

THE RESOLUTION OF DUALITIES IN
MILTON'S ENGLISH POETRY

by

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Abstract

Milton's poetic thought especially as expressed in Paradise Lost consists of three basic elements, God, man, and the Evil One. For Milton as a Seventeenth-century Christian the first and last of these two elements are absolutes while Milton's adherence to Renaissance humanism means that man also has a place of prominence in the poet's view of the totality of things. Each of the three elements in Milton's intellectual framework is in polar tension with each of the other two. From the tension between man and God arises the conflict of human concerns with divine imperatives resulting in such dualities as: body and soul, matter and spirit, the pleasures of the flesh and the demands of the spirit, secular human culture and the will of God, reason and revelation, salvation by human effort and salvation by divine grace. The tension between good and evil involves conflicts between human sin and divine righteousness and between human suffering and the ultimate beneficence and justice of God. These dualities occur in Milton's poetry with a frequency which suggests that they constitute a continuing problem in the poet's life and thought.

This thesis attempts to show that in his poetry Milton consistently sought to unify and resolve these dualities but that the means by which he tried to do so and the extent to which he was successful differ from one poem to another.

In the first group of poems, which includes all the early minor poems written before Comus and Lycidas, dualities tend not to be very deeply felt or very firmly pressed. Where resolution is necessary between two opposites, this resolution is, as a rule, complete and is achieved without strenuous effort.

In the second group of poems, which includes Comus and Lycidas, there are deeply felt oppositions which clash strongly throughout the poems. These dualities are, on the whole, not completely resolved in the course of the individual poems; much tension remains at the end of each work and oppositions are often simply juxtaposed without resolution. Such resolution as does result is achieved by oblique and unexpected means.

The final group of poems includes Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes. These three poems are as full of dichotomies as the two works which immediately precede them. The oppositions are also as deeply felt as in the earlier two poems but by vast expenditures of energy are triumphantly resolved and held in dynamic balance. The resolutions achieved in these three poems are complete and are attained in direct ways.

Introduction

Much of Milton's poetry (especially such major works as Comus, Lycidas, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes) appears to be full of dualities or pairs of opposites of one kind or another: spirit and flesh (Comus, Paradise Lost), religion and culture (Paradise Regained), faith and knowledge (Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained), the natural and the supernatural (Comus, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained), grace and good works (Paradise Lost, Comus), predestination and free will (Paradise Lost), good and evil (almost all the poems), and many others. These dualities are not so various or unrelated as they might seem, nor is their occurrence in Milton's poetry in any sense accidental or haphazard. Rather they arise inevitably from the basic structure of the poet's thought.

Milton's poetic thought appears in its clearest and most amplified form in Paradise Lost. Whatever justification there may be in the various attacks which accuse Milton of assorted heresies, the basic framework of his theology as it appears in Paradise Lost and other works is central to the Christian tradition. This framework assumes three basic elements: God, Man, and the Evil One. For the Christian (and especially for the Christian of Milton's time) the first and last of these primal elements are unquestionable absolutes. Although Christians have differed as to the importance of the human race in the divine scheme of things, Milton, as a Christian humanist, and in spite of his essentially orthodox belief in the seriousness of the Fall, clearly gives man a place of special prominence. Each of these three elements in the poet's intellectual

framework is thus in polar tension with each of the other two. This basic structure of three absolutes in conflict with each other underlies not only Milton's greatest poem, Paradise Lost, but also most of his other major poems, and indeed is the basis of his whole philosophical outlook. Thus in both his thought and his poetry numerous dualities are inescapably present.

An important group of them arises from the tension between the poles of Man and God. The source of the conflict can no doubt be found in Milton's adherence to both Renaissance humanism, which sometimes tended to place man at the centre of the universe and to Puritan Christianity, which, like medieval Roman Catholicism, uncompromisingly set God at the centre of the world. While always insisting upon the absoluteness of God and his claim upon man, Milton nevertheless asserts the dignity and freedom of man, refusing to reduce him to a state of utter depravity and helplessness. From this tension arises unavoidably the conflict between the concerns of man and the concerns of God. Participation in the arts is thus confronted by the claims of religion, traditionally often antagonistic to man's creative endeavour. The achievements of the human intellect in culture and learning stand opposed to the demands of faith which supposedly transcends or even denies reason. Lure of worldly fame conflicts with promise of heavenly reward. The Christian concept of Satan, on the one hand, and the Renaissance awareness of man's imperfection and limitations, on the other hand, raise further problems. Two opposite ways of salvation arise: salvation primarily by man himself through his own reason and will, and salvation solely through the

grace of God. Another related duality which occurs in Milton's poetry is the opposition between body and soul or between matter and spirit. This opposition is again traditional and has roots in both Christian and Greek thought. Milton insists on the reality and value of both elements.

