. Ryken remarks that, “the Hebrew word for altar comes from the word for slaughter.”

Altars are places of holy interchange, but such interaction requires a blood covering. Adam’s desire to rear “so many grateful Altars” is wryly ironic because, first, he has not raised any altars in Eden, and second, his children will raise many altars, and not only to God. Whether on
the Mount Zion of Yahweh or the Mount Zaphon of Baal, Adam’s race will define itself by the altars they rear.

Adam’s desire to record God’s presence encompasses the height and depth of the natural world, beginning with “this mount” and ending by “the brook.” Lieb hears in Adam’s eloquent lament echoes of the Psalms, especially the Psalmist’s majestic survey of God’s presence when he asks, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (Ps 139:7-8). Indeed all places, from the lofty mountain to the bubbling brook, express God’s presence. If Adam had been able to complete his project, the landscape—from top to bottom—would have been marked with altars celebrating the presence of God.

Alas, this is only what could have been. Adam’s desire to commemorate the glorious concord once existing between man and God allows him only to raise altars of the mind. The altars that will be erected throughout the time of the Hebrew Scriptures signal the scarcity of divine visitations. In Paradise Lost, Milton never has God appear to Adam on a mount, under a tree, among pines or beside a fountain, at least, not in the overtly corporeal way that the Hebrew Bible says he does. In truth, when Adam asks where in the “nether world” he can seek God’s “bright appearances, or footstep trace” (11.329), he is faithfully relating to us the nature of his earlier visit with God. So intense was the radiance of God’s presence, that it caused Adam to fall “with awe” before the “presence divine” (8.313-15).

When Lieb interprets Adam’s tracing of God’s footsteps as “a conversing with God, and, by implication, a ‘walking’ with him, as his ‘footstep’ can be ‘traced’ from
‘place’ to ‘place,’” he is only partially correct. Adam’s quest does not indicate that he is “walking” with God, but, rather, it implies the ineffable nature of Adam’s relationship with God. Instead of seeing God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, or even walking with him, Adam is left only to trace his footsteps! These footprints are more in the spirit of Giambattista Andreini’s depiction of God in *L’Adamo* (1613), when the Eternal Father declares, “The Foot that used to tread among the stars / and the great shining pathway of the Sun / Begins today beside a woody bank / To set its heavenly footprints in the clay.”

Part of the mystery Adam and Eve experience in Andreini’s account lies in the presence of these footprints left in the clay bank, since these tracks are not theirs. Milton’s interpretation is less concrete. God is in the garden and he is there in a physical form, as the footprints give evidence, but Adam is always a step behind; he traces the presence of Almighty God. He does not walk hand-in-hand with his maker. To argue that Adam is “walking” with God passes over a significant point—Milton’s Adam does not experience God in the manner that Adam does in Genesis or *L’Adamo*. Milton’s Adam encounters God only in a visionary state hovering between the juxtaposed states of an awakened consciousness. God is so bright that Adam can recall only varying degrees of radiance. Eve is even less fortunate, for while she too participates in God’s physical presence in Genesis, in *Paradise Lost* she never glimpses God, save as his image is reflected in the image of Adam.

How different it is for Adam to trace God’s footsteps than it is for him to walk with God. Adam asks where he will trace God’s footsteps in “yonder nether world,” implying that he was tracing God’s footsteps in Eden, too, which posits a physical
distance that simply does not exist in Genesis, where Adam enjoys an intimate and physical relationship with God. In Genesis, Adam and Eve do not need to trace God’s footsteps because they walk with him. Hypothetically, if one were to trace the footprints, one would discover the prints of three people walking side-by-side. Such is not the case in Milton’s account; rather Adam is continually following God’s footsteps so that he may catch up with him. Adam knows God has been nearby, since he has discovered his footprints; but it does not mean that Adam has seen God face to face.

In *Paradise Lost*, Adam sees God but once, immediately after his creation, and so bright is this revelation that Adam differentiates only between varying degrees of intensity. Joseph Shipley follows the origin of “trace” to the Latin *trahere*, “to draw ... a succession of moving things, passed through.”

34 It is this process that one hopes to achieve through *training*. Lieb associates walking with Adam’s tracing of God’s footsteps, but Adam’s tracing is less a walking with God than an attempt to locate him. Where Adam wishes to have constructed altars to commemorate God’s visit are those places where, if he had stood faithful, he would have conversed with God.

“On This Mount”

Yet God will manifest himself to his people. Adam says that had he not fallen he would have been able to tell his sons, “On this Mount he appear’d, under this Tree / Stood visible, among these Pines his voice / I heard, here with him at this Fountain talk’d” (320-22). And while the garden possesses these features, they will be charged later with significance by God’s revelation. Jon Lawry interprets Adam’s desire to raise
altars at these places as “one last way of clinging to the physical Eden that man has physically forsworn.” The altars thus signify his fallen desire for raising idolatrous images. Hugh MacCallum interprets Adam as “clearly wrong to think in terms of a pastoral religion that restricts God to times and places, and his mistake will recur in the future among the patriarchs.” I agree that Adam’s desire is misguided; however, since these places draw upon an exceptionally rich tradition of biblical imagery and are witness to God’s dwelling presence (shekina), I believe that we can access a more profound insight. Adam’s references are neither casual nor incidental, but rather, they are carefully chosen by Milton to correspond to those places where God will allow himself to be found. Each place, “mount,” “tree,” “pine,” “fountain,” expresses the message of restoration. Adam’s lament contains a powerful promise, since where he wishes he could have met with God will be where God meets his children.

That God will be found is all the more impressive given that Adam’s children will continue to sin against him, often raising their idols at the very place where God discloses himself. Adam’s desire to relate to his sons how “On this Mount, he appear’d” (320) is poignant, because there are many records of God appearing on a mount; approximately five hundred references are made to mountains and hills in the Bible. But as Ryken observes, there is a paradoxical quality to mountaintop experiences, for “mountaintops are places of pagan worship that God denounces and of true worship that he commands.” Ryken interprets mountains as constituting a master image of the Bible, “through which one can trace the whole course of biblical history and doctrine in microcosm … As the place where humans encounter the divine, they epitomize how God and people relate to each other, both in history and in the eschaton.” Mountains are as
important for defining God as they are for defining humanity, for it is on the mountaintop where people encounter God.

Mountaintops are witness to a rich tradition of human interaction with God. Ryken summarizes this history by reminding us, "Almost from the beginning of the Bible, mountains are sites of transcendent spiritual experiences, encounters with God or appearances by God." The garden is on a mountaintop in Eden (Ez 28:13-15). It is on a mountaintop that Abraham offers up Isaac and then experiences God's presence (Gn 22:1-18); Moses receives his call on Horeb, the mountain of God (Ex 3:1-2), and it is there that he receives the law (Ex 19, 20); Elijah encounters God on the same mountain, and it is on the mountain that the seventy elders of Israel enjoy a covenant feast with God (Ex 24). The New Testament picks up the motif. To be alone and pray, Jesus retreats to a mountain. It is from a mount that Jesus delivers his greatest sermon, resists Satan's temptations of authority (Mt 4:8), and is transfigured and joined by Moses and Elijah (Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-8). After he ascends from the top of the Mount of Olives, the disciples are told that he will return in a similar manner (Acts 1:9-12). What is most striking, however, is the radical transformation that the Mountain of God undergoes, from Mount Sinai (Horeb) to Mount Zion, from a place of fear to the place of restoration.

As mountain of God, Sinai incorporates everything we would expect of the dwelling place of the holy. It is the place of unimaginable terror and fear. When God tells the Israelites "ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex 19:6), the thunder, lightning, and smoke coming from the mountain terrify them: "And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we
die" (Ex 20:19). The mountain is a formidable presence. If any man or beast should touch it, death was the result. The Israelites lived continually in the shadow of Sinai.

Michael and his band of cherubim will ensure that access to the garden is denied, and Sinai is similarly a mount from which the people are excluded. God himself institutes this sacredness when he tells Moses to

set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall surely be put to death: There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live. (Ex 19:12-13)

In like fashion, Adam and Eve can no longer dwell in the garden. Eden then is the site of the original exodus, the place from which humanity first leaves God’s presence. Yet Adam and Eve take with them the promise that God will restore them to himself.

The progression from Sinai to Zion marks the active role of God’s redemption. Isaiah prophesies this transformation when he says,

the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Is 2:2-3)

The contrast between Adam’s wish to commemorate a meeting with God on a mount and Isaiah’s promise that “many people” shall return to the mountain of the lord is striking.
God's promise to establish his house in "the top of the mountains" is accompanied by the provision that people will have the capacity to behold him. In the place of fear, people will seek out God's mount without fear. Zion is as holy as Sinai, but God enables his people to countenance him there; now it attracts them. Now they say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the lord," and their desire to enter God's presence is matched by their newly endowed capacity to "walk in his paths," bringing Ezekiel's prophesy to fruition, for God himself will "take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in [his] statutes, and keep [his] ordinances" (Ez 11:19-20). Beginning with book 11, Milton invokes this promise, saying that Adam and Eve stood praying because "Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd / The stony from thir hearts, and made new flesh" (11.3-4). Ezekiel speaks of the future, but Milton projects that time as now. Only a changed heart will enable people to follow God's ordinances, to trace his paths, and God's prevenient grace is already causing "new flesh" and new fruits to grow.

Such a transformation occurs on the mountaintops of one's soul, however, and this internalization is iconoclastic, requiring the individual to travel not to a physical mountain but to a spiritual one. As MacCallum says, "holiness is an inward state, not a property of places." In Hebrews, Paul makes this point when he tells believers that they have come to mount Zion, which is within them:

> For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire ... (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight that
Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. (Heb 12:18-24)

From Sinai to Zion, from the old covenant to the new, Paul traces the progression of sacred place from law to gospel. Zion symbolizes the grace given to all; Sinai delivers a dreadful sentence that drives people away. Paul encourages all to come to Zion and join in the fellowship and worship of the living God. Zion thus accomplishes what no physical mountain can; it is the spiritual tabernacle to which all believers will stream, and the holy place that all believers carry within them.

Adam’s desire to raise an altar recording God’s appearance on the mount is prophetic, for God will vouchsafe to meet with his people on mounts; and every mountaintop appearance by God anticipates the larger promise of restoration on Zion. Adam wishes he could have related to his children the appearance of God on the mount, but on Zion Adam will join with his children in the presence of God. The garden is itself on a mountain, and there is an interesting parallel between Eden as the paradise lost and Zion as the paradise regained. Like Eden, Zion is exalted above the other mounts and is the place of unfettered communion between God and his creation. Emphasizing this perfect concord is the imagery associated with both Eden and Zion, for both are places of
blessing. As it was in Eden, so Zion will be a glorious new world, a world touched with
the dew of creation, a place where

the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie
down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
and a little child shall lead them ... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all
my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,
as the waters cover the sea. (Is 11:6-9)

“Under this Tree”

God will meet with Adam’s children under trees, and the imagery of trees
constitutes a central image of restoration. That Adam should mention God appearing
“under this tree,” may refer to Abraham’s encounter with God, since it is by the oaks of
Mamre that Abraham enjoys a meal with God (Gn 18:8). Gideon, too, meets with the
Lord, “under an oak which was in Ophrah” (Jgs 6:11). Milton’s reference is important not
for its precision but for its rich symbolism, and Ryken summarizes what we know to be
ture: “the Palestinian world is arid, with trees scarce.” Hence, the Bible’s two hundred
and fifty generic references to trees are evidence not of their abundance (save the olive
tree), but of the special status of trees in a land where they are few. Trees are mentioned
eight times in the creation story, and God sees that they are “good.” But by far the most
striking feature of tree imagery is how it contains the promise of restoration.

The story of salvation begins and ends with references to symbolic trees. It is out
of the ground that the Lord God made “to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight,
and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gn 2:9). In the garden, trees can both bless with immortality and curse with death; man is the sole arbiter. From the rind of one apple tasted, death is brought to all. But the cure will bring restoration, which is often depicted by tree imagery. So it is that Isaiah consoles the people by telling them that God will open rivers in high places and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together. (Is 41:18-19)

To bring forth water from the dry sands and trees out of the barren soil is a picture of God restoring his people and healing their land; it also promises God’s provision, for trees provide nourishment. Ezekiel invokes just such an image when he prophesies of the new Holy Land, which is fed by streams, “And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months” (47:12).

Such trees promise much. And much as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil transported Adam and Eve across a spiritual threshold, so the eating of the tree of paradise signifies the new life of believers. John writes that “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Rv 2:7). John’s parallelism is arresting here for he reverses the process that occurred in the garden. In the original paradise it was the premature tasting of the forbidden fruit that led to our first downfall. Now, it is only after “overcoming” the hurdles of this fallen world that we may
eat of the promised tree, which marks our new beginning in the final paradise. It is this tree of life that figures so prominently in John's vision of the New Jerusalem, where he sees the last act of God's restoration, of his people dwelling with him by the Throne of God,

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse. (Rv 22:1-3)

John's final vision of life in the Golden city draws upon the symbolism of the Hebrew Scriptures. In this perfect world, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil grows not at all and the tree of life stands in the middle spreading forth joyous leaves of deep green, offering continual abundance. John's imagery plays upon the Psalmist's vision of the righteous man who delights in the law, for he "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps 1:3); yet this tree is superior, for its season is forever and always, and its fruit brings life to the many.

Between the tree imagery evoked in Genesis and Revelation stands the cross of salvation. It is because of this tree that the righteous may taste of the fruit of redemption. Peter pictures the transformation wrought by Christ's sacrifice thus: "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pt 2:24). It is from the fruit of one
tree that all die; yet from the death of one on a tree all shall live. The crucifixion nails to the tree the law given on Sinai, ushering in a new era defined by grace. Michael tells Adam of this when he speaks of the Son nailing to the cross “thine Enemies, / The Law that is against thee, and the sins / Of all mankind, with him there crucifi’d, / Never to hurt them more who rightly trust / In this his satisfaction” (12.415-19). Figuratively, it is out of the tree of Calvary that the tree of paradise grows in the New Jerusalem. Adam’s wish to have memorialized God’s meeting with him under “this Tree” looks forward not only to occasions where God will meet with his children under the various trees, but it also anticipates the final meeting of God with his people, a time when the leaves will bring healing and there shall be no more curse: “but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads” (Rv 22: 3-4).

“Among these Pines”

It seems redundant for Adam to single out pine trees, since he has spoken of encountering God under “this Tree.” References to pines are scattered throughout Paradise Lost. In Adam and Eve’s Morning Hymn, they call upon all creation to join together in praise of God:

His praise ye Winds, that from four Quarters blow,
Breathe soft or loud; and wave your tops, ye Pines,
With every Plant, in sign of Worship wave.
Fountains and yee, that warble, as ye flow,
Melodious murmurs, warbling tune his praise. (5.192-96)
Adam and Eve call upon the pine trees to wave “in sign of worship,” and these tall, lofty trees would make for a visible display. Their act of praise, however, does not marginalize the other participants; it is not a competition, but a unified worship with celebrants expressing their adoration as they are best able. The personification of nature may reflect Adam and Eve’s desire to make their own praise more visible, so that the trees function as an extension of their own arms, the fountains as their voices. How very different is this manifold outpouring of praise from Adam’s fallen desire to hide among the pines in shame. Speaking with Eve, Adam asks, “How shall I behold the face / Henceforth of God or Angel” (9.1080-81)? In place of divine communion Adam now desires to live in solitude like a “savage” (9.1086). And rather than calling upon the pines to wave in sign of worship, now he tells them, “Cover me ye Pines, / Ye Cedars, with innumerable boughs / Hide me (9.1088-90).

Adam’s children will hide among the pines in an annual festival known as the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. Nehemiah speaks of the pine tree as suitable material for the Israelites to build their booths. In reading the law, which God had commanded to Moses, the people read that

the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees to make booths, as it is written. (Neh 8:14-15)

Pine branches are only one of the many branches with which they are to build their booths, and this practice is important for recalling their days of wandering in the
wilderness, during which time they lived in these easily transported dwellings. The Feast of Tabernacles was “at once the general harvest festival ... and the anniversary of the beginnings of the wanderings in the wilderness (Ex 23:16; Lv 23:33; Dt 16:13-15).”

How ironic, then, that Adam’s wish to hide from God among the branches of the garden should become the basis for the Hebrew practice of celebrating God’s provision. The feast reminds the people of God’s enduring presence, which brought them from the land of captivity to the promised land of green trees and lofty pines.

The Feast of Tabernacles is fitting to Adam’s lament for its evocation of the beginning of the wanderings and because it draws our attention to the tabernacle and its final resting place in the Temple. Like gold, pine and cedar trees are used extensively in the building of the Temple. In addition, when Solomon begins construction of the Temple, he must import the pine, cedar, and necessary craftsmen. “This mount,” “this tree,” and “this fountain” are singular, which locates God’s presence more definitely than “these pines.” But, for Adam’s children, God will dwell in the closed quarters of the Holy of Holies; it is here that the High Priest will go to speak with God and discern his will; and it is among the pine of the Temple that Adam’s children will hear God’s voice, for it is there that he will dwell.

References to pine trees are found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Adam’s regret that he will not be able to tell his children how “among these Pines his voice / I heard” (11.321) looks forward to the promise which Isaiah gives to Adam’s children, to a time when God will dwell with his people among the pines (Is 41: 17-20). Adam is banished from the garden and must enter a sober world defined by conflict, scarcity, and alienation from God, and this contrasts directly with the image of the pine tree, which
“exemplifies peace, prosperity, and reconciliation to God.” It is precisely these elements of restoration that are incorporated in the Temple. Originally, God was worshipped in the tabernacle, which was a portable Temple enabling worship under nomadic conditions; it was replaced by a fixed Temple building (traditionally dated at 959 BCE) only when a suitable place (Jerusalem) and person (Solomon) were found (1 Kgs 6).

Pine and cedar are prominent features of the Temple: “the entire interior of the Temple was covered with cedar boards (on the walls) and with pine boards (on the floor), all overlaid with gold.” The doors which led from the porch into the holy place were made of pine (1 Kgs 6:34); “they hung on four-sided jambs and were bifold (each having two leaves hinged together that folded open against each other and turned on sockets … All the doors were decorated like the walls.” Thus, for the priests to enter the holy place they first had to enter through the doors of pine. It was only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when the blood was sprinkled on the Ark and the nation’s collective sins were forgiven, that the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies (Lv 16). A curtain of blue, purple, and crimson, in which the figures of cherubim were woven (2 Chr 3:8-14), separated the Inner and Outer Temple areas. When the High Priest entered this holiest of places, he stood on top of pine flooring covered with gold and spoke with God.

The Holy of Holies was the Hebrew theocracy’s visible centre and its most sacred place, containing “within itself most of the ideas that make up our concept of religion.” Between the two cherubim stationed on either end of the Ark, God dwelt—his presence made the holiest place so holy; in the garden, however, God dwelt with Adam and Eve wherever they went; the entire garden was holy. With their banishment, Adam and Eve
must leave their Temple and enter a “world of woe,” but even then, God will dwell with them and among the pines their children will hear his voice.

“With Him at This Fountain Talk’d”

Fountains are a distinctive image in both the Old and New Testament. Like wells and springs, they are associated with the biblical image of water as life. A fountain refreshes and invigorates, and is the source of sustenance and life. In an arid land, water is bound to be favourably portrayed; so it is that the Psalmist refers to God as “the fountain of life” (36:9). Indeed, the “most frequent use of the fountain image is found in its connection with God.” The image of a fountain of water eloquently expresses the abundance and vitality which springs from intimacy with the Creator. As with trees, mounts, and pines, fountains signify prosperity. Without water, life is not possible; without God, life is barren. Fertility and life are commonly likened to the image of a fountain, and so is the image of a woman. Proverbs 5:18 counsels men to enjoy their wives as “fountains” of blessing, which Ryken interprets as “obviously sexual, and the allusion is to the woman’s vagina, a well-watered place, which is also the source of human life.” In regarding fountain imagery as indicating the source of human life, we can appreciate the Psalmist’s claim that, “All my fountains are in Zion” (87:7) to mean that Zion is the source of his life.

The most striking fountain imagery is found within God’s promises of restoration. When the Deuteronomist offers the Israelites a vision of the land promised to them by God, he invokes the imagery of water, which would be especially pertinent given the
severity of their wilderness exile: “For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills (8:7).

Such rich plenitude promises more than drinking water; it is the promise of an abundance of water, not only of brooks, but of fountains bursting forth. But more profound than being brought to a land flowing with water is the significance of being brought to the very source of all waters. From the Promised Land fountains will stream forth to all the nations, and to dwell here is to abide with the source of blessing.

Proximity to God is vital in relation to the prophets’ use of fountain imagery. The prophet Joel foretells Messiah’s reign as being that day when “all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters; and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord” (3:18). The house of the Lord is the source of the fountain. This is not a mixed metaphor, but is a lesson that God is both a physical and spiritual fountain. In like fashion, the people’s physical act of washing signifies their spiritual cleansing. Zechariah follows Joel’s use of the fountain when speaking of Messiah’s return: “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (13:1). Zechariah eloquently expresses the promise contained in the image of such a fountain: to bathe in these waters is to be made pure. The promise of a fountain is the promise of new life, and this imagery is evoked in Christ’s response to the Samaritan woman, when he tells her that “whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn 4:4). This is the water of life, and the drinking of it internalizes the source, creating an internal paradise where continual cleansing leads to “everlasting life.”
Isaiah evokes fountain imagery when he reminds the people of God’s delivering them from Pharaoh. Isaiah tells the people that it is God “which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters ... [and who] will do a new thing; now it [the wilderness] shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert” (43:16, 19). The “mighty waters” would have destroyed the people as it did their Egyptian pursuers, yet now God will do an even greater work. Rather than divide water, he will call forth water out of a barren dessert. Such a promise bears a striking resemblance to Moses’ act of bringing forth water from the rock (Nu 20:11), for it too brings life to a dying people, and demonstrates God’s abiding presence in his people’s midst, despite their disobedience. To bring forth water from a rock prefigures God’s most astonishing transformation: his promise to change his people’s hearts from stone to flesh.

As sources of life, fountains hold tremendous significance and symbolic power. Hagar, for instance, is “by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur” (Gn 16:7), when the angel of the Lord appears to her and blesses her, and it is by a well that Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:6-7). Nahum Sarna notes that Hagar’s experience marks “the first appearance of an angel in biblical literature.” This angel more closely resembles a theophany, for as Charles Ryrie notes, the angel “speaks as God, identifies himself with God, and claims to exercise the prerogatives of God.” Hagar implies this divinity when she invokes the name of the Lord who spoke to her: “Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? Wherefore the well was called Beer-la-hai-roi” (Gn 16:13-14). Beer-la-hai-roi translates as “well of the Living One who sees me.” There is a world of
theology in the name Beer-la-hai-roi, for this is a God who sees his creation, who is actively involved in the lives of all his people; he appears not only to Abraham and Sarah, but also to Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian maid. Such an appearance is extraordinary, because, as Bruce Waltke observes, this is “the only known instance in ancient Near Eastern literature where the deity addresses a woman by name. The greeting makes a trustful response possible.”

God does more than appear to Hagar—he calls this Egyptian maid by her name. Hagar and the Samaritan woman are both of an ethnic group not of the chosen line, and yet a deity addresses both. That God should seek his people is remarkable; that he should call the disenfranchised by name is astonishing.

The fountain achieves its final treatment in Revelation. Life in the City of God will bring the final act of healing to the people, for “the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes” (7:17). The waters are symbolic of cleansing and healing, a symbolism embraced in the ritual of baptism. But the “living fountains” of Revelation also represent the fullness of life and continuous blessing that life in the New Jerusalem will bring. The fountain of living water comes from the source of all life, and in the presence of such radiant excellencies John sees

a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb ... And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. (22:1, 4)

The culmination of time brings with it complete restoration, and the New Jerusalem contains imagery that is central to the prophets and the garden. The presence of God and the Lamb with the race of Adam defines and distinguishes this golden world. Adam
laments that he cannot tell his children how he talked with God at “this fountain”; yet
God will reveal himself to Adam’s children by fountains, and they are a prominent
feature of the Promised Land and of the New Jerusalem. Milton’s invoking of the
fountain is well-suited to the promise of restoration. Though Adam did not talk with God
by the fountain, his children will see God face-to-face in the New Jerusalem.

“A Monument to Ages”: The Abiding Presence of God

Because of Adam’s sin, his children are condemned to live east of Eden. If Adam
had held fast to God, he would have held a privileged position within this growing
population. It is from Adam that Adam’s race would have learned of God: where he
appeared, how he chose to manifest himself, what he spoke, even something, perhaps, of
what he looked like, rather than from the prophets. Growing old in Eden would
presumably bring a greater capacity to know and behold God. When Adam replies to
Michael, he speaks with anguish, because he will be banished and his sons will never
know the delights of the garden; his sons will never experience God as he has, and for
Adam, those experiences are now bygones. The “monument to Ages” that Adam’s
children inherit is the curse of man’s first disobedience.

Adam’s concern for his children implies his awareness of himself as the father of
civilization and the cause of its fallenness. Adam tells Michael that, “here I could
frequent, / With worship, place by place where he voutsaf’d / Presence Divine, and to my
sons relate; On this Mount he appear’d” (11.317-19). The word “relate” comes from a
root meaning “to lift, support, hence weigh” and brings with it the meaning of “to ‘carry
back a story, etc., ... The same sense [gives us] the Gk demigod Atlas, who supported
the world on his shoulders, whence the Atlas that holds the whole world.\textsuperscript{56} Adam is
prevented from “carrying back” to his sons those stories of his meetings with God
because he has but a single story.

Adam’s lament reveals a fundamental truth wrought by his fall—he does not have
many stories about God. If we bear in mind the literal meaning of relate as “to lift,
support,” then Adam’s load is slight—but his burden is great. That Adam would have
related to his sons how God manifested himself on the mount, under the tree, among the
pines, and by the fountain, anticipates his role of patriarch. Adam would have assumed a
role similar to that of the High Priest or prophet, since relating to others the revelation of
God is to adopt the role of proclaimer (the root of the word prophet). Alastair Fowler’s
chronology of \textit{Paradise Lost} places the Fall of Man as lasting thirteen days, which is the
same as the Fall of the Angels, and this chronology reveals a sobering truth: Adam
possesses less than two weeks worth of memories of life in Eden—thirteen days of fading
memories of life in a perfect world and one visit with God are all that Adam will carry
with him.