The other two important poles between which there is much tension in Milton's thought and poetry are of course good and evil, into which conflict man is also drawn, attracted and repelled by both. Again the poet refuses to reject either element in the conflict. Moral evil is, for Milton, always powerful and often attractive, human suffering is always real and terrible; yet Milton's God is always ultimately supreme.

In Milton's poetry (and even in some of his prose) the dualities just discussed are of course represented, not abstractly and theoretically, but concretely and dramatically. They are often associated specifically with individual characters and with certain space areas--such as heaven, earth, hell--within the total setting of each of the poems. Yet despite the varying forms in which they are expressed, the three basic elements of Milton's cosmos and the dualities arising from them occur in succeeding poems with a frequency which suggests that these dichotomies represented a continuing problem in the poet's life and thought.

It will be the purpose of this thesis to explore in Milton's English poetry the forms in which these opposites occur and the poet's attempts to reconcile them. All Milton's major works and some of his minor ones will be considered and the poems will be examined in chronological order. In the discussion of each poem I shall be concerned to discover which dualities are evident and which of these are most prominent, how these

dualities are represented through characterization and setting, and to what extent and in what way they are resolved.

Chapter One: Early Minor Poems

The first poem of interest in respect to Milton's attempt to resolve dichotomies in his thought is "At a Vacation Exercise...." Its interest lies not so much in itself but in what it anticipates in Milton's later poetry. In this early short poem we find suggested the basic cosmology of Paradise Lost, expressed, it is true, in classical terms: Addressing his "native Language"¹ Milton first rejects superficial facility of expression and prays for language suitable for his high thoughts.

...I had rather, if I were to choose,
Thy service in some graver subject use.
Such as may make thee search thy coffers round,
Before thou clothe my fancy in fit sound:
Such where the deep transported mind may soar
Above the wheeling poles, and at Heav'n's door
Look in, and see each blissful Deity
How he before the thunderous throne doth lie,
Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings
To th' touch of golden wires, while Hebe brings
Immortal Nectar to her Kingly Sire:
Then passing through the Spheres of watchful fire,
And misty Regions of wide air next under,
And hills of Snow and lofts of piled Thunder,
May tell at length how green-ey'd Neptune raves,
In Heav'n's defiance mustering all his waves. (29-44)

These pagan deities are clearly analogous to Christian figures who later appear in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The god who sits on the "thunderous throne" is of course Jove, traditionally linked with God the Father whom Milton in Paradise Lost endows with his Biblical attribute of thunder. Apollo, here as elsewhere in Christian thought, is analogous to God the Son, while Hebe, the classical goddess of youth and

¹ John Milton, "At a Vacation Exercise...", Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), 1. All subsequent references to Milton's poetry by line number are to this edition. References to footnotes and critical comments on the text by Hughes will be indicated by the editor's name, followed by the page number on which such critical notes occur.

the cupbearer to the gods clearly suggests the Holy Spirit, the only person of the Trinity not specifically endowed with masculine characteristics. Finally the defiant Neptune brings to mind Satan, the ancient antagonist of God.

Another early poem, "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough," is important primarily because of what it points toward in Milton's later poetry, particularly Lycidas. As in the later poem Milton is here lamenting the death of a young person whom he knew personally (in this case, the three year old daughter of his sister). Although similar problems are raised here as in Lycidas (the tragedy of early death), the emotional involvement of Milton in the poem is not nearly so great as in the elegy to Edward King.

Good and Evil are represented in conventional Christian terms. Satan is seen as the bringer of "black perdition" (67) and of the "slaughtering pestilence" (68). The problem of the evil of suffering is, however, resolved easily in the all-encompassing will of God the Father. If Milton's sister accepts with patience her affliction, God

will an offspring give
That till the world's last end shall make thy name to live.
(76-77)

As far as the relationship between body and soul is concerned, Milton appears to subscribe to a Neoplatonic dualism. The soul of the young maiden does not share in the corruption of the body but flees to everlasting delight either in the Primum Mobile of the Ptolemaic universe or in the Elysian fields of classical literature leaving in scorn the "sordid world" (63) below. The solution to the various dualities which

appear in this poem is thus simple and straightforward and leaves very little unresolved tension.