The irony of Adam’s lament is that he cannot know how significant these places
will become. Adam wishes he could have encountered God on the mount, under the trees,
among the pines, and at the fountain; yet these are the very places that are to become
charged with the significance of God’s presence. Adam’s desire to relate to his sons the
significance of the stones and grassy turf that would have commemorated God’s visit will
find its fulfillment in his sons; they will erect these altars. The places of which Adam
speaks with regret will be for his children sites of tremendous hope and enduring
promise, for they will demonstrate God’s active presence.

God will deign to visit his creation, even though it is fallen. Adam’s speech is both a lament for the testimony he cannot transmit to his children, and a splendid reminder that God will not withdraw himself from his creation, despite the sins of the father. The altars that Adam wishes to have raised symbolize his profound regret, and yet they remind us of the visits that God will make to Adam’s children, who will be born in sin. Adam asks Michael, “where shall I seek / His bright appearances, or footstep trace?” (11.328-29); but he has, unknowingly, foretold where these “bright appearances” will be found. Adam’s lament implicitly promises that God’s presence is not restricted to the garden or to a prelapsarian context alone. The testament that will be passed on to succeeding generations is not Adam’s faithfulness, but God’s stubborn love for his fallen people.
Chapter 3 Endnotes


3 I provide a brief overview of critical opinion in order to show the scope of this debate. Keil, Vola, Speiser, and Westermann, argue that this section’s true end is 31:54, but Delitzsch, Driver, Gunkel, Skinner, Von Rad, and Fokkelman see 32:1 as the terminus; against these positions, Dillman, Jacob, Sarna, and Vawter contend 32:2,3 as marking the end. These critical positions are not crucial to our study of Mahanaim, but they do help us to appreciate the difficulty of delineating the events.


5 Wenham, 268.

6 Ibid.


12 Ibid.


19 Lieb, 215.


22 Keil and Delitzsch, 326.

23 Ibid.

24 Walvoord and Zuck, 551.

25 Ibid., 88.

26 See Ps 104: 1-3, O Lord, “thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the water: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind.” The sense of the earth as constituting God’s dwelling place finds eloquent expression in the famous hymn, “O Worship the King,” “O worship the King, all glorious above, And gratefully sing His pow’r and His love; Our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days, Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.” (Robert Grant, 1833).

27 Lieb, 212.

28 Lieb, 215.

29 Lieb, 213.


31 Ibid.

32 Lieb, 213.


37 In *Paradise Lost*, mountains are in heaven, hell, and earth. Each mountain, furthermore, is the exalted place; God’s throne, Satan’s throne, and Adam’s “rural seat” are all located on top of the highest mount.

38 Ryken, s.v. “mountain.”

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 MacCallum, 192.

42 Ryken, s.v. “tree, trees.”

43 See 1.613; 2.544; 4.511; 5.193; 6.198; 9.1088; 11.321.


45 In particular, the following verses refer to the pine tree: 1Kgs 5:8; 5:10; 6:15; 6:34; 9:11; 2 Kgs 19:23; 2 Chr 2:8; 3:5; Neh 8:15; Ps 104:17; Is 14:8; 37:24; 41:19; 44:14; 55:13; 60:13; Ez 27:5; 31:8; Hos 14:8; Na 2:3; Zec 11:2.


47 Walvoord and Zuck, 501.

48 Ibid.


50 Ryken, s.v. “fountain.”

51 Ibid.

52 Moses had been commanded to speak to the rock (Nu 20:8), not strike it. In anger, he struck it with his staff, and it was this sin which prevented him from entering the Promised Land. Walvoord and Zuck argue that Moses’ striking of the rock “drew attention to his own authority as covenant mediator” (238) rather than the Lord’s miraculous provision.


55 Waltke, 254.

56 Claiborne, s.v. “relate.”
Chapter 4

Holy Ground: Sanctuary Symbolism and Milton’s Garden of Eden

So much the rather thou Celestial Light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight. (3.51-55)

Paradise Lost is exceptionally visual, and Milton’s ability to “see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight” renders visible a rich cosmos teeming with life and energy. Not only do we witness the glistening delights of Eden, but Milton also depicts the dazzling regions of heaven along with the dark, lower regions of hell and chaos. While Milton gives physical form to these imagined places, he also conceives of Sin and Death, Satan and Beelzebub, Raphael and Michael, and the Father and Son as possessing something of a physical form. As readers, we are shown, in vivid detail, events and characters which touch upon the limits of the human imagination: hills collide with hills during the War in Heaven; Raphael descends to Eden in flight seraphic; Eve’s golden tresses in “wanton ringlets” hang down; and the flames of hell give off no light, “but rather darkness visible.” Adam and Eve and the choices they make are at the poem’s centre, but Milton presents the distant regions of heaven, hell, and chaos. And so vivid is his depiction of these places and so fertile the contrasts between them that one may overlook the tremendous distance that separates them. Milton’s vast design is indebted to the revolutionary observations of Kepler, Galileo, and others who changed humanity’s conception of the cosmos. Milton’s model of the cosmos can be interpreted as modern, or
at least it can be said that his depiction is conscious of the new theories. While I am interested in demonstrating the immensity of the cosmos in *Paradise Lost*, I wish to emphasize the intimacy that permeates it. As Roland Frye says, “with the Son at its center and providentially overseeing every crucial development within the epic, *Paradise Lost* is permeated with the most profound cosmic optimism.” Though God’s Throne is immeasurably distant from earth, God himself is actively involved with Adam and Eve, seeking them out so they may enjoy his fellowship.

Humankind has always looked upon the heavens, seeing in the stars a reliable source of navigation and manifest testimony of God’s power. The Psalmist says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” (Ps 19:1-3). All people everywhere walk under the stars and who has not paused to contemplate their wonder and glory? But a natural tendency to reverence the stars compels the Deuteronomist to warn that it is the maker who should be worshipped: “lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven” (4:19). The heavens inspire awe; thus God replies to Job by asking, “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion” (39:32), for a view of the heavens soon provides Job with a fuller perspective of the God with whom he speaks, and so a sober Job replies to God, “I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth” (40:4). In the presence of God’s creation, Job
is struck dumb. But what answer could he provide? The heavens declare in silent but eloquent praise the glory of their Creator.

An especially notable use of the stars can be found in Dante’s *Inferno*. Halfway on his life’s journey, Dante finds himself in the dark wood, “the right road lost.” Suddenly, a leopard appears,

And more than once she made me turn about

To go back down. It was early morning still,

The fair sun rising with the stars attending it

As when Divine Love set those beautiful

Lights into motion at creation’s dawn,

And the time of day and season combined to fill

My heart with hope of that beast with festive skin—

(1.27-34)²

The sight of the stars inspires fresh hope in Dante as they call to remembrance the source of all creation, and surely the “divine love” which set these lights into motion is a reliable guide to the poet who now looks upon them. Furthermore, Dante recalls that creation was an act engendered by supreme love, and the beauty of the stars reminds him of the creator’s beauty. It can be no accident then that as the poet emerges from the terrifying depths of the inferno, his first sight is of the stars that he saw when he first descended:
To get back up to the shining world from there

My guide and I went into that hidden tunnel;
And following its path, we took no care
To rest, but climbed: he first, then I—so far,
Through a round aperture I saw appear
Some of the beautiful things that Heaven bears,
Where we came forth, and once more saw the stars.

(34.134-140)

The Inferno begins and ends with the stars, and to see the stars requires the active engagement of the will so that one may look towards the heavens. This upward look is wonderfully contrasted to the total movement of The Inferno which is downwards, implying the natural inclination of the fallen soul to sink. Against this pull, Dante struggles to climb after his guide, “so far.” The stars remind Dante again of the act of “divine love,” which set them in motion. The stars signify a rebirth or baptism, for while he may be looking at the same stars, his experience has changed him. His journey down to the centre of the earth and up again suggests a type of physical burial and spiritual renewal; he has descended into the earth’s womb and has now ascended the canal-like tunnel into the presence of the stars.

Milton’s depiction of the heavens is very different from Dante’s, but so is his understanding of those regions. Paradise Lost is delightful for its capacity to show us “Heav’n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, All,”3 and more profound than such a gigantic perspective is Milton’s depiction of God, who not only beholds everything with a single glance, but who is intimately connected with what he sees. While Dante distinguishes between the
degrees of hell and heaven, Milton describes these regions only generally, as large areas bearing a single name. The difference between these two poets' depictions may be likened to the differing views offered by telescope and microscope, for *Paradise Lost* presents a sweeping view of the cosmos, which renders hell, chaos, and heaven as something akin to continents on a cosmological globe, whereas Dante is less concerned with their general location and intent on depicting their various internal levels and compartments and the degree of suffering or joy experienced therein. Milton's cosmos is unfathomably large, which reveals the earth to be small by comparison. Adam calls this earth a "punctual spot" (8.23) in the universe, a grain of sand; yet it contains the eternal, for it is a world created, visited, and sustained by God.

People have always contemplated the stars; and the work of Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler, and Galileo brought fresh insights to those speculations. Milton had long been fascinated by the "optic glass" (1.288) of the "Tuscan artist," and Galileo "is the only contemporary to be mentioned in *Paradise Lost*, where he occurs three times." Milton grew up "with a generation intellectually aware of the discoveries of such men as Galileo and Kepler, and of the philosophical theories of Bruno." Galileo's influence on *Paradise Lost* is ambiguous, even though his theories had a profound impact on the seventeenth-century. In 1638, Milton visited with Galileo, who was blind and had been confined under a kind of house arrest since 1633. We do not what they talked about, or whether Milton looked through his telescope, and if Milton received or purchased a copy of Galileo's *Dialogue of the Two Chief World Systems—Ptolemaic & Copernican* (1632), it would have been a clandestine copy (the work having been banned since 1633). We should be careful not to project new theories of the cosmos onto Milton's epic for several
reasons. First, we should not accept it as truth that Copernicus had “dethroned”
humankind from a previously exalted and central position. Second, the size of the
cosmos and Adam and Eve’s position within it seem to have little bearing on the
concerns of the epic. In reply to Adam’s question regarding the size and brightness of the
earth, Raphael instructs him to “consider first, that Great / Or Bright infers not
excellence” (8.90-91). The earth is of utmost importance not because of its size or
position, but because God’s people live there.

Against this position, Neil Postman argues that after Copernicus, Kepler, and
especially Galileo, “the Earth became a lonely wanderer in an obscure galaxy in some
hidden corner of the universe, and this left the Western World to wonder if God
had any interest in us at all.” While it is difficult to ascertain the consequences of the
new astronomy on old beliefs, *Paradise Lost* is a testimony to Milton remaining
undisturbed by the discoveries of the “sleepwalkers.” The possibility of life on other
planets does not trouble Adam, neither does the earth’s tiny size in relation to the cosmos;
nor is Adam especially vexed by what we recognize to be the opposed theories of
Ptolemy and Copernicus. The concern with humanity’s place in the cosmos, which
reverberates through the verses of John Donne, especially in *The First Anniversary*, is
less observable in Milton, who depicts the earth not necessarily in the centre of the
cosmos but clearly at the centre of God’s concern. In *Paradise Lost*, humanity is of
special interest to God because he has created us in his image and seeks to have
fellowship with us.

In demonstrating the supposed “psychic desolation” that Galileo’s telescope
“thrust upon an unprepared theology,” Postman cites *Paradise Lost*:
Before [his] eyes in sudden view appear
The secrets of the hoary Deep—a dark
Illimitable ocean, without bound,
Without dimension … (2.890-93)

"Truly, a paradise lost," writes Postman.\(^{10}\) We need to recall the context of this passage, however. First, "his" is misleading since it is actually Sin, Death, and Satan who are looking out upon the dimensionless realm of chaos. This does not represent the theological disarming of seventeenth-century society, but rather it provides a glimpse of the immensity of primordial chaos while offering a window onto the "spiritual desolation" of this infernal triad. In short, this is a perspective that only the damned will ever see. Ironically, it is Sin’s act of taking from her side the "fatal key" and opening the gate separating hell from chaos which opens before them this “dark / Illimitable ocean.” Previously, Sin and Death were bound in front of this gate, much as Satan was bound in hell, but now they have cut themselves loose from those moorings.

In his discussion with Raphael concerning the operations of the cosmos, Adam declares that “something yet of doubt remains, / Which only thy solution can resolve” (8.13-14). In particular, Adam supposes that the universe he sees is Ptolemaic, the earth “sedentary” (8.32), and he wonders why it is that God has arranged it in such abundance, with “such disproportions” and superfluous motions. Why should all these stars travel “Spaces incomprehensible … merely to officiate light / Round this opacous Earth, this punctual spot, / One day and night” (8.20; 22-24)?
Raphael's "solution," however, does not "resolve" Adam's question of whether the earth is stationary or whether it revolves around the sun. Instead, Raphael sets forth "what is ostensibly an even-handed argument on both sides. Raphael thereby removes scientific inquiry from the province of divine revelation and places it squarely in the realm of human speculation." Adam's questions are not answered, but neither is he told to cease from his speculations. Instead, Raphael tells Adam, "To ask or search I blame thee not, for Heav'n / Is as the Book of God before thee set, / Wherein to read his wond'rous Works, and learn / His Seasons, Hours, or Days, or Months, or Years" (8. 66-69). Raphael sanctions Adam's speculations on the cosmos; but he also says that many of its aspects are beyond the scope of man or angel, and knowledge of the cosmos' immensity speaks "The Maker's high magnificence" (8.101). Rather than focus solely on these speculative ventures, Adam is counselled to take joy in what God has given him: "joy thou / In what he gives to thee, this Paradise / And thy fair Eve" (8.170-71). Celestial examination should not come at the expense of earthly delights, and the chief end of his delight and knowledge should be to glorify God and know him forever.

While *Paradise Lost* impresses on readers the scale of creation, the vast distances between heaven, hell, earth, and the stars, it resounds with God's presence. All creation owes its existence to God, is sustained by him, and will return to him. W.B.C. Watkins argues that of all Milton's great themes, "Creation is most completely and serenely realized in his work. It is closest to his heart." God's power is expressed through creation, and Thomas Orchard describes well the sublime proportions of the epic:

In its greatness and comprehensiveness the poet's scheme stands unrivalled. The all-containing and uncontained Empyrean filled with the
glory of visible Deity; the pendant Universe hung drop-like from its floor—an illumined globe floating in the great ocean of space; the Infernal World with its burning lake and lurid flames sunk in the uttermost depths of Chaos, present to the reader's imagination a cosmological vision magnificent in its proportions and transcendent in its vastness.¹³

What distinguishes Milton's vision of the cosmos from the biblical writers or from Dante is the manner in which it sees beyond the stars, travelling to the farthest reaches of creation, depicting the earth from a position beyond the earth. Unlike the Psalmist who looks up at the stars from earth, Milton presents us with a view of our "pendant world" hanging from the floor of heaven. Such a perspective demands that we acknowledge the immensity of God's creation and our own relative minuteness to it; however, the golden chain also signifies our attachment, as by an umbilical cord, to God.

What is presented in *Paradise Lost* is often viewed from a great remove, as though we were seeing places and events through the literary equivalent of a telescope. We read of the astounding fall of Satan and his crew from the heights of heaven,

Him, the Almighty Power

Hurl'd headlong flaming from th'Ethereal Sky

With hideous ruin and combustion down

To bottomless perdition ... (1.44-47)

To the vast and dreary region of Hell—

A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round

As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames

No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades ...(1.61-65)

and beyond these reaches a frozen continent,

dark and wilde, beat with perpetual storms

Of whirlwind and dire Hail, which on firm land

Thaws not, but fathers heap, and ruin seems

Of ancient pile; all else deep snow and ice ...(2.588-91)

and beyond this the hoary deep, appearing as

a dark

Illimitable Ocean without bound,

Without dimension, where length, breadth, and highth,

And time and place are lost; where eldest Night

And Chaos, Ancestors of Nature, hold

Eternal Anarchy, amidst the noise

Of endless wars, and by confusion stand. (2.891-97)

And finally we see heaven and the new-created universe:

Far off th'Empyreal Heav'n, extended wide

In circuit, undetermin'd square or round,

With Opal Tow'rs and Battlements adorn'd

Of living Sapphire, once his native Seat;

And fast by hanging in a golden Chain

This pendant world, in bigness as a Star

Of smallest Magnitude close by the Moon. (2.1047-53)
Such a survey of notable images illuminates the vastness of Milton’s cosmos, and there is a striking contrast between the boundlessness of the lower regions and the close boundaries of our own pendant world. Hell is bottomless, and when the adventurous bands of fallen angels seek to find, “if any Clime perhaps / Might yield them easier habitation” (2.572-73), they discover only a “universe of death.” Little wonder then that Milton describes them “With shudd’ring horror pale, and eyes aghast” (2.616), for they have found neither rest from their suffering nor walls to their prison. Chaos, too, is an “Illimitable Ocean without bound” (2.892). Jules Law argues that “the description of hell is full of indeterminacies which open wide geographic and semantic gaps. Everything is paradoxically synesthetic, oxymoronic, and uncertain.”

A relentless force of disintegration emanates from the metaphysical bottomlessness of hell, and the fallen angels must live with the continual threat of being swallowed, or lost within its enormity. No such danger threatens “this pendant world” which hangs secure, bound to the floor of heaven by a golden chain.

The scale of God’s creation is further emphasized by the physical location of heaven and hell. There is no middle stage between these antithetical regions. Jonathan Richardson, an early commentator of Paradise Lost, describes well the transition Milton makes when he writes,

We have seen Hell; Now Heaven opens to our View; from Darkness Visible we are come to Inconceivable Light; from the Evil One, to the Supream Good, and the Divine Mediator; from Angels Ruin’d and Accurs’d to Those who hold their First State of Innocence and Happiness; the Pictures Here are of a very Different Nature from the former: Sensible
things are more Describable than Intellectual; Every One can Conceive in some Measure the Torment of Raging Fire; None but Pure Minds, and Minds Capable Of, and Accustom’d To Contemplation Can be Touch’d Strongly with the Things of Heaven, a Christian Heaven; but He that Can may Find and possess Some Ideas of what he hopes for, where there is a Fullness of Joy and Pleasure for Evermore.\textsuperscript{15}

The contrary natures of heaven and hell, God and Satan, good and evil is more clearly observed since the narrative shuttles us straight from hell to heaven. Richardson’s comment that “sensible things are more describable than intellectual” is compelling; yet Milton’s cosmos is distinguished by its physicality. Hell’s physical climate intimates its spiritual indeterminacy and moral darkness. Don Cameron Allen argues that “Absence from God is symbolized throughout the epic by a privation of light, and it is often the darkness rather than the pains of Hell that oppresses its remorseful inhabitants so bitterly.”\textsuperscript{16} In comparison, “Heaven’s dazzling brightness is, along with its height, its most consistently mentioned characteristic.”\textsuperscript{17} The worship of God is a chief delight; to have the Father look upon the angels is for them to receive “beatitude past utterance.” In the span of three books, Milton transports readers from a region where no words can fully describe the horror and suffering to a realm where the glory and rejoicing are “past utterance.”

In heaven, God sits “High Thron’d above all hight,” and such a sublime position contrasts starkly with the violent downward force of the angels’ fall. God’s throne requires the angels to look ever higher, whereas the fallen angels are plunged down to the lowest of depths. Satan and his rebel crew are “Hurl’d headlong flaming from th’Ethereal
Sky / With hideous ruin and combustion down / To bottomless perdition” (1.45-47).

Watkins argues well for the profound energy contained in these lines:

[T]he whole violence of Satan’s more terrible fall is in the phrase hurled headlong, requiring for its utterance violent expulsion of breath; then comes the turn in air: flaming from the ethereal sky, the quickening rhythm; with hideous ruin and combustion down. The sense of falling is conveyed by our making, not just hearing, the sounds and rhythms.”

More impressive than the vast distance covered by the fallen angels is the profound duration of their fall: they are hurled headlong for nine days. Unlike his depiction of God, Milton allows readers to rest their eyes on Satan, since after his fall, we see him lying senseless and then watch as he and Beelzebub make their way to the dreary plain, “The seat of desolation” (1.181).

While Satan’s location compels us to consider how low he has fallen and the darkness and depravity of his new home, God’s throne invites our eyes to see higher and farther than they possibly can; even the angels, who are themselves beings of pure light, can see the Father only through a veil of cloud that surrounds him “like a radiant shrine” (3.378), or as his countenance is revealed by the Son’s. It is impossible to imagine a location that is “above all highth,” and Milton compels us to try to see even beyond “all highth,” since God is “high thron’d” above this highest of heights. With Satan, our gaze is directed downward until it ends on the plain in “bottomless perdition,” while God’s throne compels us to look ever higher.

Such a distinction is logical, but Milton accomplishes more than the greatest possible separation of God from Satan. Milton is not simply informing us that God is on
one end of the cosmological spectrum and Satan the other; God's omnipresence renders such a division impossible. Milton's representation of the physical areas implies something of the nature of their inhabitants; and I wish now to consider more carefully Satan's location, since his physical position informs an understanding of his spiritual condition. It is an apparent paradox that we should consider Satan to be at the bottom of "bottomless perdition," since such an interpretation places him on firm ground and hell is a place of undefined boundaries and shifting reality; if perdition is "bottomless," then the fallen angels have not encountered a bottom but have instead merely ceased to fall. Satan implies the internal correlative to this area during his soliloquy to the sun when he laments,

Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n. (4.73-78)

The horror of an ever-increasing awareness of separation from God and a limitless capacity to suffer the pain of alienation from love is more than Satan can bear, but bear it he must. Milton's depiction of "bottomless perdition" accomplishes the effect of boundlessness, like Chaos' "dark / Illimitable ocean without bound" (2.891-92). Hell is bottomless, and it is precisely this feature which signifies its immensity. Satan could be "hurled headlong" for another nine days, or for all eternity, and he would find no resting place. Yet by placing Satan "prone on the flood," Milton locates him within the
boundaries of hell; however, since it is “bottomless,” Satan is stripped of even this certainty. We must adopt a three-dimensional model of hell to understand how it can be bottomless and yet have a gate, for when Satan meets with Sin and Death, Sin takes the “fatal key” and opens “th’infernal doors” which separate hell and chaos. Before this time they could see only the gates, not what lay on the other side.

To appreciate better the nature of Milton’s cosmos let us revisit two popular depictions of it. First, Walter Clyde Curry’s diagram of the cosmos of *Paradise Lost* is misleading since it places a fixed boundary around the region of hell, but since hell is “bottomless,” its boundary cannot be determined. In Curry’s drawing the cosmos possesses definite boundaries. The entire cosmos appears as a giant globe or earth. Such a view of the universe’s limits is opposed to Thomas Orchard’s conception, who argues that to “understand the cosmological scheme which Milton adopted for the requirements of his poem, it will be necessary to imagine uncircumscribed infinitude as consisting of
two hemispheres, an upper and a lower." The upper hemisphere embraces "a vast and boundless region of immeasurable extent—the lofty habitation of the Deity: a place radiant with the effulgence of His glory, and filled by His immediate and visible presence." The lower hemisphere, "called by Milton the 'vast immeasurable abyss,' 'the wasteful and hoary deep,' 'the vast and boundless deep,' is the realm of Chaos—a dark and unfathomable abyss pervaded by the elements of matter that with incessant turmoil and confusion war with each other for supremacy." Orchard conveys this sense of "uncircumscribed infinitude" in his drawing of *Paradise Lost*.

Unlike Curry, who carefully outlines the clear boundaries of Milton's cosmos, Orchard emphasizes its boundlessness, and while we may fault Curry for making hell appear too contained, we can similarly fault Orchard for making heaven appear too boundless. We
know that heaven has a wall of crystal enclosing it, even though Orchard does not depict it, presenting heaven as a massive area located above the cosmos. The universe of *Paradise Lost* is immense, but it does possess definite borders. Heaven and the garden, for instance, are visibly contained, while hell is shown as a vast empty region, void of hope.

**Satan Unbound: The Boundaries of Hell**

The boundaries of hell are peculiar, for while a definite wall encircles heaven and the garden, hell is less contained. Though Milton describes the gate of hell and the portcullis guarding it, he does not say whether or not there is a wall connected to the gate. While the gates of heaven are ornate, those of hell are dark and forbidding (3.505-8; 2.644-48); and while the gates of heaven open with a harmonious sound, the opening of the gates of hell is accompanied by the grating noise of harsh thunder (7.205-7; 2.880-83). A gate implies the presence of walls, but if hell has walls, they are not mentioned. We know that when Satan lands on the outer surface of our universe, he gains entrance through a kind of hatch, and perhaps we should consider this gate as similarly hatch-like, enabling him to exit the lower regions, but, even so, we can only speculate about the presence of this boundary. Satan travels up from hell, through Chaos, and then down through our universe to the earth. In comparison, his fallen colleagues’ explorations are outward, and hell’s indeterminacies are soon manifested; unlike Satan, they do not discover a gate. Instead, the angels find,

No rest: through many a dark and dreary Vale
They pass'd, and many a Region dolorous,
O'er many a Frozen, many a Fiery Alp,
Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death,
A Universe of death, which God by curse
Created evil, for evil only good,
Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds,
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
Abominable, inutterable, and worse
Than Fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceiv'd
Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimeras dire. (2.617-28)

The fallen angels’ relentless exploration is similar to their cohorts’ intellectual investigation, where they discuss such weighty topics as “Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate, / Fift Fate, Free will, Foreknowledge absolute,” only to discover “no end, in wand’ring mazes lost” (2.559-661). To the enquiry of these fallen minds there is no end, but neither is there an end to the fallen angels’ physical quest. Milton does not resolve the indeterminacy of hell’s borders; in fact, he aggravates the lack of closure by not telling us whether a border is ever found, for he leaves the fallen angels scouting out hell’s terrain and returns the action to Satan’s journey: “Meanwhile the Adversary ... Explores his solitary flight” (2.629, 631). If there are walls to hell, they are substantially less defined than those encircling the garden and heaven.

Hell may be without walls; however, it is only to the fallen angels that it appears as a boundless region without end. Raphael relates to Adam the details of the war in heaven, informing him that as a herd of goats or timorous flock the defeated angels threw
themselves from heaven’s height. Nine days down they fell, and so terrible is the sight that even hell

Would have fled

Affrighted; but strict Fate had cast too deep

Her dark foundations, and too fast had bound. (6.868-870)

Hell does not want these vile transgressors, and Raphael’s words reveal an important detail—even bottomless perdition has “dark foundations,” which have been bound fast. It is an apparent contradiction that perdition can be at once bottomless and still possess foundations, and the natural question to ask is, on what are those foundations laid? Yet since all things proceed from God and are supported by him, we can surmise that hell, too, is bound by God; it is limitless only within the limits of God. To the fallen angels, hell is boundless, and they could fall for all eternity and never touch its darkest limits, for those are the reaches of God alone.