The "Nativity Ode" is the first poem in which appear in significant form most of the major dualities with which Milton is concerned in his later works and at the same time there is little question but that it is, as Barker describes it, "the first of Milton's inspired poems."² Here we find presented such opposites as good and evil, body and soul, and the natural and the supernatural. Christ rather than God the Father stands for the supreme good in the poem while evil is represented mainly by Satan, the "old dragon" (168) and by the pagan gods whom Christian tradition had long identified with the fallen angels, followers of the Evil One. There is no single representative of mankind but the effect of the advent of Christ on the human condition is constantly kept in mind.

Throughout the poem, Christ is pictured as the great hero who triumphs over all the evils which afflict the human race. He overcomes the corruption into which nature has lapsed after the Fall. In his presence

Nature in awe to him
Had doff't her gaudy trim,
With her great Master so to sympathize:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the Sun, her lusty Paramour.

Only with speeches fair
She woos the gentle Air
To hide her guilty front with innocent Snow,
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
The Saintly Veil of Maiden white to throw,
Confounded, that her Maker's eyes
Should look so near upon her foul deformities. (32-44)

² Arthur Barker, "The Pattern of Milton's Nativity Ode," University of Toronto Quarterly, X (1941), pp. 167-181.

His coming banishes war from all the world.

No War, or Battle's sound
Was heard the world around....

But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of light
His reign of peace upon the earth began. (53-54; 61-63)

Stanzas IX to XIV celebrate the harmony which Christ brings to heaven and earth, a harmony capable of wiping out sin and thus effacing the evil effects of the Fall.

For if such Holy Song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold,
And speckl'd vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mold,
And Hell itself will pass away,
And leave her-dolorous mansions to the peering day.
(133-140)

Finally Christ brings victory over Satan and the pagan gods. Many of these gods are represented in Paradise Lost (I, 392-521) as the cohorts of Satan. In the "Nativity Ode" these gods are vehemently denounced and repudiated as utterly false and cruel, yet as we examine the passage which describes their downfall at the hands of the Son of God we are struck by the curious fact that these pagan deities, like other of Milton's characters who are associated with the principle of evil (for example, Comus and Satan), have their attractive aspect. The unmistakable regret expressed, for instance, in stanzas XX and XXI that the beauty of these heathen gods has passed away suggests a certain ambivalence towards them in the poet's mind. Although Milton's favourite theme of temptation cannot be said fully to enter his poetry until it appears in

Comus, one senses that these gods of that classical world which Milton so much loved were a temptation which he did not succeed in overcoming completely within this poem. Considering the poem in general, we can conclude that, on the whole, Milton manages to resolve successfully the problem of evil. Although stanzas XVI and XVII remind us that the ultimate victory of Christ lies beyond his death and resurrection in the final judgement, and although Milton's evident attraction toward the pagan gods still lingers in certain stanzas of the poem, the dominant mood of the poem remains one of jubilant triumph over the evils of sin and suffering.

The birth of Christ brings before man the possibility not only of the defeat of evil but also of the reconciliation of the natural world of man with the supernatural world of God. Christ is pictured throughout the poem as the Lord of nature which since the Fall, it is suggested (particularly in the first two stanzas of the body of the poem), is evil if left to itself but which puts on a new purity at the coming of its "great Master." (34). Through Christ alone, it is implied, the natural order is reconciled with the supernatural order. Hearing the music which is brought by the Son of God, nature

Now was almost won
To think her part was done,
And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;
She knew such harmony alone
Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier union.
(104-108)

This salvation for man and nature from the evil results of the Fall comes from Christ alone, both being otherwise helpless to save themselves.

A certain dualism between soul and body (recalling the Neoplatonism of earlier poems previously discussed) is suggested in Stanza II of the introduction, where at his nativity, we are told, Christ

Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day,
And chose with us a darksome House of mortal Clay.
(13-14)

The last few words of the second line quoted recall the ancient Greek saying that the body was the "prison-house of the soul." Any negativity implied in these lines is swept away, however, by the stanzas proclaiming the harmony which Christ brings to the whole of created reality.

Regarding Milton's general handling of the dualities in the "Nativity Ode," the prevailing note in the poem is of serene harmony and unity. At no point in the poem are there stirred up the deep tensions and upsetting emotions with which Milton has to deal in Lycidas (and to a lesser extent in Comus).

One would suppose that a poem written by Milton on the sufferings and death of Christ would be exceedingly relevant to a discussion of his treatment of dualities, particularly the opposition of good and evil. In "The Passion," however, Milton fails to come to grips with the problem or to produce any solution whatsoever. The reason is not far to seek: Milton demonstrates an extreme reluctance here and later in Paradise Lost to dwell on the sufferings of Christ. The poet concentrates rather on his own feelings. Milton was apparently unable to put himself in the place of Christ as he was later to do in the case of Lycidas. The poet was clearly at this point, as he half suggests in his concluding note, unable to handle the problem of evil on such a

large scale.

Milton's poem, "An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester," was one of several poems written by Cambridge students for Jane Paulet who died in 1631 at the age of twenty-three.³ As in his earlier poem, "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough," and in his later work, Lycidas, Milton here faces the problem of the death of a young person before he or she had been able to experience the complete fulfillment of life. It is full of the usual conventions including nicely turned compliments, and the inevitable apotheosis at the conclusion of the poem, but in comparison with Lycidas there is again very little emotional involvement of the poet in his poem.

Two poems which, within themselves (at least), seem to suggest little ambivalence or conflict at all are "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." Each poem presents an idealized kind of life as a harmonious whole. Each is concerned solely with the innocent enjoyment of pleasure. Since this is the case, evil cannot be said to enter the poems at all. There are furthermore no rigid dividing lines between the natural world and the supernatural order of reality, or between the flesh and the spirit. In both poems there is equal enjoyment in the pleasures of the senses (nature, music, dancing etc.) and those of the mind (poetry, drama etc.). Nor is pleasure in itself (in either poem) scorned as in some sense morally wrong, though this problem certainly arises in later poems. In "L'Allegro" Mirth is given a pagan geneology--she is the offspring of Venus and Bacchus--yet she brings in her right hand "the Mountain Nymph,

³ Hughes, p. 65.

sweet Liberty" (36) and Milton desires to live with both of them "in unreproved pleasures free!"(40).⁴ It is interesting to compare Mirth, or Euphrosyne with Comus; both are fathered by Bacchus (though the sinister Circe, not fair Venus, it is true, is the mother of Comus), but Mirth is to be approved of by the reader, while Comus, for all his attractiveness, must, because of the structural framework of the poem, be rejected by the reader. Melancholy is called a "nun, devout and pure" in "Il Penseroso", yet her parents are also pagan divinities (Vesta and Saturn), and there is little sense of incongruity in the poem because of this fact. The central character in the poem can furthermore enjoy and benefit from both the literature and philosophy of the pagan Greeks and Romans and a service in a Christian church which "brings all Heav'n before [his] eyes." (166)

Granted that little conflict exists within each of these two poems, is there meant to be a definite opposition between them? Certainly this seems to be the case at first glance, for each poem begins by rejecting the mood of the other. But the attitudes and behaviour of the cheerful man and those of the thoughtful man, as Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, are not mutually exclusive opposites.

...Milton could not afford to exploit mere contrast. If he had, the two halves would have driven poles apart. They would have ceased to be twin halves of one poem, for the sense of unity in variety would have been lost. We are almost justified in putting the matter this way: by choosing the obvious contrast between mirth and melancholy, Milton obligated himself to bring them as close together as possible in their effect on the mind.

⁴ Underlining my own.

For the tension between the choices depends upon their presentation as choices which can appeal to the same mind....⁵

Thus the pleasures of Mirth are not riotous and unrestrained but "unreproved!". "Il Penseroso" is the thoughtful man not the miserable man. There may seem to be a contrast suggesting that the speaker in "L'Allegro" is the worldly, public man engaged in secular interests and the speaker in "Il Penseroso" the withdrawn, private man concerned with religious and spiritual matters but in reality both men are mere spectators of, and are curiously/uninvolved in, the activities of the other characters in the two poems.

Both poems furthermore present an idealized world which represents a projection of the poet's fancies, not a definite event or series of events in the past as all Milton's longer poems do. The verb tense and the logical structure of both of the poems is indicative of this fact. The basic argument of each can be reduced to the words "If... then...." Many of the verbs are oddly indefinite in regard to mood and time. Rather than in the more forceful, simple indicative, they occur in such less definite forms as the conditional and infinitive:

And if I give thee honor due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreproved pleasures free,
To hear the Lark begin his flight.... ("L'Allegro," 37-41)

The present and past participles are fairly common,

Some time walking not unseen
By Hedgerow Elms, on Hillocks green.... (56-57)

as well as the imperative mood:

⁵ "Light Symbolism in 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'", The Well-Wrought Urn (New York, 1947), p. 53.