Hell may be indeterminate, but it will be shut. The Father prophesies that hell “shall be for ever shut,” which is followed by his later promise “to seal up [hell’s] ravenous jaws” (3.333; 10.637). In surveying the “Thousands of art works show[ing] those jaws gaping wide,” Frye remarks that he knows of “no instance in any visual representation of the Last Judgment in which they are shown to be sealed up and forever shut.” This vivid and reassuring promise that hell will be “for ever shut” is related to Adam by Michael when he informs him that the Son will “dissolve / Satan with his perverted world” (12.546-47). Fowler annotates “dissolve” as meaning “annihilate,
destroy." This final dissolution fully emphasizes the restoration of golden days and eternal bliss, "with Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth" (3,338).

The Boundaries of "This Pendant World"

The shifting and uncertain nature of hell is more clearly discerned when one contrasts it with the pendant world, hanging in a "golden chain" (2.1051), since the image of our entire universe suspended by a chain bespeaks certainty and stability. This chain is moored to its Creator, and such a fixed position stands in high relief to hell's boundlessness. Initially, hell appears to have a firm surface, for the angels are suspended in flight.

Till, as a signal given, th'uplifted Spear
Of thir great Sultan waving to direct
Thir course, in even balance down they light
On the firm brimstone, and fill all the plain. (1.347-50)

Brimstone may indeed be "firm," since it usually exists as a bright yellow crystalline solid, known today as sulphur. It is also a component of gunpowder and an essential ingredient found in matches, and its explosive potential increases when it is exposed to fire. Hence, the "firm brimstone" on which the angels have alighted implies an inherent instability borne of its capacity for combustion. Even though Satan finds a "firm" surface underfoot, it is unstable and explosive. Just such an explosion occurs when Satan first lights on the dry land, for it "ever burn'd / With solid" (1.228-29), and the constant detonating produces a violent energy that may be likened to
The force

Of subterranean wind [that] transports a Hill

Torn from Pelorus, or the shatter'd side

Of thunder'ring Aetna, whose combustible

And fuell'd entrails thence conceiving Fire,

Sublim'd with Mineral fury, aid the Winds,

And leave a sing'd bottom all involv'd

With stench and smoke: Such resting found the sole

Of unblest feet. (1.230-38)

Watkins keenly notes how Milton conveys the terrific energy of this explosion by tapping all the natural and cosmic sources he can think of, “volcano, earthquake, comet, planetary collision, explosion.”

Only the greatest of eruptions adequately describes the fierce combustions continually rocking this region. Satan and the fallen host, however, make their way to a plain of firm brimstone, and later, some of these angels travel inland to discover a “frozen Continent,” beaten by perpetual storms of “whirlwind and dire Hail, which on firm land / Thaws not” (2.589-90). Here, the freezing winds and driving hail create an effect like a firestorm, for the “parching Air / Burns frore, and cold performs th’effect of Fire” (2.594-95). This area is no better than the lake into which they first fell, for here they are brought “From beds of raging Fire to starve in Ice” (2.600). Not even the consolation of being “immovable, infixt, and frozen round” (2.602) is available to them, however, since they are then “hurried back to fire” (2.603). This endless cycle of burning, freezing, thawing, burning is like the vicious explosions first endured by the angels, for both extremes
momentarily incapacitate their inhabitants. Only spirits can endure these extreme conditions, and in their survival is their agony.

Hell is hostile to life; it inflicts physical pain upon the angels. But hell is also unpredictable, since the fallen angels never know when or where the next storm will strike. They do not live; they endure. Even Satan admits how terrible hell is, for after he is found at Eve’s ear, “Squat like a toad,” he replies to Gabriel’s querying of his escape from hell by saying, “Lives there who loves his pain? / Who would not, finding way, break loose from Hell, / Though thither doom’d” (4.888-90). The risk of doom is a brighter prospect than life in hell.

In Eden, we find the “verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung ... And higher than that Wall a circling row / Of goodliest Trees loaden with fairest Fruit” (4.143, 146-47). One gate leads to the garden (4.178), which Satan avoids when he contemptuously leaps over the wall. Eden is similar to heaven in that a wall encloses both. As Satan travels to the new world, the narrator describes him “coasting the wall of heav’n” (3.71); as the rebel angels flee from the Son’s wrath, the “Crystal wall of Heav’n, which op’ning wide, / Roll’d inward, and as a spacious Gap disclos’d / Into the wasteful Deep” (6.860-62); when Raphael leaves heaven the gate of heaven self-opens wide (5.253). These instances demonstrate heaven’s boundaries to be physical and well-defined. While the fallen angels are lost in hell’s indeterminacies, the walls of Eden and heaven secure their inhabitants from endless wandering.
The Walls of Eden

A significant difference between the walls of heaven and those of Eden is found in their composition. Eden’s walls are organic; it is a “verdurous wall,” composed of trees, blossoms, and fruits (4.147-50). And such a construction suggests a boundary that is less material, less solid than one fashioned from stone or crystal, as though the boundaries of Eden have yet to solidify. In contrast, a wall of crystal encloses heaven; it is impenetrable, save for its brief opening to accommodate the fleeing angels. Heaven’s crystal wall indicates the glory and radiance of its maker, and, unlike the garden, these walls cannot be trimmed back. No walls are mentioned in hell, Eden’s walls are organic, and heaven is surrounded by a wall of crystal, which implies that as one approaches God the boundaries become more certain.

Unlike brimstone, earth’s fertile surface rears a wall of foliage so dense that “the undergrowth / Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplex’d / All path of Man or Beast that pass’d that way” (4.176-77). Watkins notes that Satan is able to leap “over an unguarded towering wall into Eden,” but this overlooks a fundamental aspect; namely, the towering wall and vegetation surrounding it guard Eden, which is located on a mountain plateau in paradise. Satan tries to enter the garden, but he is denied:

Now to th’ascent of that steep savage Hill
Satan had journey’d on, pensive and slow;
But further way found none, so thick entwin’d,
As one continu’d brake. (4.172-75)

Satan will make his way into the garden, but the natural defences of paradise are able momentarily to “brake” his progress. It is surprising that Satan should be frustrated so near to his goal, given the enormous obstacles he has overcome. We have witnessed Satan finding his way to the gates of hell; negotiating the profound region of chaos; coasting the wall of heaven; navigating the vault of space; circling the earth; and finally landing on this world. It is a testimony to the superiority of Eden’s defences that he should make his way “pensive and slow” and then not even at all, for “further way [he] found none.” This is no “unguarded” wall, for while hell, chaos, and the vast spaces of this pendant world cannot stop Satan, the wall of Eden does. While the wall may seem inadequate and feeble, it alone accomplishes what the greater physical spaces could not.

Before arriving at the wall, Satan comes to the border where Eden,

Crowns with her enclosure green,

As with a rural mound the champaign head

Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides

With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,

Access deni’d. (4.132-37)

The image of the garden as a crown on the head of Eden is wonderfully suited to its majestic place within God’s kingdom and Adam and Eve’s privileged position within creation. These lines anticipate Michael’s later words to Adam that had he not fallen “this had been / Perhaps thy Capital Seat, from whence had spread / All generations” (11.342-43). A kingdom without end, and Adam and Eve enjoying the venerable status of being the founders of this realm would have resulted from their firm obedience. Such was
God’s intention, and the physical structure surrounding Eden reveals this, for the “overgrown” sides of paradise deny access, and the shrubs and tangling bushes “perplext” the path of any who might seek entrance to the garden. The vegetation of Eden protects the life within the garden.

This undergrowth is outside of Adam and Eve’s habitation, where they prune and harvest the excess growth, and yet it demonstrates the tremendous fertility of the soil. Unchecked, the vegetation flourishes into an impenetrable brake, but it also exemplifies the heavenward urge of creation. Raphael tells Adam that “one Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed, and up to him return” (5.469-70), which refers not only to humankind but to plant life as well, and the vigorous growth manifests this upward progression. On the morning of their fall, Eve tells Adam that they should divide their labours to better keep the vegetation in check, for the

work under our labor grows,

Luxurious by restraint; what we by day

Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,

One night or two with wanton growth derides

Tending to wild. (9.207-211)

There is a subtle pun on the word “tending,” for while God has commanded Adam and Eve to tend the garden, the garden’s tendency is to grow wild. It is interesting that their restraint produces “luxurious” growth, because the regions of Eden and heaven are also restrained. The walls protect, contain, and mark the limits of Eden and heaven, but it is a limitation that is beneficial to the inhabitants. Hell’s boundlessness strips it of clear referents, condemning the angels to wander endlessly.
Pruning results in better growth; and the lush vegetation of the garden recommends God’s lavish provision and the couple’s faithful stewardship of that which they have been given. Adam and Eve are secure in Eden and their labours are focused and deliberate. In contrast, the unbridled restraint of the fallen angels, endlessly exploring hell, demonstrates that they are untended and not cared for; their energy has no fit and productive outlet. Adam and Eve’s pruning of the garden and their containment within it, calls to mind Proverbs 3:12, “For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth,” a sentiment echoed by the author of Hebrews, who writes “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (12:6); and in Revelation, John records God’s injunction, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (3:19). As well, Jesus invokes the image of a vine as he declares, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ... If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned” (Jn 15:5-6). Adam and Eve’s tending of the garden brings greater growth, and the walls that encircle heaven and Eden indicate God’s “pruning” or “chastening” of these regions. The limits God establishes, disdained and transgressed by the fallen angels, enable his creation to enjoy the freedom of limits. Boundaries enable spheres and elements to coexist. The wall protects Adam and Eve from intruders even as it establishes their position in the garden, for a single glance at the wall reminds them of where they are in the garden. So it is in the Genesis account that Eve responds to the serpent saying, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it” (Gn 3:2-3).
The “midst” is literally the middle, and hell possesses no correlative to this geographic certainty, for it is boundless with a centre that is indeterminable.

The Geography of Eden

James Holly Hanford observes how Milton’s description of the garden “luxuriates in detail and brings to bear a wealth of comparison from his classical and romantic reading.” The garden’s luxuriant growth, however, threatens to overtake Adam and Eve. Overwhelmed by the enormity of their task, Eve proposes “the proto-capitalist idea of the division of labor to help meet the problem of the garden’s burgeoning growth.” Adam suspects that Eve has something other than the best interests of the garden at heart when he responds by saying that their work

Will keep from Wilderness with ease, as wide
As we need walk, till younger hands ere long
Assist us: But if much converse perhaps
Thee satiate, to short absence I could yield.
For solitude sometimes is best society,
And short retirement urges sweet return. (9.245-50)

Keeping the garden is hard work, and while the pruning results in greater growth, Adam contends that their work will provide them with a circuit large “as we need walk.” The addition of “younger hands” will enable them to tend a larger area, but for now, they need only take care of what they can. Within the walled-in garden, then, the vegetation provides greater enclosure. Due to the soil’s remarkable fertility, Adam and Eve will
soon be unable to reach the garden's wall, and Joseph Duncan comments appropriately when he says, "Adam seems to need a chain saw more than a plow."\textsuperscript{28}

But how long can Adam and his offspring prune back the growth until their labours take them beyond the garden? It would seem that the garden is larger than Adam and Eve can tend, since Adam responds to Eve by saying that they need only care for whatever is as "wide as we need walk." Given the vigorous growth, it would be increasingly difficult to discern the precise location of the original wall, since it too comprises vegetation. In fact, the overgrown sides of the mountain are already indistinguishable from the verdurous wall of paradise, for the "hairy sides" are overgrown and wild, and overhead there grew

\begin{verbatim}
Insuperable height of loftiest shade,
Cedar, and Pine, and Fir, and branching Palm,
A Silvan Scene, and as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woody Theatre
Of stateliest view. Yet higher than their tops
The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung:
Which to our general Sire gave prospect large
Into his nether Empire neighboring round.
And higher than that Wall a circling row
Of goodliest Trees loaded with fairest Fruit,
Blossoms and Fruits at once of golden hue
Appear'd, with gay enamell'd colors mixt. (4.138-149)
\end{verbatim}
It is difficult to picture this scene, for our eyes travel continually upward. Above the overgrown thicket rises a stand of cedar, pine, and fir trees of “insuperable height,” and towering over them is the “verdurous wall of Paradise,” and surpassing this wall is a “circling row / Of goodliest Trees.” It is hard to imagine that Satan, travelling on foot, could differentiate between these walls, and it would seem that he never passes the first line of defence, which is the undergrowth. Unlike heaven’s crystal wall, the wall of paradise is “verdurous.” Eve fears the vegetation will overtake their labour, but this growth acts like a plastic boundary. The vegetation will encroach up to the limit of Adam and Eve’s efforts, providing, as Adam says, a circuit large “as we need walk.” Michael’s words to Adam, that Eden could have been his “Capital Seat, from whence had spread / All generations” (11.343-44), inform us that this area might have accommodated future generations. Furthermore, Michael tells Adam that he was given “all th’ earth” (11.339), and future generations would have come “From all the ends of th’ Earth to celebrate / And reverence thee thir great Progenitor” (11.345-46). The entire world was given to Adam, not only Eden’s “narrow bounds.”

The garden is a walled plateau situated on a mountain in Eden. Milton’s mountain is “partly heavily wooded and partly craggy, through which plunges a great river.” The mountain’s beauty, like the garden, is various, diverse, and full of contrast. On the north side, the Tigris flows into a dark chasm beneath the “shaggy hill,” from whose depths is drawn with “kindly thirst” a “fresh Fountain” that waters the garden (4.223-30). These waters unite, plunge down a “steep glade” on the south side, and are reunited with the “darksome passage” (4.231). On the west face, where Adam was led up by God, grows the “steep wilderness” with shrubs and entangling undergrowth. On the east side is a
“craggy cliff,” “impossible to climb,” with a small winding path that leads to the garden’s single gate, which is guarded by Gabriel and bands of “angels under watch” (5.288). One gate leads to the garden, and so it is here that Raphael lands and where Adam and Eve are led down to the plain after their disobedience.

A large body of Renaissance literature addresses the question of what would have happened to the garden had Adam and Eve not fallen. Duncan argues that what distinguishes Renaissance discussions is that they were “not only more frequent, but more literal, more explicit, and more fully developed than those of any earlier period.” Ludovico Fidelis, a Flemish professor of theology, held that the whole earth was intended as a paradise, for how else could so many offspring be sustained if the earth outside were a desert. Joachim von Watt (1484-1551), a humanist of St. Gall and follower of Zwingli, maintained that Adam and Eve occupied a particularly delightful spot, but surely the rest of the earth was not without similar delights. The Spanish Jesuit, Juan de Pineda (1557-1637), wondered if there were not inherent inequalities in the belief that Adam and some of his children should dwell in the garden while others lived outside the walls. Would those living a thousand leagues or more away from the Tree of Life need to have the fruit transported to them? Pineda surmised that if people were to live thousands of years, there would be more people than the earth could support. Of course, all debate concerning the future of prelapsarian life on earth is a moot point, since Adam and Eve do fall and must leave the garden.

The presence of the cherubim and the wall itself imply that the garden has definite borders. While the wall is “verdurous,” less attention is given to what lies outside of the garden than on what is within, and it is here that we discover the vegetation to be
encroaching. The luxurious growth would soon bar access to the wall, but also it is ideally suited to Adam and Eve’s capabilities because their efforts constitute its boundary. The imagery of a hedge appears variously in the Hebrew Scriptures, and two instances in particular demonstrate God’s provision. When God asks Satan if he has considered His servant Job, “a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil,” Satan responds by asking, “Hath not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?” (Jb 1:8;10). Similarly, Ezekiel is told to prophesy against the prophets of Israel because they “have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord” (13:5). In these instances, the hedge, like the garden’s wall, is a protective barrier. The hedge around Job and the hedge that the prophets have not erected around Israel both symbolize spiritual protection and the wall encircling the garden demonstrates God’s protection, too. This sense of enclosing and protecting is thus wonderfully suited to the garden’s profuse growth, since it always exists at the edge of Adam and Eve’s labours: they are closely hedged at all times. With time and assistance they may enlarge their circuit “as wide / as we may walk” (9.245-46), but their labours will remain closely circumscribed. The wall is physical; yet after the fall Michael tells Adam that God will continue to be found and “of his presence many a sign / Still following thee, still compassing thee round / With goodness and paternal Love” (11.351-53). In the place of a physical enclosure, a spiritual one will be raised, demonstrating God’s abiding presence.
The Wall of Heaven

The wall of heaven similarly defines a region, but this wall is very different from Eden’s. Since heaven’s wall is composed of crystal, it enables beings on both sides to see through it; and there is no vegetation or other matter surrounding, which would diminish its definition. In addition, its composition and clarity enable the glorious light of heaven to radiate far beyond its boundaries. The transparent quality of crystal creates a curious effect. As Satan emerges from chaos, we read,

The sacred influence

Of light appears, and from the walls of Heav’n
Shoots far into the bosom of dim Night
A glimmering dawn; here Nature first begins
Her fardest verge, and Chaos to retire
As from her outmost works a brok’n foe
With tumult less and with less hostile din. (2.1034-40)

On first reading, it may seem that Milton is describing a sunrise, with the beams of light reflecting off heaven’s wall, but closer inspection reveals the “sacred influence / Of light” to be the continual light of heaven passing through the crystal walls and reaching far into the “bosom of dim night.” Heaven is the seat of light and order, and so potent is its “sacred influence” that it commands even darkest “chaos to retire.” Milton uses light in this context as he does in the invocation to book 3 (twenty lines later), as that which has “Dwelt from Eternity, Dwelt then in thee / Bright effluence of bright essence increate” (3.5-6). This light emanates not from the seat of God but from God himself, who is its
great author, and only this origin can enable the light to bring order to the “fardest verge.” Without this light, order and reason are lost, and so, the fallen angels wander forever the mazes of philosophic enquiry and the region of hell. Duncan argues that Milton’s use of light and darkness was so effective that it “changed the direction of English imagery,” so that these descriptive adjectives superseded true and false as representative judgmental adjectives.

As a physical object, the crystal wall encloses heaven while allowing divine light to pass beyond its borders. The wall of Eden is different since it does not refract light but, rather, contains the garden’s glory; its dense foliage forces Satan to leap over the wall, but it also prevents those outside from viewing its vernal delights. Citizens of either can always determine their bearings, since the walls provide a stable and fixed boundary. Conversely, the absence of walls in hell signifies the absence of certainty; the fallen angels can never ascertain their position. No middle can ever be found:

Jules Law argues that the “universe of Paradise Lost—like the universe of modern physics—is an expanding one.” To consider the geography of God enthroned high “above all highth” and Satan hurled down to “bottomless perdition” is to contemplate a universe without height or depth, but one should be careful not to project the anachronism of an expanding universe onto Milton’s epic. Not only are the theories of modern physics complex and difficult to relate to Paradise Lost, but also Milton’s cosmos is more stable and contained. Both heaven and the garden are enclosed and, in like fashion, a circle of glittering stars contains this universe. Satan must ask Uriel for directions to the “orb” inhabited by the new race of humans, since the homogeneity of the
universe does not indicate which globe they inhabit. Uriel’s reply not only provides
directions to earth but also informs Satan of the larger presence of the stars,

Numberless, as thou seest, and how they move;

Each had his place appointed, each his course,

The rest in circuit walls this Universe. (3.719-21)

The cosmos Milton depicts includes hell, chaos, heaven, and this universe. And
the universe of which Raphael is speaking contains the stars. It is interesting that this
universe, though immense, is walled in by stars, since the garden and heaven are both
walled in as well. Milton’s cosmos is circumscribed by God and held in place by him. It
is a cosmos that declares the creativity of God and his omnipresence. From God all
matter has come and to him all matter will return.

The Symbolism of the Garden in Genesis and in Paradise Lost

We have discussed the nature of Eden’s walls; yet their significance increases and
is enhanced by an examination of the tabernacle imagery contained in the Hebrew
Scriptures. I believe that we should consider the garden as more than an idealized hortus
conclusus, and I think that Milton accomplishes more than a depiction which incorporates
the best imagery from classical writers. In particular, I wish to suggest that we interpret
Milton’s garden as an archetypal Temple. In 1986, Gordon Wenham published
“Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” which points out the many
similarities between the sanctuary and the garden.34 Wenham argues that the imagery is
not coincidental but deliberate, with the tabernacle being closely modeled on the design
of the garden. Wenham brings the following observations to our attention. First, the verb describing how God walked “to and fro” (hithhallek) in the garden (Gn 3:8) is used later to describe his presence in the sanctuary (Lv 26:12; Dt 23:15; 2 Sm 7:6-7). The cherubim, traditional guardians of holy places in the ancient Near East, guard the entrance to the garden (Gn 3:24), which is on the east side, and to the inner sanctuary (1 Kgs 6:23-29; Ex 25:18-22; 26:31), which is also located on the east side. The tree of life in the garden (Gn 2:9; 3:22) is replicated by the menorah, which is a type of stylized tree of life kept in the tabernacle (Ex 25:31-35). The verbs “to work” and “to keep” (le’obdah ulesomrah) only appear together in the Pentateuch in Gn 2:15 when the Levites are commanded to do the work of and take care of the sanctuary (Nm 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6). God makes garments of skin (Gn 3:21) for Adam and Eve, and the priests are to be similarly clothed in the sanctuary (Ex 20-26; 28:42-43).

A prominent feature of the garden are the gold and precious stones (Gn 2:12, soham, bedolah), which correspond to the gold (soham) found in the tabernacle (Ex 25:7; 28:9,20; 1 Chr 29:2; Ex 28:9-14), and the precious stones (bedolah), described in Nm 11:7; Ex 16:4, 33. A river of water (Gn 2:10-14) appears again in Ez 47, Ps 46:5. Wenham also observes the parallels in phraseology between the creation account (Gn 1:1-2:3) and the account of the tabernacle’s construction (Ex 25-40), with the six commands given for the building of the tabernacle corresponding to the six days of creation (Ex 25:1; 30:11,17,22,34; 31:1). Interestingly, a seventh command is given in Ex 31:12, but it is the command to keep the Sabbath. Wenham argues that the surrounding chapters of Genesis likewise comment on the proper approach to worship, and he concludes by interpreting “you shall die” as being exclusion from the sanctuary / garden,
the centre of life, since to be exiled from the camp was to enter the realm of death. In his
reading of the garden as the archetypal sanctuary, Wenham argues the symbolic
importance of the garden and places the J and P writers closer together in their theology
than is customary.

Wenham’s argument is rich and full of insight in its own right, but it is especially
relevant when we consider Milton’s portrayal of the garden, for Milton’s depiction is
saturated with sanctuary imagery. I believe that we should consider the garden as a
Temple and the inner bower as a type of Inner Temple, or Holy of Holies. First, let me
begin with the outer walls, since Milton’s depiction of these walls (4.135-149) is
strikingly similar to the ledges that lead up to the outer wall. Satan looks up from his
entanglement, and sees “over head” trees of “insuperable highth of loftiest shade”
(4.138), with their ranks ascending “shade upon shade” (4.141). The verdurous wall of
paradise rises majestically “higher than thir tops” (4.142), implying another level, and
“higher than that Wall a circling row / Of goodliest Trees” (4.146-47) reach skyward.

These walls resemble an ascending series of steps, rather than an unbroken line of
steady growth, which calls to mind the description of Solomon’s Temple found in 1 Kgs
6:36: “And he built the inner court with three rows of hewed stone, and a row of cedar
beams.” These ledges lead to the inner court, which contains the Holy of Holies, and it is
interesting that Milton describes three ledges and then a fourth one of “goodliest trees.”
Ezekiel’s description of the Temple also depicts it rising upwards and outwards in
various levels, for he sees that there was “an enlarging, and a winding about still upward
to the side chambers: for the winding about of the house went still upward round about
the house: therefore the breadth of the house was still upward, and so increased from the
lowest chamber to the highest by the midst” (Ez 41:7). The imagery is perplexing, and it is possible that floors built upon the various ledges jutted outward, making the inner courtyard inaccessible, save by a single staircase. If we regard Milton’s depiction of the mount of paradise as similar to Solomon’s Temple, then we find further confirmation when we read later that paradise is located on a Rock

Of Alabaster, pil’d up to the Clouds,
Conspicuous far, winding with one ascent
Accessible from Earth, one entrance high;
The rest was craggy cliff, that overhung
Still as it rose, impossible to climb. (4.543-48)

The parallel between this description and Ezekiel’s is difficult not to notice, given the striking imagery of a mountain-like structure expanding as it rises. If we place the previous image of the various trees rising upward within the context of this cliff that overhangs as it rises, we confront an especially complex image. I believe that such an image, which depicts the rising levels leading to the inner garden sanctuary (4.135-149), invokes the sanctuary imagery of Solomon and Ezekiel. And this allusion encourages us to consider the garden as more than a piece of Mesopotamian farmland; it is an archetypal sanctuary, a place where God dwells and should be worshipped.

In the biblical garden, the single entrance guarded by cherubim faces east, and the tabernacle, too, has a single opening facing east, guarded by cherubim symbolically engraved on its two pillars. Milton’s depiction of the garden, which faces east (4.178) and is guarded by cherubim, suggests he is following biblical precedent. The entrance to
the Holy of Holies also faces the east, and it appears that Adam and Eve’s bower is similarly oriented. Raphael alights “on th’Eastern cliff of Paradise” (5.275) and passes the “glittering tents” of the angels under watch. Adam is reclining in the door of the bower (5.299) and “discern’d” his approach. If the door were located anywhere but on the east side, Adam could not have discerned Raphael’s approach. To see Raphael making his way from the east requires Adam to be on the bower’s eastern side. So it is that Adam calls to Eve within the bower: “Haste hither Eve, and worth thy sight behold / Eastward among those Trees” (5.308-09). As in the biblical garden and Temple, Milton places the entrance to the garden and the innermost sanctuary of the bower on the east.

Milton records Raphael passing the “glittering tents” of guardian angels, and it is perplexing to think of the angels’ tents as “glittering,” since they would seem to be composed of vegetation. This image calls to mind Raphael’s description of the angels in heaven who, after celebrating the exaltation of the Son, are

Disperst in Band and Files thir Camp extend
By living Streams among the Trees of Life,
Pavilions numberless, and sudden rear’d
Celestial Tabernacles. (5.651-54)

The “living streams” and “trees of life” resonate with garden imagery, and the living waters of Ps 46:5 and Ez 47 speak of the sanctuary’s life-giving qualities, and the fountain which waters the garden. Furthermore, the “trees of life” recall both the stylized tree or menorah kept in the Temple and the tree of life growing in the garden. The tabernacles raised by the angels signal their devotion and guarding presence while recalling the particular features of the Israelites as they camped around the sanctuary in
the wilderness. It is interesting that Milton should regard the angels as raising tabernacles, since the tabernacle was a portable Temple enabling the worship of the Lord under nomadic conditions; it was replaced by a fixed Temple building (dated at 959 BCE) only when a suitable place (Jerusalem) and person (Solomon) were found (1 Kgs 6). Proximity to the sanctuary denoted importance, since it was held that the holiness increased as one neared the sanctuary. In addition, to be situated on the eastern side, closer to the entrance, implied favour. Thus, it was the Levites, the priestly tribe, who pitched their tents immediately around the tabernacle (see below).

Numbers 2 records the explicit instructions given to the Israelites about their camp, providing the precise details of where each tribe must place its tents. It is interesting to note that the angels’ tents are “glittering,” since it requires us to consider the nature of their construction. These tents are not made from skins or other material requiring manufacture, such as precious metals that would indeed glitter. We may recall that the
Temple’s walls were overlaid with gold, which seems more appropriate to a glittering appearance. The angels’ tents are likely composed of branches, vines, leaves, and flowers, and perhaps they glitter because they reflect the sun, but regardless of how fresh the materials are it is nevertheless remarkable that Milton should portray the tents as glittering.36

Milton’s description of angelic tents is important not because he says they glitter, but rather, because his invoking of the biblical command that the Israelites place their tents in a particular order around the sanctuary reinforces his portrayal of the garden as an archetypal sanctuary and Adam and Eve as inhabitants of the holiest place. The Levites were the priestly tribe chosen by God, and their tents, located nearest to the sanctuary, prominently displayed their favour. This concept of “graded holiness” is vital to Milton’s depiction since Raphael’s approach through the “glittering Tents” implies his drawing near to the holiest of places. The Israelites’ careful and deliberate arrangement of their tents generates two important insights. First, we are being prepared to conceive of Adam and Eve’s bower as far more than a rustic lodge. Second, the pattern bestows a tremendous importance upon Adam and Eve, for they dwell in the Holy of Holies. Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when the blood was sprinkled on the Ark and the nation’s collective sins were forgiven, could the High Priest enter the Inner Temple (Lv 16); yet Adam and Eve together enjoy this holiest of places, and not only annually, but continually, for it is their home.
Raphael and the Imagery of the High Priest

Raphael’s approach brings to mind the image of the High Priest when he is dressed to enter the sanctuary, for Raphael has six wings to cover:

His lineaments Divine; the pair that clad
Each shoulder broad, came mantling o’er his breast
With regal Ornament; the middle pair
Girt like a Starry Zone his waist, and round
Skirted his loins and thighs with downy Gold
And colors dipt in Heav’n; the third his feet
Shadow’d from either heel with feather’d mail
Sky-tinctur’d grain. (5.278-85)

The imagery is dazzling and speaks of high occasion, which is paralleled in Exodus when the directions for the construction of the High Priest’s garments are given:

They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, and fine twined linen, with cunning work. It shall have the two shoulder pieces thereof joined at the two edges thereof: and so it shall be joined together. And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen. (28:6-8)

The High Priest is distinguished from the regular priests by the robe of the ephod, which was “a sleeveless tunic … a variegated dress of the four colors of the sanctuary, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen interwoven with gold.” A prominent feature of the ephod
is the two stones, upon each of which was engraved the names of six tribes of Israel (Ex 28:9-14; 39:6,7), which fasten it together at the shoulders. Raphael does not have the tribes of Israel engraved on his ephod; in fact, Raphael is not dressed at all. And it is with the utmost subtlety that Milton imparts a sense of his being apparelled for this high occasion. The top wings come “mantling o’er his breast / With regal Ornament” (5.279-80). Milton’s use of “mantling” is perplexing, since mantle is a noun, but Milton uses it here as a verb, which creates a sense of Raphael wearing a mantle without saying that he is wearing anything at all. A mantle is also ornamental drapery worn behind and around a shield, but Raphael carries no shield. In addition, these “mantling” wings appear with “regal ornament.” It is original to conceive of wings as possessing any ornament, since they are essentially feathers; yet Milton implies that these wings are purple (the colour of royalty) and intricately designed. In addition, since the wings are “mantling” over his breast they would create an effect similar to that of a breastplate. The breastplate was worn by the High Priest alone and was exceptionally ornate: it had four corners and was suspended by little chains; in the breastplate were “twelve precious stones, having engraved upon them the names of the twelve tribes of Israel [six on each].” Enclosed within the breastplate were the Urim and Thummin (“lights” and “perfections”), two stones used to discern God’s will; these were tangible objects of utmost significance, though how they were used remains unknown. Raphael’s appearance speaks of high occasion: he appears as a High Priest, clothed to enter the Inner Temple.

To connect Raphael’s appearance with that of the High Priest based solely on his “mantling” wings would be overzealous. The connection is strengthened, however, by Milton’s description of each set of wings: the first set of wings mantle his breast; the
second, cover his waist; the third, shadow his feet. The middle wings gird Raphael’s waist “like a Starry Zone” (5.281), skirting “his loins and thighs with downy Gold / And colors dipt in Heav’n (5.282-83). The High Priest’s covering included the four colours of the sanctuary (blue, purple, scarlet, and linen interwoven with gold). Flannagan notes that Raphael’s “mantling” wings would seem to be purple, while those at his midsection are like a golden belt, and those covering his feet the colour of the sky in the daytime.39

Earlier, Milton had written in “Lycidas” of the “uncouth swain” who, upon presenting his songs, rose “and twitch’t his Mantle blue: / Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new” (192-93). Lewalski notes that “Blue is ... the color of Aaron’s priestly robes (Ex 28:31), intimating that, like Lycidas, the swain will continue some ministry in the church.”40 In a similar fashion, Raphael’s wings of blue represent his priestly nature and his ministry to the human church of Adam and Eve. It is difficult to say what colours are meant when Milton depicts the middle wings as skirting Raphael’s thighs with downy gold and “colors dipt in Heav’n” (5.283). Perhaps we are to think of a rainbow (Flannagan urges us to recall Joseph’s coat of many colours). We cannot be sure, but the colours denote regal splendour and heavenly origin, as though he has been baptized in heaven. Raphael’s entrance is impressive, so impressive that Adam compares him to “another Morn / Ris’n on mid-noon” (5.310-11).

Milton brings to our attention another important aspect of High Priest imagery when he records the lower wings with “feather’d mail” (5.284). Of course, the delicate and intricately arranged feathers would produce an appearance much like a coat of mail, but Milton would seem to be invoking another highly specialized feature of the High Priest’s dress. In Ex 28:32, we read that the ephod shall have “an hole in the top of it, in
the midst thereof: it shall have a binding of woven work round about the hole of it, as it were the hole of an habergeon, that it be not rent.” Similarly, Ex 39: 23, records that “there was an hole in the midst of the robe, as the hole of an habergeon.” Habergeon is a sleeveless coat of mail, and so it is that other versions of the Bible record the ephod’s opening as being “a binding of woven work, as it were the opening of a coat of mail, that it may not be torn.” (NASB). The Hebrew word for habergeon (tahra) is used only twice in the Hebrew Scriptures (Ex 28:32; 39:23) and both times it refers specifically to the ephod’s opening. Milton’s description of the “feather’d mail” finds precedence in the exclusive use of the term to denote the opening of the High Priest’s ephod.

So stunning is Raphael’s appearance that one may forget that he is in fact not clothed at all. Cherubim protect the garden, and Raphael’s “dress” and six wings distinguish him from his fellow angels. Raphael is not a cherub but a seraph, and Milton invokes Isaiah’s vision of God where the seraphim attend God and touch Isaiah’s mouth with a burning coal. The distinction between these two groups of angels is complex and difficult to trace.41 The plural word “seraphim” occurs only in Is 6:2 and not at all in the New Testament. The seraph mentioned in Nm 21:6 and Is 14:29 signifies a fiery serpent, and seraph itself comes from a root meaning “to burn.” In Jewish theology, seraphim are connected with cherubim and ophanim as “the three highest orders of attendants on Jehovah, and are superior to the angels who are messengers sent on various errands.”42 Raphael is clearly a “superior” to the other angels, with his very appearance declaring his high position. In similar fashion, it was dress that set apart the High Priest from his fellow priests. Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, would the High Priest enter the Holy of Holies, for he alone could act as the mediator between Israel and God. The other
cherubim do not miss the importance of Raphael’s sacred mission nor do they fail to immediately recognize him:

    Straight knew him all the Bands
    Of Angels under watch; and to his state,
    And to his message high in honor rise;
    For on some message high they guess’d him bound. (5.287-90)

The cherubim understand the significance of Raphael’s approach and Milton’s repetition of “high” enforces his high calling and brings to mind the sacred duties of the High Priest. Such an understanding imbues Raphael’s visit with profundity, for he is likened to a High Priest entering the holiest of places, entering the very presence of God.

Rustic Holiness: Adam and Eve’s Bower and the Inner Temple

Adam and Eve’s bower seems but a rustic lodge. I wish, however, to continue to urge the sanctuary imagery and interpret the bower in terms consistent with the Inner Temple, which was the Hebrew theocracy’s visible centre and its most sacred place, containing “within itself most of the ideas that make up our concept of religion.”

Duncan notes that while every animal lives in paradise in harmony, “not even an insect or worm will violate the Bower.” In the garden, Adam and Eve continually enjoy God’s presence; while we may surmise that it is the vast cosmos which would declare the presence of God, we find that he is also revealed and enjoyed within this “sweet recess.” The bower is not made by Adam and Eve, but has been “planted” by God for their enjoyment. The bower is built on a place,
Chos’n by the Sovran Planter, when he fram’d
All things to man’s delightful use; the roof
Of thickest covert was inwoven shade
Laurel and Myrtle, and what higher grew
Of firm and fragrant leaf; on either side
Acanthus, and each odorous bushy shrub
Fenc’d up the verdant wall; each beauteous flow’r,
Iris all hues, Roses, and Jessamin
Rear’d high thir flourisht heads between, and wrought
Mosaic; underfoot with rich inlay
Broider’d the ground, more color’d than with stone
Of costliest Emblem. (4.691-703)

It is here, with heavenly choirs singing the “Hymenaen,” that Adam and Eve first enjoy the rites “mysterious of connubial Love” (4.743). The bower is stunning in its beauty and practical in its application, allowing them shade from the sun, secrecy, a landmark they can return to from their labours, and a place to entertain celestial visitors. But I believe that the bower may be regarded as evoking the imagery of the Inner Temple.

Milton’s depiction of the bower draws upon many biblical sources; for economy, I wish to draw attention to the features of Solomon’s Temple (2 Chr 3,4,5), since the imagery of Adam and Eve’s bower is especially consonant with it. Solomon strove to construct a home for God (959 BCE) that would meet with no equal. Every surface of the Temple’s interior was veneered with gold. It should be noted that this was a task made more difficult by the prohibition of loud tools in the sanctuary. Workers were allowed
tools, but only those producing little or no sound; hence, the workplace was punctuated by silence and solemnity. In practice, this meant that all the cutting, fabricating, engraving, and weaving was done away from the Temple site and then transported and assembled there. In this way, the bower is the perfect model, since it has been planted and has grown, silently, into existence.

The fine gold overlays would be fashioned outside the Temple and then brought to the site and fastened onto the surface. Scholars are still uncertain how such advanced construction was possible at this time of limited technological development; yet Scripture records that when Solomon built the main hall or holy place in the tabernacle he had it Ceiled with fir tree, which he overlaid with fine gold, and set thereon palm trees and chains. And he garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim. He overlaid also the house, the beams, the posts, and the walls thereof, and the doors thereof with gold; and graved cherubim on the walls. (2 Chr 3:5-7)

Truly this was a home fit for the Lord. The precious stones and gold are reflected in Milton’s description by the sparkling flowers rearing their “flourisht heads” and the gorgeous violet, crocus, and hyacinth inlaid with flowers, which are “more color’d than with stone / Of costliest Emblem” (5.702-3). Part of the genius of Milton’s description is that the flowers and vines overlay the bower’s walls in a manner superior to the gold-clad walls of the tabernacle; the wall constitutes one organic structure. The inner sanctuary of Solomon’s Temple was engraved with carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers (1 Kgs 6:29-35), which Wenham interprets as participating in the imagery of the garden. Milton does not depict cherubim either engraved in the walls or woven into the tapestries,
because Adam and Eve are privy to a far greater event: they have fellowship with an actual seraph who occupies the position of High Priest, while the cherubim stand guard without. The Lord was said to dwell between the outspread wings of the two cherubim which covered the Ark of the Covenant (Nm 7:89; 2 Kgs 19:15; Ps 80:1; 99:1), and it is under his seraphic wings that Raphael meets with Adam and Eve.

It is not clear how the curtains and various Temple coverings were held in place without sagging. Whether a ridge-pole with a sloping roof was used or an elaborate framework is not clear; neither is it certain if the solid boards of pine and cedar were used to enclose the structure or whether they were used to provide a framework for the curtains. Were the curtains enclosing the Inner Temple visible from the outside or the inside alone? Milton’s depiction avoids all these questions because the walls he depicts are neither woven nor engraved—they are alive. The “firm and fragrant leaf” connote a sense of rigidity and beauty. Flannagan observes how the structure anticipates and supersedes human architecture:

the inwoven roof anticipates thatch, the acanthus on either side suggests classical columns or pilasters, the wall is fenced with espaliered flowers which also represent a mosaic, and the arrangement of violets, crocuses, and hyacinth prefigure, but are morally preferable to, a marble floor.45 Such imagery recalls Solomon’s Temple, which had two pillars on the eastern side (2 Chr 3:15, 17), with carved cherubim, palm trees, and flowers overlaid with gold. Instead of gold, however, the floor of the bower is more coloured “than with stone / Of costliest Emblem” (4.702-3). Incense was to be burning continually in the Temple, and so in the bower “each odorous bushy shrub / Fenc’d up the verdant wall” (4.696-97). We discover
the air is filled with the sweet perfume of "Flowers, Garlands, and sweet-smelling herbs" (4.709); Eve strews the ground with "Rose and Odors from the shrub unfum’d" (5.349), and the "silvan lodge" smiles with "flow’rets deck’t and fragrant smells" (5.379). Each night Adam and Eve are "Show’r’d [with] Roses, which the morn repair’d" (4.772). The bower is beautiful and a continual source of sweet smells. I shall explore the greater significance of aroma in the next chapter, but here Milton asserts the primacy of Eden’s fragrances against the backdrop of sanctuary imagery. The walls are alive and not built with human hands, and so too the fragrance comes naturally from the plants and not from their burning—the fragrance is a type of sweet-smelling incense.

The connection between Adam and Eve’s bower and the Inner Temple is not as exact as my discussion may imply. There is no menorah, Ark of the Covenant, or sculptured cherubim with outstretched wings; the walls are overlaid with flowers not gold; no Showbread is mentioned. Approximately 30 feet square, the Inner Temple was separated from the Holy Place (30 feet by 60 feet) by a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson, in which the figures of cherubim were woven (2 Chr 3:8-14); but Milton presents only the single room bower enclosed within the much larger garden, though the "close recess" of Adam and Eve’s "nuptial bed" may indicate a separate chamber. In its totality, however, Milton’s depiction of Raphael, the garden, and the bower resonate with sanctuary imagery. Furthermore, since Milton is portraying a place and time previous to the fall, there would be no need for many of these furnishings, which are but symbols recalling an earlier time and anticipating future events.

The menorah, for instance, is a crucial feature of the Temple, which was to be serviced by the priests in the morning and at sunset (Ex 27:20-21; Lv 24:3-4) so that it
would always burn. The light it provided symbolized the calling of Israel to be a people of light even as God himself is light and has called them to be his people. In addition, it provided light for the priestly functions before God, “so Christ today is the Light of the world, who reveals the way to God.” Given that thick walls of vegetation and a roof “Of thickest covert” (4.697) enclose the bower, we can assume the need of some light. Yet Milton places no such instrument in the bower; rather it is illuminated by Adam and Eve’s love, for “Here Love his golden shafts imploys, here lights / His constant Lamp, and waves his purple wings, / Reigns here and revels” (4.763-65). The light of love shining in the bower far surpasses that which any golden lamp stand could provide. In the place of the menorah is the perfect and original light, which later lamps can only symbolize.

In addition, Milton’s garden imagery is not modeled on any one of the Temples, or even on any one of the visions of the Temple, but, rather, it is a picture of the first and perfect meeting place between God and humanity. As such, it contains all Temples even as it looks forward to the final Temple of the New Jerusalem. Duncan interprets the garden as more than the “age-old archetypal paradise,” for he regards it as revealing “the one true and original Edenic garden.” Milton, it would seem, presents an image more potent than the original garden, for he invokes Temple imagery that all the redeemed will carry within them. When Michael tells Adam that he must leave the garden Adam fears that he is also leaving the presence of God. In his consoling of Adam, Michael imparts a profound truth, that Adam “shalt possess / A paradise within thee, happier far” (12.586-87). While the heavens declare God’s glory, it is the garden that holds the greatest
importance for Adam and Eve, and it is the Temple that will become the most meaningful place for us.

The garden of Eden is the original sanctuary, not the final one. God ever has and ever will have his dwelling among humanity, hidden from the unbelieving, but always accessible to those who seek his face. It is the “upright heart and pure” which his Spirit prefers “before all temples.” As the Son intercedes as a High Priest in the heavenly Temple, so we ourselves may enter into the holiest place to enjoy communion with God and not only once a year but now and forever, here and anywhere. The earthly Temple is a powerful symbol, containing the prospect and promise of a higher communion, and beckoning us to contemplate the perfect communion enjoyed by our first parents. In Paradise Lost, Milton would have us look back with neither fondness nor regret; rather, he would have us look inward, to the paradise within, which transcends any Temple built by human hands and leads us forward in hope and devotion to the ultimate sanctuary, to a time when we shall hear,

A great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Rv 21:3-4)
Chapter 4 Endnotes


7 Ibid., 94.


10 Postman, 29.

11 Lewalski, 478.


17 Ryken, *Apocalyptic Imagery*, 79

18 Watkins, 56-57.

19 Orchard, 54.

20 Ibid., 54.
21 Ibid., 55
23 Roland Mushat Frye, 168.
25 Watkins, 58.
27 Lewalski, 482.
29 Duncan, 223.
30 For a comprehensive treatment of Paradise and its location see Duncan, 89-233.
31 Duncan, 199.
32 Ibid., 198.
33 Law, 35.
36 Perhaps the tents glitter because the angels, who are “bright orders,” live inside of them.
38 Ibid.
40 Lewalski, 86.
44 Duncan, 227.
45 Flannagan, 281 n198.


47 Duncan, 223.
Because my study focuses on Milton's depiction of God, a discussion of the presence of aroma in *Paradise Lost* might seem out of place; however, odour is an essential component of Milton's strategy for depicting God's transcendence. Through the senses, Milton touches upon the profoundest of theological insights. Theology in *Paradise Lost* is not coolly rational, nor is it divorced from the lush tropical world of the senses; rather, it is through the vibrant world of the senses that the sacred is encountered. Watkins says,

> We cannot over-stress a fundamental truth about Milton which we find endlessly proliferated in his work. At his most creative, he accepts the whole range from the physical, specifically the senses, to the absolute Divine as absolutely unbroken. This glad acceptance means that he is free to speak of any order of being extending to inanimate matter in identical sensuous terms as the great common denominator.¹

*Paradise Lost* is the distillation of Milton's lifelong study of theology and literature; but much more than a work of learning, the epic is a triumph of the human imagination. Milton reveals how life in the first world "felt." By this I mean that Milton devotes much poetic energy toward showing us the involvement of the senses in experiencing the delights of Eden and in apprehending God. Alastair Fowler says that Milton was the first English poet "to describe a sunset in detail."² Few, if any, English poets so thoroughly exalt the range and grandeur of our senses as Milton does. To read Milton is to embark on
a journey engaging the entire spectrum of human sensation and to experience the glory and power of being human.

In Milton’s epic, we read of more than how things look to the inward eye: Eden is not only visually perfect, but it is also “a wilderness of sweets,” a “spicy forest” wafting fragrances sublime. Heaven is the paradigm of visual beauty, but it also resounds with the exuberant praises of the angels’ “hymning,” and its air is sweetened with clouds of incense “Fuming from Golden Censers.” Harold Bloom argues that “When blindness came upon him, Milton turned even more fervently to the exaltation of the senses.”

While we will never know how his loss of sight changed his epic, we can be certain that Milton’s “exaltation of the senses” imbues his work with a richness of sensation that exceeds the scope of the visual capacity alone. Here I am concerned not to explore the many sensory delights in *Paradise Lost*, but rather the significance of smell. Milton uses aroma to establish a direct link between God’s “fragrant words” in book 3 and the ritual of the burnt offering recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Through odour, Milton draws to our attention the peculiar properties and practices of these offerings, while portraying their fulfillment through God’s Son, who offers the prayers of Adam and Eve, “clad with incense,” to the Father. Fragrance intimates what is to come, and it is used by Milton also to transcend temporal distinctions of past, present, and future. From the throne of God all time is one, and, through aroma, Milton depicts a God who beholds all time and whose grace transcends it.
The Prevalence of Aroma in *Paradise Lost*

We notice aroma often: Death “snuff’d the smell / Of mortal change on Earth” (10.272-73), and the fruit of the forbidden tree diffuses “ambrosial smell” (9.852). In contrast, the Fall is a “foul revolt,” and Hell’s flames are “fed / With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum’d” (1.68-69), accented by “stench and smoke.” Eve, when approached by Satan in the form of a serpent, is “Veil’d in a Cloud of Fragrance” (9.425). Before examining himself newly created, Adam observes: “all things smil’d, / With fragrance and with joy my heart o’erflow’d” (8.265-66). Richardson observed how the placing of the comma after “smil’d” rather than “fragrance” gives an Additional, and more noble idea. All things smile, not with fragrance Only, but in Every respect. That Universal Balmy, Cordial, Exhilarating Air which He breath’d continually whilst he Beheld the General Loveliness around him is also Expressed, together with the Overflowing Joy arising from All.

Adam’s heart overflows with joy and with his enjoyment of Eden’s fragrances. The sense of “joy arising from all” is expressed well by the fragrance, since it enables the vegetation to join together in unison and present themselves simultaneously to Adam. When Adam prepares to leave the garden, he tells Raphael of his desire to have reared altars to God by the mount, tree, pines, and fountain (11.320-323); yet the altars of which Adam speaks would differentiate between these places. In contrast, the fragrance that causes his heart to overflow has brought a wide and diverse variety of plant life together, enabling him to enjoy their properties of aroma in the single act of smelling.
The joy and harmony existing between the human pair and nature are beautifully expressed; yet the perfection is not limited only to this world, since the beautiful fragrance fills the air of Eden and reaches to the Throne of God, suggesting a cosmic harmony similar to the Music of the Spheres:

Now whenas sacred Light began to dawn
In Eden on the humid Flow’rs, that breath’d
Thir morning incense, when all things that breathe,
From th’ Earth’s great Altar send up silent praise
To the Creator, and his Nostrils fill
With grateful Smell, forth came the human pair
And join’d thir vocal worship to the Choir
Of Creatures wanting voice … (9.193-97)

The delicious scents bring refreshment and pleasure to the human pair, and it is the manner by which the vegetable world is able to offer its praises to God. His nostrils are filled with “grateful smell”; and there is a measure of ambiguity since “grateful” can refer to God or to the smells: God is “grateful,” indicating his glad acceptance of their praise; the smells are “pleasing.” Though the “morning incense” is silent, Milton asserts that it is a form of praise acceptable to God. All creation is united by breath, since “all things that breathe” send up silent praise to the Creator. Also, Adam and Eve add their vocal praise by first breathing in the fragrant air of Eden. The flowers both send up their silent praise to God and also have their praise inhaled and exhaled as vocal praise by the human pair. By emphasizing the role of breathing, Milton further implies a larger cosmic
harmony, since it is the breath of God that has brought all things into existence, and it is only with his breath that they can offer up their praise to him.

Through the faculty of smell Milton presents the tropical fertility and sense of joy that life in Eden holds. The "humid flow'rs" glisten with the dew, indicating the richness of this vegetative world and its newness, for these flowers are less than a week old! The "incense" they exude implies that their fragrant exhalations are the manner in which they may glorify God. As shown in Adam and Eve's Morning Prayer in book 5 (153-208), all life in Eden is in continual celebration of its Creator: the planets and stars join in "mystic dance"; the "mists and exhalations" rise in honour to the "world's great author"; the pines and every plant in "sign of worship wave"; the warbling birds bear on their wings and in their "notes his praise." The giant perspectivizing wrought by the vision of planets and stars dancing to the chorus sung by angels, human beings, and beasts illustrates the perfect communion of all creation. Adam and Eve can speak as easily of the distant planets overhead as they can of the smallest plants underfoot. In addition, the prayers come as easily and naturally to Adam and Eve as the incense does from the "humid flow'rs": praising God in this prelapsarian world is as natural and unpremeditated as breathing. Every day is an opportunity for creation to exalt God and revel in its devotion to him, and God, whose nostrils savour the smell of this praise, participates in this worship—indeed, he is the origin of it and its proper end. By introducing the image of God's nostrils, Milton implies his intimate fellowship with the New World: he is so near his creation, which has come forth from him, that though in heaven, he can savour its aroma. It is also what we expect of a morning in the garden. These may be the clearest
hills, the most fragrant flowers, and the most brilliant stars in all poetry, for this is the most beautiful, odiferous, and inspiring place ever.