And ever against eating Cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian Airs.... (135-136)

And when the Sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me Goddess bring
To arched walks of twilight groves.... ("Il Penseroso," 131-133)⁶

Sometimes the verb is omitted altogether. Above all, both the cheerful man and the thoughtful man are the recipients rather than the doers of action. A further sense of indefiniteness is added by the frequent presentation of alternatives; the word "or" occurs even more often in these two poems than it does elsewhere in Milton's poetry.

As a result of all these factors, we do not find in these two poems the driving energy and aspiration which is characteristic of nearly all of Milton's other poems. The poet seems to have detached himself from the world of both "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." The two poems lack real conflict because Milton, surely, was not deeply committed to either. They are simply idealized expressions of his own imagination and belong to an untroubled period of his early life before he was deeply involved in the later problems (political and personal) which were to demand his effort and attention.

As the cosmology of "At a Vacation Exercise..." anticipates that of Paradise Lost so the world implied in "Arcades" suggests very strongly that of Comus. While this piece can hardly be said to possess a plot it does feature a setting of considerable interest through which Milton is later to convey important dualities. The Genius bears a close resemblance to the Attendant Spirit of Comus, and like him is an agent of Jove, who represents the Christian God. The Genius himself belongs,

⁶ All underlining in the above quotations is my own.

however, to the natural rather than to the supernatural order, though he inhabits the nine spheres, the highest realms of the order of nature. Here, as in Milton's full-length masque, the pure in heart may ascend upward in the order of nature to reach the order of grace, the dwelling place of Jove. The only evils mentioned in the poem are those which occur in nature, represented by the pastoral forest, "this fair Wood." (45) It is the work of the Genius to heal these ills of nature, just as does Sabrina in Comus. The wood itself is to be carefully distinguished, in its allegorical implications, from that of Comus. In the later poem, as we shall see, the forest is a symbol of nature corrupted because it is uninformed by grace. The wood in "Aracades" has wider connotations than this and appears to stand for the whole of the natural world which forms the environment of man.

The poem, "On Time", briefly considers the ills of mortal existence and anticipates the glorious release which the soul will find in eternity. Like other poems which we have already considered, this poem reflects the conventional Neoplatonic dualism. Time will destroy the falseness and vanity and "mortal dross" (6) of earthly existence leaving only the spiritual qualities of virtue and goodness, which the dedicated soul will enjoy in endless bliss in heaven. In this poem earth is decidedly depressed in favour of heaven, but as in earlier poems this solution is accepted with little tension or unrest.

In its consideration of the sufferings of Christ which alone bring salvation from sin to mankind, the poem, "Upon the Circumcision," resembles the earlier work, "The Passion." Again it is clear that Milton derives

no satisfaction from this consideration and the poem ends on a note of anguish at the thought of Christ's coming death which the circumcision anticipates.

The elements of Milton's intellectual framework appear finally in "At a Solemn Music," the last of Milton's early minor poems. These elements are expressed through the dominant image of harmony and music. Before the Fall, heaven and earth were in perfect harmony. Milton looks forward to a time when the discord caused by the entrance of evil into the world will be swept away and mankind can

again renew that Song,
And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long
To his celestial consort us unite,
To live with him, and sing in endless morn of light. (25-28)

Let us, in conclusion, survey Milton's handling of dualities in the early minor poems as a whole. It will be clear that in these poems dualities tend not to be very deeply felt or very firmly pressed. Where resolution is necessary between two opposites, this resolution is, as a rule, complete and is achieved without strenuous effort. These poems are thus in sharp contrast to Milton's next two poems, Comus and Lycidas, which are full of ambiguities and strongly conflicting dualities.

Chapter Two: Comus

Comus is the first poem in which Milton really attempts to come to grips with most of the dualities which are to concern him profoundly in all his succeeding poetry. In this poem the natural world conflicts with the supernatural world; salvation by human effort and aspiration with salvation solely by divine grace. Spirit and the soul are set in opposition to matter and the body. Desire for physical security is set against the conviction that spiritual integrity alone is necessary. Good and the harmony and order which it creates conflicts with evil and the disorder and chaos which it causes.