Fragrance and Time Before and After the Fall

Earlier, I remarked how the garden’s dense foliage was able momentarily to stop Satan’s advances; yet the fragrance of the garden transcends these boundaries. Though from his throne God can see and hear all creation, aroma “physically” manifests itself in his presence. Only “spirits” can travel between heaven and earth; yet Milton depicts the garden’s fragrances as able to complete this journey. To help Adam understand how the cosmos has come about, Raphael explains to him that “one Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed” (5.470-71), and emanating out of and back to this divine source are all the various forms that Adam sees and even those he cannot. To help Adam grasp this concept, Raphael invokes an image familiar to Adam. The metaphor is at once complex and simple, expansive and singular, and it aptly expresses the interconnectedness, vitality, and heavenward progression of all things:

So from the root
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More aery, last the bright consummate flow’r
Spirits odorous breathes: flow’rs and thir fruit
Man’s nourishment, by gradual scale sublim’d
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
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Fancy and understanding, whence the Soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being,
Discursive, or intuitive; discourse
Is oftest yours, the latter most is ours,
Differing but in degree, of kind the same. (5.479-490)

Raphael concludes his image by remarking that “bodies may at last turn all to spirit, /
Improv’d by tract of time, and wing’d ascend / Ethereal, as we” (5.497-98), which brings
the image full-circle. Life begins with God and returns finally to him. William Kerrigan
notes how “everything is in transition. The root metamorphoses into stalk, stalk into
leaves, and leaves into flower, whereupon the plant offers its being to man.” Everything
is in transition, and it is also in continual progression. It is impossible to separate the
various elements into distinct categories, for God has created things fully formed with the
divers parts so intertwined that they can only be seen as later manifestations of what is
latent. The blossom is not a separate entity from the bud or the bud from the stalk or the
stalk from the root, but, rather, all these features are part of the same plant, springing
from the same root. The blossom is only a further manifestation of the stalk, even as the
plant manifests the latent capacity of the seed. The “tract of time” improves creation,
enabling all manner of created life to progress heavenward.

From a common “root,” all things in Eden breathe forth their timeless incense
from earth’s “great Altar,” sending “up silent praise / To the Creator” (9.195-96). There
is no clear division between spiritual or physical acts, even as there are no breaks within a
plant, though we can differentiate a blossom from a branch; and the praise of God
radiates upwards and outwards from the origin of the root, which has its source in God.
Through aroma, the works and praises of the vegetable world reach the Throne of God. Raphael’s imagery is one of increasing weightlessness: the stalk “springs lighter,” the leaves are “more aery,” and the flower “spirits odorous breathes.” The silent praise of the plants may be likened to the prayers of Adam and Eve, since both fragrance and prayer extend from the human world to the divine.

How different this is from the postlapsarian vision given Adam, where the ripening of fruit and onset of age brings the diminishing of one’s faculties: “thou must outlive / Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty, which will change / To wither’d weak and gray; thy Senses then / Obtuse, all taste of pleasure must forgo” (11.538-41). The inexpressible sense of loss, accompanying the passing of time, is less like the sublimating of physical material found in Eden and more like the fading of a rose. In a fearful vision, Adam is shown “a lazar-house” housing all the sick in their varying stages of dying. The grisly scene brings Adam to grief, who asks Michael if this be the only way to die. On the contrary, Michael explains, with fit diet and chaste appetite it is possible to live long, “till like ripe Fruit thou drop / Into thy Mother’s lap, or be with ease / Gather’d, not harshly pluckt, for death mature” (11.535-37).

The fruit is either “pluckt” or falls into the “mother’s lap.” And where the previous image insisted on weightless ascent, now the fruits either drop or are plucked: the movement is earthward with no promise of sublimation. The prelapsarian condition posits no fissures or gaps between the different levels of creation; instead it draws attention to their organic relation: the living plants exhale fragrances, which ascend effortlessly to heaven. There is no death, only the gradual converting of flesh to spirit. Rather than the rank smell of fleshly demise, which Death smells with glee, there are now
only fragrant exhalations. After the fall, however, the path to God is blocked, and it is only through death that life can be regained. Furthermore, the “mother’s lap” alludes to the necessity of things being reborn to enter God’s presence. The lap roughly approximates the womb, and the image of the mother is one of regeneration, of bringing forth new life. From the earth Adam was taken, and to the earth he will now return. Raphael speaks of the fragrance that ascends to heaven; but now, in its place, Michael tells Adam that he will be left to wilt on the stalk. Only after his death will he experience life everlasting.

Before the fall, fragrances enjoy unrestricted entrance into God’s presence. There is no need for burnt offerings, and so fresh aromas, pure as air, ascend to God’s presence. That these odours are able to reach the throne of God emphasizes the perfect connection between creation and God; after the fall it is only that which is burnt with fire, a sacrifice, that may enter his presence. When preparing to dine with Raphael, Eve gathers a variety of fruits and then she “strews the ground / With Rose and Odors from the shrub unfum’d” (5.348-49). It is remarkable that the shrub is “unfum’d,” for as Hughes notes, this is “the perfume from the fresh plant, not from its burning—not from any kind of incense.” There is no need for incense yet, and the natural fragrances are a superior form of incense. There is no fire in the garden of Eden, and it is only after the fall that Adam intuits that fire holds the possibility of “remedy or cure / To evils which our own misdeeds have wrought” (10.1079-80). After the fall, it is only that which passes through the fire that may enter the courts of heaven; and the next image encountered is that of the Son mixing their prayers with incense, taken from the fuming altar, and presenting them
to the Father. The scents of Eden, however, need no fire, and it is only after the fall that fire is required to purify and transport humanity’s gifts to God.

The Smell of Paradise: Aroma in Eden

We can only imagine how beautiful the smells of Eden were, and to dwell in the garden would have been to savour continually its delicious odours. So exuberant are the fragrances of Eden that physical boundaries cannot prevent them from travelling through the cosmos to the Throne of God. Thus, Satan, en route to paradise from his own pungent world, smells the divine aroma of Eden before seeing it:

And of pure now purer air
Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
All sadness but despair: now gentle gales
Fanning their odoriferous wings dispense
Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole
Those balmy spoils. As when to them who sail
Beyond the Cape of Hope, and now are past
Mozambic, off at Sea North-East winds blow
Sabean Odors from the spicy shore
Of Araby the blest, with such delay
Well pleas’d they slack thir course, and many a League
Cheer’d with the grateful smell old Ocean smiles. (4.153-65)
Since we have been travelling with our odious Foe, the gentle gales wafting Edenic aromas are a blessed relief.\(^{10}\) John Reichert notes that Milton’s reference is to the heart in general rather than to Satan’s heart; and while Milton may hedge on the question of whether Satan felt delight and joy, he “insists on the present power of pure air to inspire delight and joy in any human heart.”\(^{11}\) The smells intimate a world profoundly pure and gentle: goodly, fair, gay, glad, lovely, pure, gentle, balmy—everything Satan is not. Nicolson observes how the garden is “surrounded by a thick forest of trees and shrubs—reminiscences perhaps of the forests around Dante’s Earthly Paradise in the *Purgatorio* and Spenser’s Garden of Adonis in the *Faerie Queene.*”\(^{12}\) In his depiction of the garden, Milton “luxuriates in detail and brings to bear a wealth of comparison from his classical and romantic reading.”\(^{13}\) Yet while Milton’s garden is the age-old archetypal paradise, “it is also freshly revealed as the one true and original Edenic garden.”\(^{14}\) Milton’s depiction of this earthly paradise is unique in its presentation of the various fragrances; the garden of *Paradise Lost* smells better than its “predecessors.” Milton invites us to revel in its delicious scents. For an imaginative instant we feel ourselves on board the weary sea-vessel, “well-pleas’d” by the spicy aromas blown from the shore of “Araby the blest.” We are transported through aroma alone; there are no visual elements, save that the “old ocean smiles.” And Milton’s account of these delightful smells allows us to experience the therapeutic (“balmy”) effects of fresh air. The fragrant breezes of Eden do not dominate the atmosphere but gently invite. This is a world exuding the glorious scents of creation. By concentrating his depiction on the faculty of smell, Milton achieves a fuller encounter and sharper contrast; the delightful spices of “Araby the blest” are juxtaposed with the foul odour of Satan the damned; and though “beyond the Cape of Hope,” the
sailors are “cheer’d with the grateful smell.” The exotic place names, “Araby,”
“Mozambic,” and the “Cape of Hope,” lend an air of mystery and intrigue, while
contributing to the general theme of tropical plenitude.

Besides welcome refreshment, these smells signal our approach to paradise.
Through aroma alone, Milton reminds us of Satan’s banishment to the putrid regions of
hell from the fragrant regions of heaven while piquing our anticipation of Eden. In the
garden, we will smell the works of God and humankind, we will hear the angels
hymning, and we will feel the texture of a world with the dew of creation still on it. We
are so close to paradise that we can smell it, even feel its inviting breeze. But it is not yet
seen. We smell it before we sight it, and Milton’s sublime depiction excites our desire to
be there.

Christopher Ricks argues that the aromas in Eden exist primarily to give a fuller
sense of prelapsarian life and “brings out how important to Milton is this image of
Paradise (The biographical critic would justifiably make at once for Milton’s
blindness).”15 Ricks brings to our attention how Milton often “makes the scents magically
visible and physical.”16 Milton’s incorporating of odour is more than a means for him to
enrich his account of Genesis, and I believe that smell is used to help us understand the
timelessness of God. As the aroma of Eden transcends its physical boundaries, so Milton
uses the faculty of smell to illustrate God’s eternity. While God is making his first
speech,

    ambrosial fragrance fill’d

    All Heav’n, and in the blessed Spirits elect

    Sense of new joy ineffable diffus’d:
Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him all his father shone
Substantially express'd, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appear'd,
Love without end, and without measure Grace,
Which uttering thus he to his Father spake. (3.135-142)

It is peculiar that fragrance should fill all heaven as the Father delivers his first speech. Lee Jacobus interprets the “ambrosial fragrance” which fills “all heav’n” as being God’s breath, “since His breath is the inspiriting force of the universe: it should be ambrosial indeed.” For Roland Frye the presence of aroma represents Milton’s attempt to “invigorate the scene by scent.” John Rumrich interprets these lines as revealing God’s “merciful intention through an unspeakable sense of joy that suddenly permeates heaven.” Rumrich explains the fragrance as enabling Milton to depict the angels’ sudden comprehension of God’s plan, so that they do not have to ponder his words; rather, they immediately apprehend God’s intent with as much ease as smelling an aroma.

All these comments are appropriate, but in particular I want to seize upon Rumrich’s insight and argue that more than the angels may comprehend God’s “merciful intention.” It is remarkable to associate God’s words with smell. While Milton draws upon biblical depictions of God, the Hebrew Scriptures never record God’s words as fragrant. The Psalmist, for instance, says that “The voice of the Lord hews out flames of fire” (Ps 29:7), that his “word is a lamp unto my feet” (119:105), and his Law or words are “sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb” (19:10). Ezekiel, too, tells of the sweetness of God’s word. After eating the scroll given by God, he remarks
that “it was sweet as honey in my mouth” (3.3). We taste a great deal in these verses but smell little. Rumrich is on to something very important. I believe that we may regard the fragrance as demonstrating God’s “merciful intention” not only to the angels, but also to readers.

Smell and Sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures

God’s words are sweet and enlightening in the Hebrew Scriptures, and he is also a God who revels in smell. Biblical recordings of odour are few but notable and always occur when the topic concerns sacrifice, and God’s reaction to the sacrifice is often depicted by his reaction to its smell. Odour is prominent in Milton’s account of Eden, though Genesis does not mention the fragrances of Eden. Not until we encounter the Noah narrative is any mention made of odour. After the great flood, Noah emerges from the ark and offers a burnt sacrifice of every clean animal and bird to God:

And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, ‘I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.’ (Gn 8:20-21)

The word “soothe” derives from a root meaning to “assent to a being true, hence to say yes to.” The ritual of sacrifice thus proclaims the truth or “yes-ness” of God. It is a form of worship, but, importantly, it declares the sinfulness of humanity and the need for a sacrifice to atone for those sins. The animal offered up covers the transgressions symbolically. “Soothe” carries with it the additional sense of a pleasing odour, of a
fragrant aroma calming or restoring one’s troubled spirit. Noah’s sacrifice produces an aroma which is savoured by God.

God delights in the smell of humankind’s devotion. When instituting the sacrificial rite accompanying the Priest’s consecration, God commands Moses to “offer up in smoke the whole ram on the altar; it is a burnt offering to the Lord: it is a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the Lord” (Ex 29.25). It is remarkable that God stresses the aromatic feature of the burnt offering. But he leaves no doubt about the importance of odour, emphasizing it again when he instructs Moses to build an altar of acacia wood, “And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps” (Ex 30.7). Here, God specifies not just incense but “fragrant incense.” It is important to God that the odour be fragrant. “Incense” derives from the Latin incendere, meaning both “that which is burnt [and the smell of] burnt spices.”21 This reminds us of the Sabean odours blown “from the spicy shore / Of Araby the blest” while emphasizing the properties of acacia wood which yields “gum arabic.”22 Furthermore, incense helps to cover the pungent aroma released by a burnt offering. Burning flesh produces an acrid odour, which, once smelled, is not easily forgotten. Burning incense in the temple thus helps mask the harsh smell of a burnt offering, and it is still used today when powerful smells need to be neutralized.23 God’s demand of “fragrant incense” shows his regard for worshippers’ sense of smell while revealing his awareness and enjoyment of spicy, pleasing aromas. God delights in sweet smells.

That God enjoys smell is less surprising than Milton’s insistence that God’s words are fragrant. “Ambrosial” comes from the Greek “ambrosia,” meaning immortal.24 Immortality is appropriate to God’s words, which Isaiah declares will “stand forever”
(Is 40:8) and the psalmist says are perfect (Ps 19:7), and Milton may be depicting God’s words as similarly Edenic—they are perfect and a source of profound delight. Milton achieves more than accurate etymology and subtle allusion, however. God smells the fragrance produced by burnt offerings, but the sacrifice looks forward to the ultimate sacrifice of God’s Son. The sacrificing of animals anticipates Christ offering himself as the supreme sacrifice.

The ritual of sacrifice is a practice through which participants seek atonement for their sins in order to draw near to God. Fragrant odours signal our approach to Eden in *Paradise Lost* and, similarly, in the Hebrew Scriptures the smell of burnt sacrifices mark proximity to Yahweh. The word “offering” holds the root meaning, “to draw near.”

Ideally, sacrifices are spiritual thresholds across which mortals may draw near to the Immortal. The offering of a sacrifice embodies a seminal moment as one progresses from cleansing to communion. Emphasizing this transitional quality, God declares that burnt offerings shall be offered “at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord” (Lv 1:3). In the temple, curtains and doors were used to separate the various areas; the Inner Temple, for instance, was separated from the Holy Place by a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson, in which the figures of cherubim were woven (2 Chr 3:8-14). The “doorway” is literally the threshold, what “we tread on,” and is the space through which one passes in entering a new area. This crossing is more than a physical movement, for in drawing near to God, one is crossing from a physical to a spiritual dimension. The spiritual aspect is represented by the actions of the High Priest, since only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), when the blood was sprinkled on the Ark and the nation’s collective sins were forgiven, was he allowed to enter the Inner
Temple (Lv 16). Raphael's imagery and the prayer of Adam and Eve, however, imply there to be no crossing, since in the prelapsarian cosmos there are no thresholds, but rather all manner of life exists in transition—or rather, all life is a threshold whereon all things gradually ascend to heaven.

To offer a sacrifice, however, is to seek a crossing from the internal world of fallen life to the world of the eternal. It is the transitional stage whereby beings in time seek intersection with the Timeless. We are told the person giving the sacrifice must "lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf" (Lv 3:4), and this symbolizes the complete identification with the animal as a substitute. John Tullock says,

When one brought an animal to sacrifice it, it was his possession and therefore was a part of himself. He laid his hands on its head to symbolize his identity (oneness) with it (Lv 1:4). When its blood was shed in the ritual, the life that was given was symbolically his own. It was not a substitute; it was the offerer giving of himself. 27

Tullock would have us understand the intimacy between the sacrifice and the person offering it so that we may grasp the profound nature of this act. The "offerer" identifies with the animal, and in part experiences its death. The slain animal symbolically covers the person's transgressions, even as incense covers the offering's sharp aroma, and only with this covering is it possible for mortals to "draw near" to the immortal.
The Sacerdotal Supplication of the Son

In the New Testament, access to God is accomplished through prayer by the “upright heart,” not blood sacrifice in the Temple Square, for the Son provides the final sacrifice. It is through his sacrifice that humankind may draw near to God. Though Adam and Eve are the morning stars of human time, Milton surpasses chronology to depict their repentant prayers in the transcendent glory of the Son:

To Heav’n thir prayers

Flew up, nor miss’d the way, by envious winds
Blown vagabond or frustrate; in they passed
Dimensionless through Heav’nly doors: then clad
With incense, where the Golden Altar fum’d,
By thir great Intercessor, came in sight
Before the Father’s Throne: Then the glad Son
Presenting, thus to intercede began. (11.14-21)

This is a remarkable journey, bearing some resemblance to Raphael’s flight in that the prayers travel just as far. However, these prayers are much faster than the flight of angels, and, too, these prayers are able to pass “dimensionless” through heaven’s gate—the gate is not “self-open’d wide / On golden Hinges turning” (5.254-55), as would be usual. Since they are prayers carried on the wings of the “spirit of prayer,” they can be blown neither off-course nor frustrated by physical impediments, unlike the religious relics blown into the yawning space of Limbo (3.490-996). The journey of these prayers is as effortless and unhindered as the fragrant odours exhaled by the plant life in Eden;
however, while the exhalations of the garden travelled directly to the throne of God, filling his nostrils “with grateful smell,” these prayers must now be clad with incense by the Son, who alone possesses the authority to present them before God.

A remarkable feature of Eden’s aromas is how they ascend to God without having to transcend the physical world. Their journey to God’s throne is a natural extension of the material world, whereas Adam and Eve’s prayer for forgiveness is shown passing through the various stages existing between earth and heaven. There are no thresholds in prelapsarian Eden, but rather various stages of being as in a plant. Milton’s description of the aromas implies that there is strikingly little distance between heaven and earth. It is almost as if God’s throne is just beyond the walls of Eden. Even though Adam and Eve’s prayers freely pass through heaven’s gates, they must first cross the threshold where the golden altar fumes in order to come into the presence of God. Unlike the aromas of Eden, their prayers only complete the journey because the work of the “spirit of prayer” brings their prayers to heaven “with speedier flight / Than loudest Oratory” (11.7-8). In addition, their prayers are beheld by the Father only after the Son has clothed them with incense and brought them before the Father. Prayer in this postlapsarian world is transcendent, but only because it now must pass over the great divide existing between the fallen world and the next.

Milton achieves a subtle connection between these prayers and burnt offerings through etymology; burnt offering means “literally, ‘ascent,’ since all of the offering, except the blood, was burned and ascended in smoke.” Both the burnt offerings and Adam and Eve’s prayers ascend to God. Milton observes biblical precedent by depicting the prayers “clad / with incense,” since to be “clad” is to be covered, and the burnt
offerings serve to cover the people's sins. Once clad with incense the prayers are presented by the Son before the Father's Throne. The covering occurs "where the Golden Altar fum'd / By thir great Intercessor." The golden altar reminds us of the Old Testament sacrifices offered on earthly altars by the High Priest. But the word "by" accomplishes much. First, we recognize it to mean "close by"; that is, the Intercessor is near—"by" the altar. Second, this proximity implies the Intercessor is, like a High Priest, in charge of maintaining the fire of the altar: it is "by" the Son's efforts that the "Golden Altar" fumes. Yet "by" also means "because of." It is because of the Son that the Golden altar can fume—he has provided the material which now fumes on the altar. The altar can smoke only because the Son has provided the sacrifice—indeed, is the sacrifice. Adam and Eve's prayers can come into God's presence only by means of the Son's presenting of them, because his blood now covers them. It is through, "by," the Son's intercession—his atonement—that the prayers can come before the Father's throne.

My interest is less with exploring the meanings explicit or veiled in the word "by" than with exploring the temporal dislocation Milton creates with this image, since it intersects past, present, and future. First, if we understand the word "by" to mean "because of," then we must come to terms with the past tense of the action. That is, we understand that the Son has completed the act which enables the altar to fume. Second, if we take the word "by" to mean "close by," then we are working in the present tense, striving to comprehend the role of the Son at this present moment in the text, which is the intercessory role between Father and creation. In this capacity, we are encouraged to see the Son in his role of High Priest, "close by" the altar preserving the sacred fire, and this maintenance implies his continuous, active, and present involvement. Third, in
interpreting the word “by” to mean what the Son is now doing, the epic thrusts us outside of its time. The Son’s intercession is not only for the sins of Adam and Eve, but also for all the sins of Adam’s race. The Son’s sacrifice covers the sins of our first parents and reaches forward to those of our children and beyond. This future tense is stated by the Son when he requests the Father to accept the “smell of peace toward Mankind” (11.38) and again when he asks that “All my redeem’d may dwell in joy and bliss, / Made one with me as I with thee am one” (11.42-43). This reconciliation is both between Adam, Eve, and God and between the entire human race and God. The progressive and complete sense of this redemption is mirrored by the passage, which begins with the repentant sighs of the first sinners and concludes with “All my redeem’d.” The Son’s sacrifice is complete and finished, bridging the gap between Adam, Eve, and God, and between their children and God as well. Furthermore, the Son’s request to have “All my redeem’d … dwell in joy and bliss,” which is accepted and was decreed by the Father, is the promise of future existence in heaven.

The word “by” also implies that it is because of the Son that Adam and Eve, or anyone for that matter, can pray at all. Trying to separate the various events involved in the prayer of Adam and Eve into a linear sequence is impossible. It would seem logical that upon sinning, Adam and Eve should pray for forgiveness, which the Father would hear and then grant; however, Milton’s description of their prayer conflates the event into a single moment originating with God, for as Adam and Eve pray for forgiveness, Milton writes that,
They in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying, for from the Mercy-seat above
Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
The stony from thir hearts, and made new flesh
Regenerate grow instead, that sighs now breath'd
Unutterable, which the Spirit of prayer
Inspir'd, and wing'd for Heav'n with speedier flight
Than loudest Oratory. (11.1-8)

The word “prevenient” means “to go before, to prevent, anticipate, forestall.” 29 It is difficult to define the sequence of events in this passage. Adam and Eve are praying for forgiveness, which involves God’s grace, and yet God’s grace has already been bestowed on them; in fact, it is his grace that has made possible their prayers: the “spirit of prayer” has both “inspir’d” the prayers of Adam and Eve and “wing’d” them to heaven. In addition, MacCallum argues that it is prevenient grace which has “made possible both the human reconciliation that we have just witnessed and the movement to prayer.” 30 Lawrence Sasek draws attention to the inability of Adam’s efforts of repentance when he notes that “in spite of his [Adam’s] repentance, evident in his manner while he repents is the fact that his heart is ‘variable and vain.’” 31 The Son makes it possible for Adam to repent. There are no illusions regarding the ability of human effort: “Without the sustaining grace of God, Adam and Eve would be irrecoverably lost.” 32 It is God’s “prevenient grace” that “had remov’d / The stony from their hearts.” The word “had” implies that the action has been completed—in the past grace has been given and now makes it possible for his prayer of forgiveness. Jackson Boswell notes that Milton’s use
of prevenient grace emphasizes that God is the author of all things: “salvation does not lie within the natural capacity of man but in God’s will.” Prevenient grace blurs chronology, compressing the process of forgiveness and restoration into a single occurrence originating with God.

Milton’s presentation of God’s grace is twofold, since the human will co-operates with grace in the process of regeneration. The Father remarks that he will clear their senses dark and soften their stony hearts, “To pray, repent, and bring obedience due” (3.190). Prevenient grace demonstrates the frailty of the human condition, but it also enables and encourages humanity to work out their salvation through the use of will and reason. By God’s grace, humanity may stand once more.

“The spirit of prayer” has inspired the “sighs,” which Adam and Eve now breathe. As God breathed into the adamah (red clay) and gave Adam life, so now his Spirit breathes new life into them. Inspire means “to breathe in, inhale; infuse thought or feeling into,” and is closely connected to spirit, since the Latin anima means “breath, soul, spirit.” To be inspired is to be breathed into, to be animated. This is significant within the context of Paradise Lost, since it is the Spirit of God that infuses life into creation. God breathes “the breath of life” (7.526) into the red clay, and it is his Spirit, brooding on the vast abyss, that infuses “vital virtue” and “vital warmth / Throughout the fluid Mass” (7.236-37) of the primordial cosmos. Breath sustains life, and it is God’s breath that originates life. Similarly, the spirit of prayer has now “inspir’d and wing’d” their prayers to heaven—it both begins their prayers and sustains them.

This parallels the dual function of the Holy Spirit, which, as the breath of God, has originated and now sustains all things. The “winging” of their prayers is an implicit
reference to the work of the Holy Spirit, which at creation sat brooding on the vast abyss, “with mighty wings outspread” (1.20), even as it is an explicit reference to St. Paul’s promise that, “the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). Yet the work of the Son is inextricably involved with this process, for he is the one who gives form to these prayers. Hughes notes how the word “dimensionless” implies the prayers’ immateriality and that “extensionlessness was basic in the Cartesian definition of non-corporeal or spiritual being.” The prayers are without form and invisible; however, after passing through the gates of heaven, they are “clad with incense” to come “in sight / Before the Father’s throne” (11.19-20). The Son renders the prayers visible, enabling them to come into sight. Only through the Son are the prayers able to be seen by God. The penitent groanings are inspired by the Spirit and carried to heaven, where they are given expression and form by “thir great Intercessor” (11.19).

The Timelessness of the Son

In Adam and Eve’s repentance, we see both the initiating and completing of their prayers. Since the spirit of prayer has inspired these prayers, it has in fact originated them and brought them to heaven. These prayers suggest not only the penitent groanings of Adam and Eve, but also the cosmic voyage made by all prayers of the saints. The image of the Son presenting the prayers before the Father can be found in John’s Revelation (8:3); in addition, the Son’s active involvement alludes to John’s recording of the peculiar image of four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, who “fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of the odours, which are the
prayers of saints. And they sang a new song” (Rv 5:8,9). This image is well suited to the occasion Milton is now describing, since it emphasizes the prayer’s aroma. In John’s account, it is the Lamb, which we may take to symbolize the Son or “the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29, 1 Pt 1:19), who alone can open the book and its seven seals (Rv 5:5). By taking the book “out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (Rv 5:7), Christ begins the Apocalypse, which the remainder of John’s revelation describes in detail.

Thus, John argues the supremacy of Christ, who alone may open the seals and who is worthy of worship. That the golden vials contain “odours,” which are the prayers of the saints, alludes to the practice of burnt offerings and to their culmination in Christ. That the vials are full and stored up signifies that they are the culmination of all the prayers which have been prayed, for this is the end of time when the world shall be judged, burned, and a new heaven and earth created. Adam and Eve’s prayers occur at the beginning of time, and after they are clad with incense they appear before God; but the prayers of the saints occur at the end of time, heralding the destruction of the old world. It is strange to imagine prayers in this manner yet consistent with the practice of offering burnt sacrifices to God.

It is as a “soothing aroma” that the Father accepts Adam and Eve’s prayers, and Milton recalls God’s promise of restoration to Ezekiel:

As a soothing aroma I shall accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I shall prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. (Ez 20:41)

But Milton’s use of Ezekiel is complicated by his simultaneous reference to St. John. Adam and Eve are able to pray because God has removed “The stony from thir hearts,
and made new flesh / Regenerate grow instead, that sighs now breath'd / Unutterable” (11.4-6). This is an overt reference to God’s promise to Ezekiel concerning the new covenant that he will establish with his people:

I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, And do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ez 11:19, 20)

In Christian interpretation, God’s promise to Ezekiel concerns the new covenant, which will come into being after the birth, death, and resurrection of the Son. It is a powerful vision of what will come to pass in the future. The promise of a new heart and the indwelling of a new spirit given by God are dependent upon the Messiah, who has yet to come. Adam and Eve, however, are depicted by Milton as having had the “stony” removed from their heart; that is, they are now participating in the messianic covenant. In this manner, we may regard this passage as a blurring of time, for Milton conflates the various temporal contexts into a single event. Adam and Eve are able to pray because God is viewing them within a messianic context. God tells Ezekiel that he will remove the “stony from their hearts,” but Milton writes that Adam and Eve can now pray because God has removed that stone, which means that the promise given to Ezekiel has already been fulfilled, and its fulfillment enables the originators of sin to receive forgiveness—the first fruits of their seed.

That Milton presents Adam and Eve as reconciled with God through the Son collapses the distance between the Old and New Testaments. They now need fear no
condemnation before God; and though they are to live east of Eden, their prayers enjoy
unrestricted access to heaven; in fact, their prayers have always been heard: the Fall does
not interrupt their access to God. The Son’s restoring of peace between God and creation
recalls Paul’s argument for there being “now no condemnation for those who are in
Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Paul’s argument is that Christ has bridged the gap existing
between God and his fallen creation, intimating something of the timelessness of God’s
vision, since he says that those God has called he has also glorified, and this is not a
process but a revelation:

For whom He foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the
image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren;
whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He
also justified, and whom he justified, these He also glorified.

(Rom 8:29-30)

God’s foreknowledge is complete and encapsulates the journey of the creature back to its
Creator. As time-bound human beings, we appropriately read Paul’s argument as
delineating a process, that is, the journey of the soul from its fleshly home to its final
celestial one, where the final “well done” may be heard. Yet Paul locates the moment of
glorification at the moment of justification, which is also the time of calling and
foreknowledge. The spectrum of events is compressed into a single moment that
originates with God.

For Paul, the restoration of fellowship between God and humanity may be likened
to a fragrant odour:
But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. (2 Cor 2:14,15)

Paul’s words recall the Roman triumphal procession: “the victory parade awarded a conquering general in which enemy prisoners were forced to march.” During this procession, armies would march with torches and burn incense, which Paul compares to the knowledge of Christ that, like a fragrance, is diffused throughout the world via the preaching of the gospel. In the Septuagint, the term “aroma” (euodia) was used of Old Testament sacrifices, and Paul regards his life as a type of sacrifice. Paul’s words invoke the Old Testament practice of burnt offering. The “fragrance” of Christ is the smell of his sacrifice and intercession, which is the smell of peace now possible between God and humanity. Paul associates believers with smell, not so improbable considering the importance of sacrifices in his time. Paul is arguing for the fulfillment of the Old Testament law in Christ and stating that Christ has given the final sacrifice, one to be savoured by both God and man. Christ’s intercession is fragrant to God because it covers the transgressions of his people, and it is fragrant to others because it exemplifies the new fellowship available to all.

The Son’s intercession restores Adam and Eve’s communion with the Father, but at the ultimate price, for to stand between God and man requires the supreme sacrifice—his life. The Son expresses this point in Paradise Lost when he implores the Father to let him interpret for Adam and Eve:
And Propitiation, all his works on mee
Good or not ingraft, my Merit those
Shall perfet, and for these my Death shall pay.
Accept me, and in mee from these receive
The smell of peace toward Mankind, let him live
Before thee reconcil'd ... (11.33-39)

Peace is restored between the Creator and his creation, but, as witnessed in the Hebrew Scriptures, this requires a blood sacrifice—a death. The Son is that sacrifice. God's words in book 3 exude "ambrosial fragrance," and now the Son asks the Father to accept "the smell of peace." Peace offerings are distinguished from other offerings in that they are the only offering in which the offerer shares by eating a portion of the sacrifice. Such a practice "illustrated fellowship between God and man (as well as between man and man) on the basis of blood sacrifice."42 It is the offering of concord or happiness wrought by the blood sacrifice, indicating "right relations with God, expressing good-fellowship, gratitude and obligation."43 Aroma is a defining feature of the new communion. It is a soothing aroma, achieved only through blood sacrifice, and hence the Sòn's insistence that "for these my Death shall pay”; his death alone can provide the smell of peace.

Aroma is central to this depiction for it connects strongly with Ezekiel's recording of God’s promise that, "as a soothing aroma I shall accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered" (Ez 20.41).

As the Father speaks, "ambrosial fragrance" fills all heaven, and this fragrance is the smell of sacrifice, the "smell of peace." Milton establishes a link between the
fragrance of God's words and the aroma of Old Testament sacrifice. By understanding how those rituals anticipate the intercession of God's Son, we may appreciate the significance of God's fragrant words. God, too, is offering a sacrifice, and smell enables us to grasp the gravity of God's resolution. For God to grant mercy requires the death of his Son. Merely to annul the penalty of humankind's first disobedience would be to undermine the authority of God's justice. Justice demands that the penalty be paid, the sentence filled: "Die hee or Justice must" (3.210). It is only through the Son's death that peace can be restored. The blood sacrifice is the scarlet thread stretching from the old dispensation to the hill of Golgotha.

"The Smell of Peace": Time and Transcendence

By having God's words allude to the Old Testament sacrifices, Milton takes us beyond the realm of human time, which is linear. Having associated odour with the burnt offering, we understand blood sacrifices to be a consequence of the Fall. In addition to atoning for the sins of the people at that particular time, these sacrifices also look towards the Son who will provide the final sacrifice. By joining God's words in book 3 with aroma, Milton transcends the sense of time unfolding in human history; at the time of the Father's first speech, Adam and Eve have not fallen—they have yet to be tempted. But from God's eternal perspective, Adam and Eve have already fallen and he—out of mercy—has secured the conditions for all of humanity's restoration. As readers we have yet to encounter the drama contained within the tasting of a single fruit; however, as citizens of this world, we know too well the consequences of that prohibited meal. In
Milton's presentation of God, we witness God restoring his people to him before they have been separated from him. From God's throne, we participate in a cosmic perspective where the categories of past, present, and future are compressed into one time: we are before and beyond time. Through smell Milton aids our understanding of a God whose vision beholds all time and whose grace transcends it.

We have been looking at how the Son intercedes for Adam and Eve with the full authority of his post-resurrected state, and noting how such a perspective participates in various times. Lewalski, in examining *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, regards it as developing strategies which come to be characteristic of his poems: "For one, the particular subject is made to encompass all time and space as Milton continually shifts the focus from the morning of Christ's nativity back to Creation and forward to Doomsday." In *Paradise Lost* we witness the maturation of the poet's skills. Milton depicts the moment of Christ's sacrifice as occurring at the beginning of time, and he also presents Christ in the role he will occupy at the end of time. Such a conflating of time periods liberates his depiction of the Son from the restraints of human time; we are offered a perspective of the Son that is timeless. The Son's role in *Paradise Lost* is complex and expansive: he is inextricably involved in the creation of the world; in expressing the ineffable glory of the Father; in routing Satan's troops; in interceding for humanity. In addition, Milton depicts him in his final role, during the time of the Apocalypse. The Son is present at the start of time and at its completion.

Earlier, I argued that the fragrant words of God in book 3 allowed us a divine perspective; similarly, we are now provided with a Godly perspective of the Son. Jon Lawry argues that the "important image is the purging of whatever is 'gross' (11.53) by
fire. The vision is prophetic not only of flaming Paradise but of the last judgment.\textsuperscript{45}

Lawry sees in the actions of the Son a continual foreshadowing of what will come. Thus, the “judgment of man in Eden all but becomes one with the judgment of all creation at the end of time.”\textsuperscript{46} This visionary aspect so “compresses” our sense of time “that we all but escape time.”\textsuperscript{47} Milton conflates the moment of the Son’s intercession with his role of saviour and final judge of the world; and, by depicting the Son as fulfilling the roles that he will occupy throughout human time, Milton generates an image that transcends human time. Milton emphasizes the totality of the Son’s role by invoking imagery that is presented in Revelation, where John, in the spirit of prophecy, beholds the end of time, declaring:

\begin{quote}
When He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand. And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fires of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. (Rv 8:1-6)
\end{quote}

In this passage John sees “an angel” adding incense to the prayers of the saints before they are presented to God—he is not recognized as the Son. Milton, in adapting this
passage, interprets this angel to be the Son. The angel’s presentation of the prayers immediately precedes the commencement of the Apocalypse, and, by grafting this image onto the Son, Milton locates his image within the context of John’s Revelation. All time is before us in this single image, since these are humanity’s first prayers, presented by the Son with the authority of his resurrected state, and heralding the end of human time.

In this image, Milton provides a perspective on the nature of time in the presence of God, for time is spread open before us like a mighty canvas. The Son is the priest and intercessor, presenting himself as a sacrifice before God. The transcendent capacity of the Son is shown to us, and we see him in various roles at various times simultaneously. He is interceding for Adam and Eve and presenting their prayers before the Father, even as his life, death, and resurrection make that very act of intercession possible; simultaneously, he is heralding the Apocalypse, ushering in a new world even as the “old” world is being destroyed. Lawry argues that the Son is “offering himself as regenerative surrogate for man, accepting ‘good or not ingraft’ (11.35) into himself—man’s second stock, paying for all man’s knowledge of death with His human death.” Yet in a profound way this act has already been completed. The Son’s offer of himself has been accepted, enabling humanity to be “made one with me as I with thee am one” (11.44). Milton’s syntax implies that these events have come to pass: all is done; all is complete. The Father has accepted the request, which was in fact his decree. The Son’s sacrifice has been accepted and between God and humanity is the smell of peace.
Chapter 5 Endnotes

4 This quote was first pointed out by Christopher Ricks in *Milton’s Grand Style* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 81-2.
6 I follow Ricks, who points out that “grateful” sometimes “has the sense of ‘thankful,’ sometimes of ‘pleasing’ (both are common seventeenth-century meanings)” (113).
7 Wordsworth achieves a similar effect in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” where the four elements, via their representative images of daffodils, stars, waves, and poet, weave a dance of the imagination to place the poet at home in a world of encircling correspondences and vitality.
10 C.S. Lewis points out the contrast between fragrant Paradise and Satan’s fishy fume in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 44.
14 Duncan, 223.
16 Ricks, 94.
17 Lee Jacobus, *Sudden Apprehension: Aspects of Knowledge in Paradise Lost* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 185. Jacobus only mentions in passing the presence of fragrance in heaven, but
his chapter entitled “The Back Parts of God” provides an excellent discussion concerning the way
God is perceptible in a general way, similar to fragrance.

1978), 152. Frye’s concern is with the iconographic tradition of depicting God in art and how it
informed Milton’s presentation of God in *Paradise Lost*.

Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 60.

20 Walter Skeat, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth
Editions, 1993), s.v. “soothe.”

21 Skeat, s.v. “incense.”

22 Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble, eds., *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (New

23 In *A Priest to the Temple*, George Herbert argues that the parson ought to devote special
attention to the care of his church, “that all things there be decent and befitting his Name by
which it is called.” The church should be swept and kept clean, “and at great festivals strawed and
stuck with boughs and perfumed with incense” (221). *George Herbert: The Complete English

1966), s.v. “ambrosia.”

25 Skeat, s.v. “offer.”

26 Robert Claiborne, *The Roots of English: A Reader’s Handbook of Word Origins* (New York:

Background* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966), 165.


29 Skeat, s.v. “prevent.”

30 MacCallum, 184.

31 Lawrence A. Sasek, “The Drama of Paradise Lost, Books XI and XII,” in *Milton: Modern

32 MacCallum, 184.


34 MacCallum, 185.


37 Hughes, 266 n7.

38 There would seem to be a pun on site, since it can be a place, or cite, or record, i.e., “sights of woe” (1.64).

39 Walvoord & Zuck, 559.

40 Ibid., 559.

41 Ibid., 559. In the Septuagint, *euodia* appears in Gn 8:21; Ex 29:18; Lv 1:9; Nm 15:3.

42 Ryrie, 161 n3:1.


46 Ibid., 262.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 271.
Chapter 6

Time and Eternity in the Speeches of the Father and the Son

Milton’s depiction of God in *Paradise Lost* draws upon Scripture and the legacy of its explication, but rather than approach Milton’s God in terms of belief or history, I wish now to consider his portrait of God in terms of its imaginative accomplishment. In contemplating the God of the Bible, we confront the concept of timelessness; but it is not clear how God’s existence beyond our time-bound realm can be reconciled to such doctrines as Predestination, Soteriology, Grace, Foreknowledge, and Free Will. The nature of these relationships often serves as both the battlefield and arms depot for clashes in theology. I have little interest in engaging in such a skirmish; instead, I seek to demonstrate the poetic effectiveness of Milton’s God by interrogating his depiction of the timelessness of the Father and the Son. In his epic, Milton renders an accessible, coherent, and credible portrayal of the eternity of God, one that invites readers to experience imaginatively the perspective of God.

In *A Priest to the Temple* George Herbert argues that the glory and end of the parson’s knowledge consists in the Scriptures; it is there that “he sucks and lives.” The Scriptures provide four things: “precepts for life, doctrines for knowledge, examples for illustration, and promises for comfort; these he hath digested severally.” Milton “digested” Scripture, and while his knowledge of the Bible was instrumental in shaping his understanding of God, it is his ability to translate that knowledge into an imaginative vision that distinguishes his portrayal of God. The Scriptures provide a record of the
beginning and the end of human time, and by drawing upon specific scriptural events, Milton imports precise temporal contexts. In the speeches of the Father and the Son, Milton draws upon the various times of which Scripture speaks in order to establish a position beyond the time of Eden and the time of the New Jerusalem.

Milton’s use of Scripture introduces specific biblical times and themes into the context of his epic. When the Son replies to the Father’s first speech, for instance, he asks the Father if he will allow humankind to “Fall circumvented thus by fraud” (3.152). Surely, says the Son, “that be from thee far, / That be far from thee, Father, who art Judge / Of all things made, and judgest only right” (3.153-55). The Son’s words recall Abraham’s debate with God over the fate of Sodom. God tells Abraham that the “cry” of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and so he has come down to “see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me” (Gn 18:21). Abraham understands what will be the outcome of God’s visit, and he draws near to God and asks him: “wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ... That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked” (Gn 18: 23, 25). The Hebrew text provides for an unmistakable connection between Abraham’s words and the Son’s:

Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring to death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly? Gn 18:25

Like the Hebrew writer, Milton repeats the key phrase “far be it from you,” but where the Hebraist uses the figure of antistrophe Milton uses antimetabole, “that be from thee far” (3.153); “that far be from thee” (3.154). We also note the figure of traductio, evidenced in the play on the word “judge.” Both writers employ intricate rhetorical devices, and
Milton's invoking of this passage calls to mind greater contextual similarities: as Abraham is interceding for Sodom, so the Son is interceding for Adam and Eve.\(^3\) God will spare Lot and his children; and so, too, humankind will be spared from the Father's wrath.\(^4\) But while Abraham barters for the deliverance of the righteous from Sodom and Gomorrah, the Son takes the Father's sentence upon himself so that humankind can be righteous.

The Son makes righteousness possible, and since he is the perfect and original example of someone interceding on behalf of another, he is archetypal in his intercession. That is an anachronism, however, since the words of Abraham come much earlier than the Son's in *Paradise Lost*; in truth, Abraham should be considered the model for Milton's Son, because his conversation with God occurs long before Milton composes the celestial dialogue.\(^5\) The Son's words call to mind Abraham, who is the earthly head of the messianic line; yet the Son is both the beginning and the culmination of the line of Abraham. Milton's use of the Abraham episode compels us to look back to the earlier time of Genesis, and Milton's use of Scripture also urges us to look forward to the time of Revelation, since within the context of the celestial dialogue these times are both present.

**General Reflections on Time in *Paradise Lost***

Time is carefully manipulated in *Paradise Lost*; the epic begins *in medias res* and then returns to earlier events before moving forward to the later periods. Time is often difficult to delineate in the epic. There is day and night in Eden, and heaven too is dimmed for nightly rest. Sometimes, Milton's imaginative account makes it difficult to
discern the actual time, as when “night measur’d with her shadowy Cone / Half way up
Hill this vast Sublunar Vault” (4.776-77), which is 9:00 pm.⁶ Within the larger sweep of
the narrative, time is weighed against the knowledge that readers bring to the epic.
Hence, in terms of dramatic structure, readers know that Adam and Eve will eat the
prohibited fruit and be expelled from the garden before the events of book 9. William B.
Hunter, Jr., observes how the epic is present to readers in a way similar to how time is
present to God, for readers know the poem “in its entirety, its past and future story, but
[they] read it in an eternal present.”⁷

It is a tribute to the poem’s dramatic pulse that we may become involved in its
particulars to the neglect of its general thrust. I believe that treatments of the poetic
effectiveness of God in book 3 have paid insufficient attention to the wider context of the
Father’s restoration of humanity. William Empson, for instance, declares the God of book
3 to be “much at his worst here.”⁸ Empson is more provocative when he interprets
Milton’s God as fundamentally evil in his designs and sinister in his speeches. Tobias
Gregory believes that Empson is right, not because Milton fails to present a kind and
loving God, but because the God of Christianity is neither kind nor loving: “The problem,
in short, is not with Milton but with Christianity.”⁹ Yet both Empson and Gregory
marginalize what every reader knows—the Father will offer his Son and humanity will be
restored. Therefore, even as the Father rails against Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience,
“Die hee or Justice must; unless for him / Some other able, and as willing, pay / The rigid
satisfaction” (3.210-12), readers know that the Son will willingly pay that “satisfaction.”
Any interpretive framework that seeks to critique Milton’s God must take into
consideration the larger context of the Father’s eternity. In the previous chapter, I argued
that as the Father delivers his speech in book 3, the ambrosial fragrance of his words signifies the smell of peace which exists between himself and humankind. In addition, the speeches between the Father and the Son occur before Satan has made his way into the garden, demonstrating a profound insight—before Adam and Eve have been tempted, the Son has willingly offered himself as a sacrifice. In a way, paradise is regained long before it is ever lost, and it is this theme of love and sacrifice that compels the narrator to declare, "O unexampl’d love, / Love nowhere to be found less than Divine! / Hail Son of God, Savior of Men" (3.410-12).

The Son’s willingness to intercede for fallen humanity inspires hope within readers, and the narrator’s resolve that the Son, “shall be the copious matter of my song” (3.413) is exemplary, since all the redeemed should sing of his love. Let us contrast this moment of praise, however, with the Father’s stern announcement that man with

His whole posterity must die,

Die hee or Justice must; unless for him

Some other able, and as willing, pay

The rigid satisfaction, death for death.

Say Heav’nly Powers, where shall we find such love,

Which of ye will be mortal to redeem

Man’s mortal crime, and just th’unjust to save,

Dwells in all Heaven charity so dear? (3.209-216)

The Father’s words meet with silence, and we may recall the half hour of silence recorded in Revelation 8:1, though what is to be made of this connection is not clear. But Milton achieves dramatic intensity, even though readers know that the Son will offer
himself. In fact, the opening lines of the first invocation speak of the "one greater man" who will "restore us, and regain the blissful seat" (1.4-5); momentarily, we may consider the consequence of no intercessor, of mere silence between God and humankind.

But the paradise of God's presence will not be lost. So how are we to read the speeches between Father and Son? They unfold in time, and we can observe a change over the course of the speeches. It has been noted generally how the Father's stern voice is tempered by the Son's gracious and loving tone. Marilyn Arnold interprets the Son's activities as bringing "him closer and closer to man, in both proximity and attitude, until finally he goes to earth as man."\(^{11}\) One thread of the speeches is thus the movement of God from inaccessible to accessible through the Son's role of mediator and redeemer; the Son is "the God of the earth, through whose person the God of heaven is made accessible to man."\(^{12}\) The Father's opening speech establishes his elevation and justice, while his final speech declares that through the Son the just shall "See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds, / With Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth" (3.336-37). The Son is brought closer to man so that man may be brought closer to God. Such an orthodox perspective supports Irene Samuel's conclusion that the dialogue between Father and Son is not dogmatic but dramatic, comparing favourably with the earlier council scenes in hell, where honest debate is overtaken by selfish ambition and predetermined plans.\(^{13}\)

Recognition of the Son's love, humanity, and wisdom has come at the Father's expense, since these characteristics are seen in the Son rather than the Father. John Peter compares our "strangely unfavourable first impressions of God" with our "unqualifiedly approving first impressions of the Son."\(^{14}\) Merritt Y. Hughes would have us recall David's appeal to God in the Psalms, so that we may observe how in "the heavenly
dialogue the Son translates David's plea from earth to Heaven."\textsuperscript{15} Hughes finds in the heavenly dialogue an extraordinary number of scriptural echoes (eighty-seven in 329 lines), equating their presence with Milton's efforts to achieve the semblance of authentic divine utterance. If we desire to find echoes and illusions within the heavenly dialogue, we need look only to Barbara Lewalski, who finds in the speeches "the most complex layering and mixture of genres in the entire poem."\textsuperscript{16} While Hughes points out the biblical allusions within the dialogue, Lewalski draws attention to its classical antecedents; God is presented at times with "reference to the activities of Zeus in Homer and Hesiod, and of the Jove in Ovid."\textsuperscript{17} Milton's God is more than a repository of biblical and classical references, however, and Hughes raises a fundamental problem in his discussion of the term "dialogue" when he asks if we are to consider the speeches of Father and Son as "a dialogue of two persons or a dialogue within one divided person?"\textsuperscript{18} And what can dialogue mean within the greater context of God's omniscience?

Hughes approaches and resolves this question by subordinating it to the Platonic sense of dialogue as a quest for truth. This is troubling, however, given that God is absolute truth, and the notion of Father and Son moving toward a solution or the discovery of the truth is fundamentally absurd. Lewalski interprets God's three speeches as setting forth three themes: the truth of things; the stern demands of justice; the celebrating of the Son who reconciles all these elements in love. In a similar vein, she argues that the speeches begin with wrath and end in love, which tacitly assumes a difference between God's first speech and his final one. But, if God is eternal, then he is present at every moment of human time.
The Son actively engages the Father, which would seem to provide suitable evidence for their individuality. Furthermore, the Son’s impassioned reply to the Father’s sentence implies that it is the Son who is now arguing on behalf of humanity and that it is he who is responsible for changing the Father’s mind. Such an approach to the celestial dialogue, and even a reading like Samuel’s that dramatizes the dialogue between Father and Son, marginalizes their perfect concord; upon hearing the Son’s initial response the Father declares, “All hast thou spok’n as my thoughts are, all / As my Eternal purpose hath decreed” (3.171-72). While the Son has sounded an independent chord on humanity’s behalf, we find that the Father has already considered and decreed the solution. Although John Peter believes that readers respond more generously to the Son than to the Father, his interpretation minimizes the complementary nature of their dialogue; for the Son is expressing what the Father has thought and decreed. Their dialogue is less a debate than an affirmation and revelation. In this dialogue, we confront the problem of reconciling the unfolding of God’s speeches in time with the eternity of God.

How can words that unfold in time be regarded as enfolding time, and how does such a paradox play out in Paradise Lost? The speeches of God occur in time; yet the Timeless One speaks them. To present the Father and the Son as speaking is to locate them in time. In addition, how are we to respond to God’s prophetic utterances? Prophecy is a looking forward to a specific time; nonetheless, since God is timeless, he occupies the time of which he prophecies. In his reflections regarding the nature of language and time, Kerrigan observes how time best serves the interests of “historians and scientists,” since
our language is most comfortable when recording chronological events and developing sequential arguments. Much of the creative intensity in Milton’s poetry is necessarily directed toward the defeat of natural expression; his words labor to accommodate an eternal perspective.\(^{19}\) Milton achieves an “eternal perspective” by invoking various temporal frameworks from Scripture. Milton’s depiction of God unfolds in time, and it is misleading to imply that time is somehow absent in the epic. In fact, Milton makes it clear that there are two distinctly different times:

Immediate are the acts of God, more swift
Than time or motion, but to human ears
Cannot without process of speech be told,
So told as earthly notion can receive. (7. 176-79)

Looking out upon the cosmos is an “act of God,” and Milton depicts in 3.56-79 how God can behold all regions “at once” in an action “more swift / Than time or motion.” Even though Milton’s depiction itself unfolds through “process of speech,” he accommodates God’s omnipresence, which beholds the vast reaches of creation in one single comprehensive act. It is from above that the Father has “bent down his eye” (3.58) to behold “his own works and their works at once” (3.59). Anthropomorphically, it is quite impossible to bend down one’s eye, and Milton uses an unusual image to express God’s observing of creation. Biblically, Milton’s use is unprecedented with the closest comparison to be found in 2 Chr 16:9, where the eyes of the Lord are said to “run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.” God is frequently described as one who sees (especially Ps 33:
18; Gn 1:4, 10), in contrast to the idols, which are blind (Ps 115:5; 135:16). More important than the singular figure of God bending down his eye is the range and speed of his visual act. “At once” God beholds everything.

Watkins articulates a fundamental truth when he says that “God’s voice dominates *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, loved and feared, since it bears life or death; since without it nothing is that is.” To say that God is harsh and even cruel in his sentencing of man, “Die hee or Justice must” (3.210), is to concentrate upon one aspect of his speech as it manifests itself at one point in time; but later we witness how dear all his works are to him, “nor Man the least / Though last created” (3.278). I believe we need a more dynamic and synchronic method of analyzing Milton’s God. Stanley Fish is an example of a diachronic critic, since his reader-response model is based upon the reader’s progressive response to the text, demonstrating how perceptions and conclusions are calcified or turned to dust as the next word or line is encountered. Fish’s interpretive framework yields many valuable insights, and while his reading sheds light on the fallen reader, we need to reconsider the appropriateness of this strategy for interpreting God. Lewalski is right to argue that *Paradise Lost* undertakes the task of “educating readers in the virtues, values, and attitudes that make a people worthy of liberty.” But the epic not only reminds readers yet once more of their inability to make correct choices; it enables readers to participate imaginatively in the perspective of God.
Obstacles of Grace: The Perspective of the Father

God possesses an eternal perspective and his ways are justified less by theological argument than by imaginative vision. Like the narrator’s introduction (3.56-79), the Father’s first speech begins by surveying the vast space that Satan has crossed to carry out his revenge. But God sees at once, and in remarkable detail, the entire journey made by Satan from hell to the wall of heaven. Kerrigan says that God sees “the whole of space-time in a single leisurely glance composed of two moments of attention: first on earth, garden, and man; then on ‘Hell and the Gulf between, and Satan.’” Kerrigan argues that God’s perspective does not locate him within this context. Since he is “above all highth,” his coordinates cannot be established: “His is a vantage without a point.” God is recorded as surveying “Hell and the Gulf between, and Satan there / Coasting the wall of Heav’n” (70-71); but when he speaks to the Son, he beholds the very “bars of hell” and the chains heaped on Satan. The tremendous scope of God’s vision incorporates both detail and vista.

Isabel MacCaffrey interprets such a comprehensive perspective as Milton’s reminder to readers that

there are many places and points of view that we must be
simultaneously aware of: this is one of the most striking, as the heroic Satan of the early books becomes a small night bird, barely visible from the flaming mount of God. MacCaffrey would have us take note of the “great panoramic view” provided by God’s perspective; yet such an impressive sweep does not come at the exclusion of detail. Even
though Satan is “a small night bird,” God sees him clearly. God’s vision beholds the
general location of hell, the bars through which Satan must pass and the chains heaped
upon him. God sees the most divergent points of the cosmos and the various stages of
Satan’s journey in a single glance.

It is remarkable how God beholds Satan’s voyage in a way that his seeing
includes his understanding the reason for this journey and its dreadful consequences.

Turning to the Son, God asks,

Only begotten Son, seest thou what rage

Transports our adversary, whom no bounds

Prescrib’d, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains

Heapt on him there, nor yet the main Abyss

Wide interrupt can hold; so bent he seems

On desperate revenge, that shall redound

Upon his own rebellious head. (3.80-86)

There is a subtle distinction between God’s view of Satan’s voyage and the narrator’s; in
particular, God begins by asking the Son if he sees what rage transports their adversary.
While the narrator records Satan’s physical journey, God’s gaze pierces through the
garment of physical action to its source, and he beholds the consequences of Satan’s
“desperate revenge” even before he has reached the new world. Ricks observes how
“these lines compress His knowledge of Satan’s single motive with His observation of his
escape from Hell. After all, it is literally true that rage transports Satan.”26 Since he is not
in control of himself, Satan’s claims of greatness are further undermined.27
Of Satan’s apparent escape and his flight to Eden the Father says that “no bounds
Prescrib’d, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains / Heapt on him there, nor yet the main
Abyss / Wide interrupt can hold” (3.81-84). Dennis Burden holds that “Milton is right to
insist on the fact that God saw Satan (since being omniscient, he must have seen him).”
Burden is responding to those who contend that since God knows Satan is speeding to
betray Adam and Eve, he should take measures to restrain him. Burden replies that God’s
refusal to intervene is logical, because “God permits evil and eventually turns it to his
own purpose ... Satan’s evil will redound upon his own head, a divine promise that
carries reassurance about God’s foreknowledge and goodness.” But God also reveals
his goodness by drawing attention to the many restraints that Satan has trespassed. God
does not allow Satan to make his way freely to the garden, even though it would be
justified because he has created Adam and Eve “just and right, / Sufficient to have stood,
though free to fall” (3.98-99). In truth, God has placed many obstacles between hell and
Eden. In order to enter the garden, where he can only tempt Adam and Eve, Satan must
break through the “bars of hell,” and the chains “heapt on him there”; he must cross the
“main abyss,” and he will have to disguise himself as a “stripling cherub”(3.636) to ask
Uriel for directions to the new created world, but even then the wall of paradise will
“brake” his advance. Once inside the garden, he encounters bands of cherubim, and his
first attempt to seduce Eve results in his capture at the hands of Ithuriel and Zephon
(4.868). And while Satan will violate the boundaries God has placed around Adam and
Eve, their free will remains secure.
"At Once": The Timelessness of God's Vision

The opening lines of God's first speech (3.80-86) succinctly convey the physical energy of Satan's quest. For Watkins, "Milton's special genius for motion is more easily experienced than explained ... making even nouns, adverbs, adjectives, participles behave like active verbs." Allen expresses the effect of Milton's "genius for motion" when he says, "It is not only Satan who is made visible by motion; whole scenes are made flesh by this forceful use of verbs." Ricks says that

The whole passage is superbly expressive of such energy. In

diction: 'broke loose he wings his way.' And in syntax: notice how the crucial verb _can hold_ flies triumphantly free, at the very end of its clause, from the grip of the previous twenty-two words of heaped chains. It is the superb syntax of 'can hold' which is prior to, and the condition of, the lines' magnificent sound which Mr. Empson praised.

Ricks keenly notes how the verb _can hold_ "flies triumphantly free"; and, in postponing the verb until the end of its clause, Milton implies that it is the same energy, the same rage, that has driven Satan to break loose from all restraint. Likewise, the suspension of _can hold_ allows for the restraints to accumulate so that we may grasp how many boundaries Satan has trespassed. Ricks' insight is valuable and I want to build upon his point by dwelling upon Milton's placement of _can hold._

I hesitate to interpret the verb as flying "triumphantly free," since the notion of there being any triumph in Satan's actions is specious. The obstacles that Satan overcomes connote distinct temporal units; the "bars of hell," and the chains "heapt on
him there,” and the “main abyss” all correspond to separate times in Satan’s journey: first, he was in hell, then chaos, and now he “wings his way / Not far off Heav’n” (3.87-88). Yet the suspending of can hold thrusts these particular events into a condition of suspended animation, since it is only after all these events have been brought together that Milton interjects the verb, which springs the clauses into action. The effect is remarkable; can hold refers to and animates the previous twenty-two words: the prescribed bounds, the bars of hell, the chains, and the main abyss cannot hold him. Since the verb refers back to these clauses, it sets them in motion “at once.” This is a profound revelation of how events appear in God’s vision.33

The first eleven lines of God’s speech (3.80-91) seem only to recapitulate the last eleven lines of the narrator’s introduction (3.69-80), and such a repetition augments the illusion of timelessness in that we have already been shown what God is regarding. The narrator concludes by remarking that Satan is “ready now / To stoop with wearied wings, and willing feet / On the bare outside of this World” (3.72-74), which is a location similar to where God’s gaze leaves him, flying “Not far off Heav’n, in the Precincts of Light, / Directly towards the new created world” (3.88-89). Both the narrator and God conclude their observations of Satan by noting his landing on this world. Jonathan Richardson reminds us that this world is not our Earth, but the Solid, Lightless Globe which the Poet Imagines to contain the whole New Creation, whose Shell separates the Luminous Orbs that are under it, and Thus encloses them from Chaos and Ancient Night, as he Elsewhere (II.970) calls This Darkness Old.34
While Satan can see only the particularities of the sphere that he is entering, God beholds the entire cosmos. This "new created world" appears much like an onion, with all its various layers comprising a whole. God's perspective renders this vast cosmos to be but a world, while Satan's voyage reveals its enormousness.

After the dialogue between Father and Son, the narrator returns us to the action of the epic, where "upon the firm opacous Globe / Of this round World ... Satan alighted walks" (3.418-19, 422). The dialogue between Father and Son thus occupies a specific period of time, since during their speeches Satan has travelled from heaven's precincts to the surface of "this round World." The precise duration of the dialogue is not clear; but, if we compare the council in heaven with the earlier one in hell, we notice that the heavenly council occupies significantly less time, occurring between Satan preparing to "stoop" on the "bare outside of this world" (3.74) and his alighting upon it. If Milton had wanted to depict God's speeches as occurring outside of time, he might have chosen to have the narrator resume where he left off, with Satan only ready to land on "this world"; but Satan is now there.

In order to approach the aspect of eternity in a more lucid fashion, let me engage Austin Dobbins' discussion of the begetting of the Son in *Paradise Lost*, since I believe that by introducing his argument I may render my own remarks more intelligible. In *Milton and the Book of Revelation*, Dobbins argues for the centrality of Revelation to the concerns of Milton's epic. He begins by dwelling upon the question of the proper nomenclature for Milton's use of "begot" in 5.603-608. Speaking to the heavenly host God declares,
Hear my Decree, which unrevok‘t shall stand.
This day I have begot whom I declare
My only Son, and on this holy Hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord ... (5.602-608)

In this passage, Dobbins notices that Milton has shifted the “place and time of Christ’s assumption of his mediatorial office as King from earth to heaven, from a period after the beginning of time to a period before the beginning.”35 For F.E. Hutchinson, Milton has placed Christ’s exaltation not at the Ascension, but before the fall of the angels.36 Such a placement is unusual, since, as J. B. Broadbent notes, “It is not until after the creation of man that Christ assumes the messianic office of anointed liberator, and reigns by merit of his self-sacrifice.”37 Dobbins articulates the traditional response to the problem of this apparent conflating of two different times when he draws the distinction between the “poetic truth” of Paradise Lost and its “theological truth.”

Yet Dobbins believes that this is an unnecessary schism: “To Milton, the view that Christ was exalted literally, in heaven, before the beginning of time was a serious statement of theological truth ... Christ was exalted literally as the King of Heaven before the creation of the world.”38 That is not to say, however, that all of the functions of the Son are present at this moment; rather, Dobbins contends that Christ’s mediatorial office was not begotten as part of his nature but was later claimed by him. Christ is first begotten as the Son of God, then he assumes this office after he has been begotten: “the
two actions are not the same.” In this manner, Milton avoids two different theological camps: “Christ is not ‘begotten’ in heaven as a Mediator (an Arian view). Nor is Christ ‘begotten’ on earth physically (a Socinian view).” The Son is begotten as the Son of God; later, on earth, he is begotten as the Son of Man. For Dobbins, the begetting of the Son is important for demonstrating the unity of Father and Son, so that as far as readers are concerned, they are one.

Dobbins’ insistence upon the Son as Christ is illuminating but troubling. On the one hand, his distinction helps us to appreciate the timelessness of the Son, who is the mediator between the Father and humanity; but, on the other hand, such a title is misleading, since the time of Bethlehem has yet to come. My interest is not in assessing the theological accuracy of Paradise Lost or Dobbins’ reflection on it; instead, I wish to draw attention to what I see as Milton’s presentation of two different times. Milton treads a path between Socinianism and Arianism (and many other theological “isms”), and his epic engages two separate perspectives: the eternal perspective of God and the temporal perspective of readers. From the throne of God all time is eternally present; for readers, we must still await many of the events of which God speaks. I believe that any critical stance that seeks to shed light on Milton’s depiction of God must keep this tension continually present. If we disregard the eternity of God, we imperil a proper appreciation of his grace. In the speeches of the Father, we must not sacrifice the timelessness of God at the altar of a reading that unfolds in time, even though reading is an act that does unfold in time.

In their entirety, the Father’s speeches survey all of human time. God draws the Son’s attention to “Man there plac’t” in the happy garden (3.90), which revisits the
narrator's description of God beholding Adam and Eve "in the happy Garden plac'lt / Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love" (3.67). The garden imagery signals the beginning of human history, which the Father and Son now behold. But they similarly survey the end of human time: the Father says that the Son "Shall satisfy for Man" and through his sacrifice "shall be restor'd / As many as are restor'd" (3.288-89). And the Son is also depicted in his final role of judge, for he "shalt judge / Bad men and Angels" (3.330-31), and then hell, "her numbers full, / Thenceforth shall be for ever shut" (3.332-33). God shall create a new heaven and new earth wherein the just shall dwell to see "golden days, fruitful of golden deeds, / With Joy and Love triumphing" (3.337-38). "Joy and love" recall the earlier fruits which Adam and Eve are seen to be reaping in the garden. "Joy and love" are immortal, and in their triumph is the final victory of humanity, who shall dwell with God in perfect concord: "God shall be All in All" (3.341).

God is Ultimate Being and the Son participates in the sweep of his vision. "Account mee man," he tells the Father (3.238), for he shall put off his glory and upon himself let "Death wreck all his rage" (3.241); yet the Son knows that he shall rise victorious because the Father will not leave him "in the loathsome grave" (3.247), which demonstrates his absolute trust in the Father. After his resurrection, the Son will "ruin" all his foes; in terms of apocalyptic imagery, the crucial element in the Son's promise is that he with "the multitude of my redeem'd / Shall enter Heav'n long absent" (3.660-61). Hell's gates are forever shut, and the Son leads the multitude of his redeemed into heaven, where they shall enjoy in the Father's presence "joy entire" (3.265).

The narrator prefaces the celestial dialogue by depicting God as he beholds Adam and Eve enjoying "joy entire" in the garden, and while the fall will deform their joy, it
will not prevent them from experiencing the final joy of heaven. Before the Father and Son begin their speeches, the narrator describes God beholding all of his works, and when he views the human realm, he sees,

Our two first Parents, yet the only two
Of mankind, in the happy Garden plac’t,
Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,
Uninterrupted joy, unrivalled love
In blissful solitude … (3.64-69)

The “immortal fruits of joy and love” that Adam and Eve reap suggest this to be a time when fruits were still “immortal” and hence unfallen; however, the fruits that they reap begin with the Father. Adam and Eve will fall and become mortal; but they will continue to reap the fruits of joy and love, which are immortal because they come from the Father. What is remarkable about this passage is how it transcends Adam and Eve’s prelapsarian condition and applies to the entire human race. The Son concludes his speech by saying that the redeemed will have “joy entire” in the Father’s presence, and since the Son has offered himself as a substitute for humankind, which the Father has accepted, joy is “uninterrupted” because they are reconciled to God before they have fallen—there really is no time when Adam and Eve are separated from the love of God.
The Timelessness of the Son

The Father begins each of his three speeches by addressing the Son, and this mention reflects the Son’s absolute centrality in the epic. Desmond Hamlet argues that the Son constitutes the moral point of reference among the figures of *Paradise Lost*, for the inescapable relationships between those creatures and Himself. That is to say, it is impossible for any creature in the poem’s world to avoid relating to the Son, whether positively or negatively. To those who relate to Him positively, He brings salvation; but to those who relate to Him negatively, He brings damnation, since to negate the significance of the Son Who exists at the center of the poem’s world is to repudiate the central and restorative focus of the world of *Paradise Lost*.  

The Father’s dialogue with the Son demonstrates their mutual deference and mutuality; as the Father invokes the Son, so the Son invokes the Father. Their speeches enable Milton to depict something akin to a thought process, since together they discuss the fate of humanity. For Lewalski, “God himself takes on the role of educator as he engages in Socratic dialogue with his Son about humankind’s fall and redemption.” It is not within the scope of my study to discuss the limits of the Son’s knowledge, but it seems dubious to suggest that the Son should need to be “educated,” except maybe in the sense of “drawn out,” (which is what Socratic dialogue does). The Son expresses the Father’s will and is the agent of his grace. It is through the Son that God will draw near to his creation, and that the Father begins his speeches by addressing the Son is representative of the epic, since the chronology of *Paradise Lost* begins with the exaltation of the Son (5.582).
In a similar manner, the Son, as the agent active in the six days of creation, begins creation. Satan may claim that the angels “know none before us, self-begot, self-rais’d / By our own quick’ning power” (5.860-61), but we understand that they, too, have been created by the Son (5.836-37). As the exaltation of the Son begins the time of the epic, so the exalted Son begins human time through his role of Creator, and so, too, he begins the time of human redemption.

The Son expresses his humility when he extends his position to humanity. He says they are the Father’s “creature[s] late so lov’d, thy youngest Son[s]” (3.151). Detractors of Milton’s presentation of God have argued that his God begins all the trouble by exalting the Son, which begets an Iago-like spirit that festers within the breast of Lucifer. Life in heaven, however, is not a calculated existence of scaling the ladder of preferment. The Son deserves praise, but in his response to the Father in book 3, he uses his authority to restore a creation that has not yet fallen. By referring to humankind as the Father’s “youngest son,” the Son extends his own title and privilege to them. The Son asks, “should Man finally be lost?” (3.150) By asking if they should be lost, the Son locates “man” after the eating of the fruit; yet he continues to refer to “man” as God’s “youngest son.” He shares his position with unfallen Adam and Eve and their entire fallen race. The Father exalts the Son, and the Son extends his position to all humanity, whose fall and continual sin prove that they are not worthy to be called the sons of God.

It is the Son who begins human time and he will bring it to its conclusion. The human world begins with the Son through his act of creation, and it will end with him leading the redeemed through heaven’s gates. Similarly, the events in Paradise Lost begin with the incarnation of the Son, and while the epic closes with Adam and Eve
taking their solitary way through Eden “with wand’ring steps and slow” (12.648), they carry “a paradise within” them which is the direct result of the Son’s sacrifice. Through the Son’s act of creation Adam and Eve inhabit paradise; by the Son’s act of redemption the paradise of God’s presence can inhabit them.

The Father ends his first speech by declaring that, “Mercy first and last shall brightest shine” (3.134), and the next image, presented simultaneously with the “ambrosial fragrance,” is that of the Son who is seen “beyond compare” and “most glorious” (3.139,149); the Son’s countenance implicitly argues that he is the mercy that shall “brightest shine.” It is important to establish the connection between the Son’s radiant countenance and the Father’s first speech so that we may appreciate the twofold presence of God’s justice and mercy. The narrator says that “while God spake” ambrosial fragrance filled heaven, a new sense of joy was felt in the “blessed spirits elect,” and the Son appeared “beyond compare” (3.135-38). I believe it essential that these events occur as God is speaking, since it demonstrates their mutuality. The Father extends grace through the Son at the same time as he declares his justice. Even as God says that humankind will fall, readers, along with the “blessed Spirits,” witness the incomparable glory of God’s grace.

For Dobbins, it is only in the Son’s visible aspect that “Christ is inferior to God. Otherwise Christ is God.”45 The Son is the visible manifestation of God and is seen “beyond compare,” but his physical aspect raises an important question: what is the intended point of comparison? This is not the only time that the Son is seen as radiant brightness. When he is “begot” in heaven, the Son sits in “bliss imbosom’d” with the Father, “Amidst as from a flaming Mount, whose top / Brightness had made invisible”
(5.598-99). In the celestial council of book 3, the Son sits at the right hand of the Father and reflects his radiance. After their speeches, it is the Son,

In whose conspicuous count’rance, without cloud
Made visible, th’Almighty Father shines,
Whom else no Creature can behold; on thee
Impress’t the effulgence of his Glory abides … (3.385-88)

No creature can behold the Father’s glory save as it is reflected in the Son’s countenance; the Son reflects physically the Father’s ineffable glory. Such an understanding forces us to change the perception offered at the outset of the Father’s speeches, since earlier the narrator said that the “sanctities of heaven” stood “thick as stars” about the Father and from “his sight receiv’d / Beatitude past utterance” (3.61-62). “His sight” refers both to the angels’ sight of God and to the glory they experience from his looking upon them, but after the speeches we find that creation can behold the Father only as he is reflected by the Son. The Son is “beyond compare” before the speeches begin in book 3”; in fact, he has always been radiating the glory of the Father.

During the war in heaven, the Son is seen “beyond compare.” After the good angels have engaged the rebel troops for two days, the Son is sent forth to drive the “sons of darkness” into the “utter deep” (6.715). When the Father commissions the Son, he shines his “rays direct” upon him, and so the Son “all his Father full exprest” (6.719); the Son’s radiant appearance forms a contrast between the “sons of darkness” and the Son of light. The Son changes his countenance into a terror that is “too severe to be beheld” and roots the rebellious host out of heaven (6.855). Joseph Summers draws attention to the redivision of Paradise Lost into twelve books that emphasizes the central importance of
the war. For Summers, the war presents “the divine image of God’s ways at their most providential.” Stella Revard locates the Son’s importance more precisely when she notes that his victory occurs “not just generally at the center, but at the exact mathematical apex, reckoned by number of lines, when the Son ascends into His chariot of victory.”

By placing the war in the exact centre of the epic, Milton must have viewed it as similarly central to our reading of the poem, and at this apex is the Son shining “beyond compare.” The Son visibly manifests the Father’s glory, and the chariot flashes “thick flames”; it is “convoy’d” by four “cherubic shapes,” who are covered with eyes as “with stars”; the wheels are of “beryl” with “careering fires between”; over this structure is a “crystal firmament” where the Son is seated on a “Sapphire Throne, inlaid with pure / Amber, and colors of the show’ry Arch” (6.758-59). Around the chariot there is “smoke and bickering flame, and sparkles dire” (6. 766). But more dazzling than the radiant chariot of God is the Son, who “blaz’d” (6.775).

Upon his triumphant return, readers are presented with an image similar to Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when he is seated upon a donkey and the people wave palm branches and shout “hosanna.” The Son’s victorious entrance evokes this image, but I am especially interested in how Milton depicts the Son as clothed in brilliance, “beyond compare.” The angels celebrate his victory:

Eye-witnesses of his Almighty Acts,

With Jubilee advanc’d; and as they went,

Shaded with branching Palm, each order bright,
Sung Triumph, and him sung Victorious King,
Son, Heir, and Lord, to him Dominion giv’n,
Worthiest to Reign. (6.883-88)

The image of the Son returning to the praises of the angels is complicated. The “branching palms” shade the angels even though they are themselves “orders bright.” Initially, it would seem that the palms cast shadows on the angels because they shield them from the sun; however, I believe that we should understand the palms as providing shade from the Son, so that only the Son’s glory overshadows the angels’. His appearance contends that he alone is “worthiest to reign.” And even the unfallen angels, “heaven’s bright sons,” must shield themselves from his blinding countenance.

The Son is clad in transcendent brightness both when he rides forth to create the world and when he descends to judge Adam and Eve. First, as he goes forth to carry out the Father’s will, Raphael tells Adam that the Son,

On his great Expedition now appear’d,
Girt with Omnipotence, with Radiance crown’d
Of majesty Divine, Sapience and Love
Immense, and all his Father in him shone.’ (7.193-96)

That “all his Father” shines in the Son recalls 6.719 (“hee all his Father full exprest”) and demonstrates several crucial facts. First, it reflects the Son’s utter obedience: he carries out the Father’s will and expresses it perfectly, which requires absolute humility and selflessness. After the speeches of the Father and Son, the narrator remarks that the Father is to be seen only in the Son’s “conspicuous count’nance,” “Whom else no Creature can behold” (3.387). And during the Father’s first speech, we are told that in the
Son “all his Father shone” (3.139). If the Father is too brilliant, holy, and glorious to behold, and yet “all” of him shines in the Son, then how is it that the angelic beings may behold the Son?

While it is beyond the scope of my discussion to reflect upon Milton’s understanding of the Trinity, I do wish to point out the degree of unity existing between Father and Son in *Paradise Lost*. In particular, I wish to consider the Son’s brightness, since at every moment that he is encountered he is said to express fully the Father’s glory. When the Father commissions him to come to earth to judge Adam and Eve, the Son is shown “full / Resplendent” because he, “all his Father manifest / Express’d” (10.66-67). It is remarkable that the Son manifests “all his Father,” since it blurs the lines of distinction between them and runs counter to the belief that the Father is vastly superior to the Son. Visually, how would the audience of angels know the difference between Father and Son if the Son so completely expresses the Father? A distinction should be made between the Son’s first and second visit to the earth. In the first instance, the Son creates the earth according to the Father’s will and upon his return we discover that the Father “also went / Invisible, yet stay’d” (7.588-89). The co-presence of Father and Son has significant implications for God’s conversation with Adam, since the ineffable nature of the “vision bright” that converses with Adam is possibly intended to embody the Father and the Son. When the Son descends to judge Adam and Eve, however, it is made clear that it is the Son alone who is meeting with them (10.56-62, 85-96).

Milton’s depictions of the Son all insist upon his brilliant appearance. There is no time in *Paradise Lost* when the Son is not seen “beyond compare.” It is this physical
brightness that I want to ponder because even as the Father declares that “Mercy first and last shall brightest shine” (3.134), the Son’s appearance incarnates that brightness. In the Father’s first speech we hear the stern voice of justice; simultaneously, however, we see the Son’s bright countenance, which is the presence of the Father’s mercy. The Father speaks of justice, and if we restrict our reading to his words alone, then we may well hear in his tone a querulous taskmaster. Yet a consideration of the visual (and olfactory) evidence forces us to deal with the incomparable glory of the Father’s mercy as expressed through the Son. Even as God delivers justice, his mercy shines.

The Son’s radiant countenance expresses grace, and we should take into account the timelessness of this grace because we are told that mercy shall shine “first and last” (3.134). The Son is begot on heaven’s holy mount, “whose top / Brightness had made invisible” (5.598-99), and this event marks the beginning of time in the epic; human time will end, the Father says, after the Son leads the redeemed to heaven and then judges the “Bad men and Angels” (3.331). From the world’s ashes shall spring “New Heav’n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell” (3.335). In one way, human time never ends, since the redeemed will live forever; yet their immortality is made possible only through the Son. The Father concludes his final speech by emphasizing the Son’s enfolding of all time and he commands all his saints to worship the Son: “Adore him, who to compass all this dies, / Adore the Son, and honor him as mee” (3.342-43). The image of the Son who compasses “all this” recalls his initial act of creation when he takes the golden compasses and establishes the limits of creation. Furthermore, after the Son is seen “most glorious,” we are told that in “his face / Divine compassion visibly appear’d, / Love without end, and without measure Grace” (3.140-42). The Son embodies love and grace—his very
face shines with it—and since the Son is the full expression of the Father, we may surmise that this love and grace proceed from the Father. Indeed, it is because of the Father that love and grace can exist.

Sister M. Christopher Pecheux argues that in comparison with the infernal councils, the councils in heaven are “suffused in light—both the light of glory that emanates from God and the light of truth that is part of his essence.” I believe that we should add mercy to Pecheux’s formulation, so that the heavenly council of book 3 not only exudes the light of glory and truth, but the light of God’s mercy, too. In truth, the Son is shining “beyond compare” long before the heavenly council scene of book 3. When Raphael relates to Adam the occasion of the Son’s begetting, he says that the Son already sat “in bliss imbosom’d” with the Father on the top of the “flaming mount” (5.597). The Father is recorded as saying “this day I have begot whom I declare / My only Son” (5.603-4), but the crucial moment of the Son being lifted up to dwell embosomed with the Father is not depicted; it has come to pass. There is no time in Paradise Lost when the Son does not express fully the Father’s glory and mercy. Thus, even before the Father begins to speak, the Son’s appearance silently but powerfully argues for the Father’s mercy.

This early event of the Father begetting the Son further confounds our sense of time. The Father is speaking to the entire assembled host of angels; yet when Raphael is telling Adam of the events leading to Satan’s downfall, he speaks of Abdiel, who, in standing firm against the rebel angel, reminds him of what he must know is true—he is not equal to the begotten Son, “by whom / As by his Word, the mighty Father made / All things, ev’n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav’n / By him created in thir bright decrees”
Abdiel’s words problematize our reading of the begetting of the Son. In his talk with Adam, Raphael tells him that the Son was begot “on such day / As Heav’n’s great Year brings forth, th’Empyreal Host / Of Angels by Imperial summons call’d, / Innumerable before th’Almighty’s Throne” (5.583-86). Are we to understand that this is the same heavenly host that the Son has created, and, if so, when were they created? The Father declares that “This day I have begot whom I declare / My only Son, and on this holy Hill / Him have anointed, whom ye now behold / At my right hand” (6.603-606).

The biblical text for this passage is Ps 2:7, “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” According to Augustine, this verse refers to Christ’s eternal generation, before the creation of the angels, in the secret counsel of God. For Calvin, this passage referred to Christ’s temporal generation, after the creation of the angels. In *Paradise Lost*, the angels, whom the Son has created, assemble around the Father’s throne to witness the begetting of the Son. It is not clear how we are to delineate these early events. A clear answer eludes us, and it is not within the scope of my present study. I raise this problem only to demonstrate the profound difficulties of trying to outline the events of *Paradise Lost* in a manner analogous with human history. Milton envisions the *beginning* of the Son in a manner similar to the way in which he begins his epic—*in medias res*.
The Timelessness of God and the End of Time

By drawing upon New Testament accounts of Christ and the visions of the culmination of human time found in Revelation, Milton presents a fuller vision of the eternity of God. The Son is shown as occupying the roles he will fulfill as Christ, both his ministry on earth and his exalted position at the time of the Apocalypse. Milton’s rendering of the Son’s initial response to the Father evokes Abraham’s concern for the fate of the righteous citizens of Sodom, but assimilating that context is less problematic than reconciling the time of the Apocalypse with the time of the celestial dialogue. The heavenly council scene of book 3 concludes with a reference to the twenty-four elders of Revelation, who cast down their crowns before the throne of God (Rv 4:10), and Milton achieves the effect of timelessness by projecting this image of the future onto the present council scene, which occurs before Adam and Eve have fallen, even before they have been tempted by Satan. By joining the council scene with imagery from Revelation, Milton portrays the time of the Father and the Son as containing the end of time.

It is the Father who initiates the heavenly council and he concludes the dialogue, too. In a way, his third speech exalts the Son again, and it demonstrates their shared timelessness, since the Father tells the Son that his

\[
\text{humiliation shall exalt}
\]

\[
\text{With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne;}
\]

\[
\text{Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign}
\]

\[
\text{Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man,}
\]
Anointed universal King; all Power
I give thee, reign forever, and assume
Thy Merits … (3.313-19)

The throne of which the Father speaks is located beside him, and the Son is already seated upon it; in fact, even before the Son is begot the narrator pictures him seated on his throne: “the Father infinite / By whom in bliss imbosom’d sat the Son” (5.596-97). Milton’s use of “by” indicates that the Son is both by (beside) the Father and that it is by (because of) the Father that the Son is so seated. Of particular interest, the Son is seated on the throne, hence exalted, even before the Father says that he will exalt him; thus, there is no time in *Paradise Lost* when the Son is not exalted. In a similar fashion, the Father gives the Son “all power”; and yet this is the same power that the Son has used previously to rout the bad angels from heaven and to enact the Father’s command of creation. Furthermore, the Father declares to the Son that “All knees to thee shall bow, of them that bide / In Heaven, or Earth, or under Earth in Hell” (3.321-22), which repeats the command issued earlier that “to him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord: / Under his great vice-gerent reign” (5.608-9). The Son is seated upon his throne and reigns by the time of his first exaltation; hence, even as Raphael relates to Adam these first events and as the Father is heard to confer his glory and power on the Son, the Son already occupies these roles.

The Father concludes the heavenly dialogue by speaking of the golden future, of that time when
The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring
New Heav’n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell
And after all thir tribulations long
See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,
With Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth. (3.334-38)

The image of the New Jerusalem stirs within us the hope of a future liberated from the curse of Adam. These “golden days” are the final fruits of both humanity’s deeds and the Son’s sacrifice. The “tribulations long” endured by the “just” bear fruit, to be enjoyed at last without end. But this fruition is only made possible by the intercessory role of the Son, whose sacrifice has borne the fruit of redemption. Milton plays on the word “fruit,” since it was the “Fruit / of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste / Brought Death into the World, and all our woe” (1.1-3); now, “golden deeds” have wrought the fruit of “golden days.” Immediately after the Son presents Adam and Eve’s prayer for forgiveness to God, he says, “See Father, what first fruits on Earth are sprung / From thy implanted Grace in Man” (11.22-23). In terms of the epic’s sequence, these first fruits occur much later than the final fruits mentioned by the Father in book 3. The first fruits of Adam and Eve will culminate in golden days, “fruitful of golden deeds,” which is made possible only by the Father’s grace.

The grace that the Father has “implanted” is made possible by the Son’s willing sacrifice. Here, again, we see the Son’s continual humility, since he gives the Father all the glory while it is his intercession that brings Adam and Eve’s acts to fruition. It is impossible to separate the grace of God from the sacrifice of the Son. The Son says that he brings to the Father,
Fruits of more pleasing savor from thy seed
Sown with contrition in his heart, than those
Which his own hand manuring all the Trees
Of Paradise could have produc’t, ere fall’n
From innocence.  (11.26-30)

The Son declares that the fruits produced after the fall offer a “more pleasing savor” than those which Adam’s hand “manuring all the Trees / Of Paradise could have produc’t,” and it is surprising that these later fruits are “more pleasing” since we would imagine the fruits of Adam’s prelapsarian state to be superior. These fruits are more pleasing because of the “seed” which the Father has sown; that is, it is because of the Son’s intercessory role that Adam’s deeds can be more savoury. Doctrinal interpretation presents a different view. The Nicene Creed, for example, states that Christ ascended the throne of God after he had completed his earthly ministry as mediator between God and humankind. Yet Milton contends that Adam and Eve are already enjoying the first fruits of Christ’s sacrifice. The Son, who is exercising his full power as the Incarnate Christ, presents their prayers to the Father, and it is the Son who reveals that the Father has already implanted his grace in them, a grace that exists because of the Son’s post-resurrected role of Redeemer.

A knowledge of the Bible assists in our understanding of the events of Paradise Lost; but Milton does not unfold his narrative along a linear axis. A biblically informed reading projects a time-conscious context onto the epic. For instance, the Son’s intercession and priestly functions would be a function of the resurrected Christ rather than of the pre-incarnate Son; yet Milton depicts the Son as possessing that authority
before Adam and Eve have left the garden, even before they have been tempted to eat of the forbidden tree.

Milton emphasizes the eternity of the Father and Son by embedding imagery from Revelation within the angels’ response to the Father’s third and final speech. Upon the completion of the heavenly council, the narrator records the angels’ enthusiastic response:

The multitude of Angels with a shout
Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
As from blest voices, uttering joy, Heav’n rung
With Jubilee, and loud Hosannas fill’d
Th’eternal Regions: lowly reverent
Towards either Throne they bow, and to the ground
With solemn adoration down they cast
Thir Crowns inwove with Amarant and Gold … (3.345-52)

Milton creates a curious effect in this passage, which is a composite of several biblical images. First, the image of praise being offered to the Son and Father alludes to the “four and twenty elders [who] fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne” (Rv 4:10). Second, the image invokes John’s recording of the numberless angels, beasts, and elders who encircle God’s throne and proclaim the blessing, honour, glory, and power due to God and the Lamb (Rv 5:11-3). Dobbins argues that the combination of Revelation 4 with Revelation 5 further emphasizes that “Christ was begotten literally as the Son of God.”51 Third, Milton’s language suggests that the connection be extended to include the image of Jesus
entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey, since "th'eternal regions" are filled by "loud hosannas" (3.348-49). Jesus' humble and triumphant entry fulfills the prophecy given by Zechariah (9:9), which is recognized by those who herald him as their Messiah, crying, "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Mt 21:9). Hosanna is only used six times in the Bible (Mt 21:9, 15; Mk 11:9, 10; Jn 12:13), and, in each instance, it is an exclamation of praise. The evangelists all use "hosanna" in relation to this one event, which is the open declaration of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. The messianic sense is vital for the emphasis it places on salvation being brought to the people from God. "hosanna" is both a word of praise and of supplication; it is the cry, "save us," and it is praise offered to the Saviour. In all of Milton's poetry, "hosanna" appears only twice (PL 3.348; 6.205). Both times, it signals the triumph of the Son. In the midst of battle, Abdiel strikes Satan on his crest, forcing him to recoil "ten paces huge ... the tenth on bended knee" (6.192-93). As Satan bends his knee, Michael sounds the trumpet of the archangel and "the faithful Armies rung / Hosanna to the Highest" (6.204-5). The imagery recalls the curse pronounced upon the serpent that Eve's "seed shall bruise thy head" (10.181), since Abdiel's sword literally bruises Satan's head, forcing him to his knee, and Milton emphasizes this point by using ten iambic feet: "He back recoil'd; the tenth on bended knee" (6.194). The idea of salvation being associated with "hosanna" enriches our understanding of the angels' celebration of the Son at the council's close, because they are celebrating his gift of salvation to the human race. Milton's use of "hosanna" compels us to remember its original context, which is the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah; yet,
by introducing this messianic context into the heavenly council, we are invited to consider the Son as Saviour far earlier than his entry into Jerusalem.

The image of the angels casting down their crowns and shouting “hosanna” is itself a composite image. In Revelation, a distinction is made between the twenty-four elders who throw down their golden crowns and the numberless audience who worship God. Both groups are praising God, and yet it is only the elders who possess crowns to be cast off. The original Greek speaks of two different crowns: the *stephanos* and the *diadem*. *Stephanos* refers to the chaplet (wreath) made of leaves or leaf-like gold, used for marriage and festive occasions, and expressing public recognition of victory in races, games, and war; also figuratively as a reward for efficient Christian life and service."54

Thus Paul speaks of having fought the good fight and finishing the race so that “there is laid up for me a crown (*stephanos*) of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Tm 4:8).55 *Stephanos* is the crown reserved for those who have proven themselves exemplary, while *diadem* is the crown which speaks of the inherent power to rule. Milton makes this distinction when he speaks of crowns in his *Masque presented at Ludlow Castle*, since he says that Neptune has granted the tributary gods leave to “wear their Sapphire crowns, / And wield their little tridents” (26-27). *Diadems* are the crowns of royalty, which may well contain such exquisite jewels as sapphires. In this instance, Milton distinguishes which type of crown is intended, since only *diadems* contain precious stones and they alone are worn by those who rule. Yet John complicates this distinction by recording the crowns, which the twenty-four elders
cast at the feet of the Lamb, as being golden. In fact, "only in the Revelation of John is stephanos called ‘golden.'"56

Scholars are divided on the identity of the elders.57 My concern is not the complexities of Revelation; Milton is sufficiently difficult. And a more fundamental consideration presents itself: why does Milton depict these angels as having crowns at all? Such a question may seem trivial, but only in this single instance does Milton depict angels as wearing crowns; similarly, it is only in Revelation 4:10 that angels are depicted as possessing crowns. Hence Abdiel’s sword strikes Satan directly on his head; it does not first cleave a crown or any other headgear, which is odd considering that when the Son appears, the rebel angels’ “all resistance lost, / All courage; down thir idle weapons dropp’d; / O’er Shields and Helms, and helmed heads he rode / Of Thrones and mighty Seraphim prostrate” (6.838-41). When Raphael enters the garden he has “lineaments divine” with “regal ornament,” but no crown is mentioned. Earlier, I argued that we should regard Raphael as an archetypal High Priest, but a distinctive feature of the High Priest is the required mitre or headdress of fine linen, with a crown of pure gold inscribed with the words “Holy to Jehovah” (Ex 28: 36-38; 39: 30-31).58 Unlike the High Priest, Raphael is not depicted as wearing a head covering of any kind. Besides the crowns cast off by the adoring angels, the only other mention of a physical crown in Paradise Lost is the semblance of one worn by Death: “what seem’d his head / The likeness of a Kingly crown had on” (2.672-73). A survey of Paradise Lost reveals that Milton generally uses “crown” as a verb rather than as a noun. Thus banks are “crowned” with myrtle (4.262), the garden with cedars (5.260), the hills with high woods (7.362), and so evening and morning crown the fourth day (7.386).
What are we to make of the crowns thrown off by Milton’s angels? A reading of Revelation reveals the identity of this celestial throng to be uncertain. But Milton, too, participates in this ambiguity by referring to the angels as “spirits elect,” which is a term more appropriate for the redeemed who will gather around the Father’s throne in the New Jerusalem than these faithful angels who have stood firm. Furthermore, John is clear that it is the twenty-four elders, not the angels, who cast down their crowns. In the epic, it is angels who throw their crowns at the throne of Father and Son, and Milton modifies his account by calling the angels “spirits elect,” as though they are the numberless host of the redeemed of which Revelation speaks. In this single instance, the angels’ celebration recalls the apocalyptic scene of jubilation contained in Revelation; these creatures are “spirits elect”: the body of redeemed who now celebrate the final triumph of God’s love, justice, and mercy. By enlarging the context of this scene Milton demonstrates the timelessness of God; the imagery is wrested from its original context so that we may understand how this scene of celebration prefigures the context of Revelation. The angels’ festivity anticipates the final jubilation of all the saints as depicted in Revelation, and, in some vital manner, it is that very scene.

The celebration that follows the celestial dialogue alludes to Revelation when the praise is offered upon the elder’s revealing to John that only the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, can open the previously unopened book and loose the seven seals (Rv 5.5). The Messiah alone is worthy of beginning the Apocalypse, which will usher in the time of the New Heaven and the New Earth. In Revelation, the Apocalypse is said to last seven years, beginning with Messiah’s opening of the book and the final vision of the New Jerusalem shining like a mighty sea of Jasper. More awesome than the
dazzling scenery are God and the Lamb who are seated upon the throne and the promise that God shall be all in all. The end of human time and the beginning of the New Jerusalem embrace in Milton’s depiction of the angels praising Father and Son, since this scene of celebration contains within it the final image of all the redeemed praising the Father and Son who are seated upon their thrones.

The deliberate anachronisms that Milton incorporates into this one image urge us to consider their effect on our sense of time. In particular, Milton presents a picture of what is to come, so that we may see how the future is contained within the present moment of the heavenly dialogue. Yet I believe that Milton creates a far more dramatic effect, since his conflation of various times and events provides a window onto how all time is one eternally present moment before God. It is exceptionally difficult to discuss time in *Paradise Lost*, especially as it relates to God, since we know that God is timeless. Milton’s vision of the angelic choir, who throw their golden crowns before the thrones and sing songs of praise to the Father and the Son, evokes our knowledge of Revelation. But, in terms of human time, this celebration occurs before Satan has even reached this pendant world. Milton confounds our sense of time by introducing the image of the “spirits elect,” which praise the Father and the Son. The crowns thrown towards either throne, the loud hosannas, the “spirits elect,” the pervasive imagery of Revelation, are all events that, according to human time, do not belong in this passage; indeed, they do not belong in the time of *Paradise Lost*. These are images of the completion of time, not of its beginning.

Is the image that concludes the heavenly council of book 3 the final celebration of the redeemed? No, and in Milton’s depiction these are angels who have resisted the
temptation of Lucifer and are now praising God; they are not the saints who have endured their time on earth with “dangers compast round” (7.27). We understand also that this scene occurs before Satan has made his way to the garden, and so a distinction is maintained between events that are to come and the present. But, in another way, the present can be seen to contain the future, even as a seed contains the plant, and the angels’ celebration is proleptic, looking forward to the time when all the redeemed will throw their crowns before the throne of Father and Son and shout “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power” (Rv 4: 11). We recognize the angels’ celebration to be proleptic; however, their activity means something altogether different when interpreted within the context of God’s perspective. The narrator began the heavenly council scene by depicting the Father seated on his throne, “wherein past, present, future he beholds” (3.78), and he now concludes the scene with the Father and Son seated upon their thrones receiving the praise which Revelation promises will be given. Such a conflation of contexts generates a window on the eternal perspective of God. By drawing his imagery from various events, Milton liberates us from the strict constraints of human time so that we may be set free on an imaginative flight to the courts of God and participate in his transcendent vision.
Chapter 6 Endnotes


3 “Absent from the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative, as well as from the Flood story, is the theme of repentance. Just as Noah did not call upon his contemporaries to repair their ways, neither Abraham nor the messengers warn the people of Sodom of the impending disaster in the hope of arousing them to atonement. This is in sharp contrast to the story of Jonah.” Sarna, 133.


5 In Harold Bloom’s “anxiety of influence” model, Milton’s use of the Abraham episode would be interpreted as his literary transumption of his poetic precursor.


8 William Empson, Milton’s God (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 120.


10 I believe that Milton uses this silence to evoke the general apocalyptic context of Revelation.


12 Ibid., 65.


17 Ibid., 113.

18 Hughes, 134.


21 In *Surprised by Sin* Stanley Fish argues that the reader is constantly challenged to make assumptions, which the narrator then shows to be false. This process of correction has at its heart the renovation of the reader, who will be transformed into a “fit reader.”


24 Ibid.


27 It is interesting to note that Satan is called only “the adversary” by the Father and Son; and while Father and Son constitute the central position of the fallen angels’ council, Satan is mentioned only briefly in the heavenly council.


29 Ibid.

30 Watkins, 55.


32 Ricks, 60.

33 It is such knowledge as this that compelled the Psalmist to sing: “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” (Ps 139:8-10).
38 Dobbins, 5.
39 Ibid., 10-11.
40 Ibid., 11.
41 It is worth noting Galbraith Crump's observation that the "end of evil coincides with the period that concludes on line three-hundred and thirty-three" (84). For a further exploration of Milton's use of structure see Crump's *The Mystical Design of Paradise Lost* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1975).
45 Dobbins, 24.
49 For Harold Bloom, "Milton avoids representing for us the crucial change by which Satan ensues from Lucifer ... This is a most un-Shakespearean evasion; we want to hear it dramatized, just as we want to see Lucifer before he dwindles forever. In flight from Shakespeare, Milton represses the dramatic moment of his hero-villain's transformation." *Western Canon*, 164-65.
50 For a fuller discussion see Dobbins, 3-5.
51 Dobbins, 21.

52 Interestingly, Dobbins does not take issue with this distinction.


55 Milton echoes Paul’s words when he depicts the Father’s response to Abdiel having stood firm against the rebel angels: “Servant of God, well done, well hast thou fought / The better fight, who single hast maintained / Against revolted multitudes the Cause / Of Truth, in word mightier than in Arms” (6.29-32).

56 Ibid.


58 The crown of gold, like a diadem, is indicative of the inherent right to rule. Only males from the tribe of Levi could be considered for the priesthood. No amount of striving on the part of another tribe could enable them to participate in the role reserved for this exclusive and privileged tribe.
Conclusion

Milton's depiction of God in *Paradise Lost* is not a mediated or remedied version of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, and Milton's God shares surprisingly little in common with the God of Genesis. Appearances of God in the Old Testament are notable for the variety of their depictions, from unapproachable light to dinner guest; and a survey of his representations brings to light the profound difficulty Milton faced in making God a character in his epic. The belief that Milton had only to reach into the Hebrew Scriptures in order to find a consistent and unified portrait of God is misguided, for while God appears in radiant light and majesty to Ezekiel and Isaiah, he meets with Abraham as desert traveller and enjoys a covenant meal with the seventy elders of Israel. Yet in his characterization of God, Milton departs from those accounts that emphasize God's anthropomorphism; instead, he presents a God that resembles more closely the God of the prophets. In Genesis, God enjoys a daily walk in the garden with Adam and Eve, visiting with them freely in a physical form. In *Paradise Lost*, it is as a "vision bright" that God reveals himself to Adam, and Eve sees God not at all. In contrast to Genesis, Milton has Raphael visit with the human pair; and it is Raphael, not God, who enjoys a meal with Adam and Eve, conversing with them "face to face" as with a friend.

A comparison between the creation accounts found in Genesis and in Milton generates several important distinctions. In Genesis, God himself forms Adam from the red clay and breathes into him the breath of life, which would result in Adam's first moments of consciousness occurring immediately within God's physical presence. But
Milton depicts Adam’s first moments as spent alone; it is only after Adam has concluded that he must be the result of some great maker that he is visited by God and led up into the garden. After the creation of Eve, God guides her, through his voice alone, to the waiting Adam; and this is the last time that God is physically present in the garden: he does not walk with the human couple in the “cool of the evening.” In Genesis, we find a sense of old routine and familiarity between God and the human pair; in Milton, Adam and Eve are familiar with God as he is manifested through his creation, and they converse with their Author through their prayers, which they offer continually to him.

Adam and Eve behold very little of God’s appearance, which is made poignant by Milton’s depiction of the many places where God will reveal himself to their children outside of the garden. In leaving the garden, Adam expresses his profound sorrow to Michael; yet his grief reveals a consoling prophecy—despite his sin, God will remain involved in the lives of Adam’s children. God will seek out Adam’s race and restore them to himself. Adam declares his desire to have raised altars at those places where, had he remained faithful, he would have visited with God; but these are places that are to become charged with significance, for it is at these locations that God will reveal himself to Adam’s race. Since each of particular features (mounts, trees, fountains, and pines) contain the image of final restoration, they silently but eloquently express the promise of a time when God and humanity shall dwell together once more in the ultimate sanctuary. Though paradise is lost, God will be found; and he will reveal himself more fully and more often to Adam’s children than he does to Adam. God’s presence is not exclusive to the garden or to a prelapsarian time alone, and the testament to be passed down to succeeding generations is the majesty of God’s grace.
But we need to reconsider the nature of God’s presence, for while God is not explicitly present in the garden, the geography of Eden suggests that Adam and Eve inhabit an archetypal sanctuary, a place where God dwells and should be worshipped. To be exiled from so holy a place threatens eternal separation from the source of all life; but God will continue to dwell among Adam’s race, revealing himself to those who seek his face, and filling the whole world with his glory. The cosmology of the epic reveals the immensity of creation and the intimacy of its Creator; and it is a small place, the garden of Eden, which possesses the most importance for the human pair; and it is the smallest place, the paradise within, that shall come to possess the greatest meaning. The garden is the original sanctuary, not the final one; and though Adam and Eve must leave their sacred place, God will institute sacred places where the faithful can meet with him. The earthly temple is a powerful symbol, and yet in *Paradise Lost*, Milton would have us look back neither with fondness nor regret; rather he would have us look within, to the paradise that transcends any earthly temple, and leads us forward in hope and devotion to the final sanctuary.

The paradise of God’s presence is not limited to the garden, nor does the Fall separate creation from its Creator. During the Father’s first speech in book 3, “ambrosial fragrance” fills “all heav’n” (3.136), and through his use of odour Milton establishes a connection between God’s “fragrant words” and the ritual of the burnt offering recorded in the Old Testament. Through odour, Milton evokes the particular features of these offerings, while portraying their fulfillment through the Son. The Son intercedes for Adam and Eve and presents their prayers before the Father, even as his life, death, and resurrection make his act of intercession possible, but also Milton depicts him fulfilling
the role that he will occupy in Revelation: he is heralding the Apocalypse, ushering in the
time of the New Jerusalem. The Son is shown fulfilling roles that, in human time, he has
yet to occupy; thus, he offers himself as a sacrifice, which the Father accepts, bringing
the smell of peace between God and humanity, even though Satan has yet to tempt the
human pair. Fragrance intimates what is to come; and Milton uses aroma to demonstrate
how, from the perspective of God, all time is one. Through aroma, Milton presents an
image of God who beholds all time, and whose grace transcends it.

Though Eden will be lost, the paradise of God’s presence will remain, and
humanity can participate in this eternal communion through the work of the Son. In
Paradise Lost, Milton depicts the moment of the Son’s sacrifice as occurring before the
beginning of human time, and yet he presents the Son as Christ in the role he will occupy
at the end of time, too, implicitly arguing for the eternity of the Son. Even as the Father
declares, “This day I have begot whom I declare / My only Son, and on this holy Hill /
Him have anointed” (5.603-5), the Son is on his throne, “in bliss imbosom’d” (5.597).
The Son’s role in Paradise Lost is complex and pervasive: he is inextricably involved in
the creation of the world; in expressing the ineffable glory of the Father; in routing
Satan’s troops; in interceding for humanity; and in leading the redeemed to their final
home in the New Jerusalem. There is no time in Paradise Lost when the Son is not
present.

In striving to justify the ways of God to his readers, Milton presents a portrait of
God that incorporates the entire spectrum of biblical time, thus establishing a context that
transcends the human boundaries of past, present, and future. The first event of the epic is
presented with imagery that is taken from the final moments of human time as recorded
in Revelation, essentially conflating the two ends of human time within this single event. More powerful than any vision of God is an awareness of his eternal mercy, for the first act that begins the time of *Paradise Lost* is an act of love. And it is in love and obedience that the Son goes forth to call out Creation from the darkness, so that the many may know God and enjoy his presence forever.

The Son is shown to be interceding on Adam and Eve’s behalf with the full power of his resurrected position, and he is shown fulfilling the roles that he will occupy during the time of the Apocalypse. But at the centre of the Son’s role of creator and final judge of the world is his mercy, which originates with the Father. Milton’s justification of God’s ways rests upon the timelessness of God; events that appear initially as anachronisms help to establish a context that looks beyond the strict limits of human time. In the presence of God, events from the beginning and end of time are coeval; on the one hand, the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Apocalypse are separate events that have not yet come to pass; on the other hand, Milton shows these events as simultaneously present before God. The angels celebrating God and throwing their crowns before the throne of Father and Son is, in some manner, the culmination of human time and the beginning of life in the ultimate sanctuary. Such a transcendent perspective prepares us for the more powerful vision of God’s love: before Adam and Eve have been tempted, his grace and mercy have found them out and they have been restored. Adam and Eve will fall and the legacy of their rash act will be for all time, but not forever. God will restore his people and wipe away their tears, and, in the context of God’s speeches in book 3, that time is now and we are its heirs.
Bibliography