Comus is also significantly the first poem to convey a story, and to express it dramatically. The dualities which arise in the poem are thus linked not only with areas within the total setting, but also with individual characters who are involved in a problematic situation which it is the purpose of the poem to resolve. All the following poems (with the exception to some extent of Lycidas) follow this pattern. Finally, the temptation motive which is so important in the last three great poems, is unmistakably prominent here for the first time (though it is perhaps hinted at in the "Nativity" Ode, the pagan gods being for Milton an attraction which must be resisted).

The existence and the importance of the above-mentioned dualities in Comus are fairly evident at a first reading; their precise representation in poetic terms, and the nature and degree of their reconciliation is a much more complex matter to ascertain. The basic identities seem straight-forward: the attendant Spirit is an agent of Jove, the supreme

good and both beings are associated with a rather vague classical heaven; Comus, who has much in common with Milton's later villain, Satan, dwells in a dark wood and represents evil; the Lady and her brothers, whose home is in Ludlow, stand for virtuous, aspiring mankind.

But closer investigation reveals ambiguities and incongruities in Milton's handling of dualities and of their relation to setting and characterization. The space areas within the total setting are by no means plainly defined or clearly related to each other. How is the "starry threshold of Jove's Court" (1), where the Spirit resides, to be related to the region (mentioned at the end of the poem) where Venus and Adonis rest, and the region "far above" it (1003) where Psyche and Cupid embrace? Is the wood where Comus dwells to be seen as totally evil or both good and evil? How is Sabrina to be related to the Attendant Spirit? Both are needed to free the Lady, yet how they differ from each other! Comus, the supposed villain of the piece, is surprisingly attractive: parts of Comus' speech (93-144) describing the pleasures of night, bear a close resemblance (in thought, metre and phrasing) to passages in "L'Allegro" which paint, not the joys of a dissolute libertine, but the "unreproved pleasures free" of a normal cheerful man--compare the phrase "light fantastic toe" ("L'Allegro," 34) with "light fantastic round" (Comus, 144). But the Lady, whom Milton apparently intends as his heroine, is, in fact, rather repellent. Two of the characters (Comus and the Attendant Spirit), are spirits and appear in changed form, but nowhere is it stated that any of the characters with whom they deal (except possibly Sabrina) is fully aware of the true nature of these

disguised beings. This is especially notable in regard to the Attendant Spirit and contrasts markedly with the situation in Paradise Lost where Adam knows immediately that both Raphael and Michael are heavenly visitors, not earthly dwellers.

Finally the characters are ambiguous not only in themselves but in their relationship to each other. Interaction between the characters is oddly limited, even though the framework of the story would seem to provide for considerable dramatic tension between all of them. The poem begins with a series of lengthy soliloquies. In the exchanges of dialogue which take up most of the rest of the poem, there is no communication at all between the Lady and her brothers, the Lady and Sabrina, Comus and the Spirit, Comus and the brothers, Sabrina and the Brothers. Even when conversations of considerable length do arise between a pair of characters, each will argue from a strongly-held presupposition which the other is absolutely incapable of entertaining. The Lady cannot possibly sink to Comus's level of reasoning nor he rise to hers. In the discussion between the two brothers about chastity, the pair are unable to decide whether the virtue involves simply a physical state which could be gravely endangered by the Lady's being lost in the wood at midnight, or rather a state of inner purity which is inviolable by outward circumstance.

Further ambivalence is evident in Milton's handling of the problem of salvation. Is the Lady saved primarily by her own devotion and steadfastness or mainly by the combined efforts of the attendant spirit, her blundering brothers and Sabrina herself? This ambiguity is carried

right into the concluding lines of the poem:

Mortals that would follow me,
Love virtue, she alone is free,
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the Sphery climb,
Or if Virtue feeble were,
Heav'n itself would stoop to her. (1018-1023)

Milton's thought seems to oscillate here between the Neoplatonic conception of the gradual ascent of the soul through its own aspiration to the divine, and the Puritan and Christian belief in salvation solely by the grace of God. And the statement in these last lines is illogical: if salvation is possible through one only of the two ways described, why is the other necessary or for that matter mentioned at all?

Do all these ambiguities, inconsistencies and incongruities indicate a complete lack of resolution of all the conflicts between dualities in Comus? Must the poem be dismissed as an artistic failure completely lacking in structural unity and logical development? A. S. P. Woodhouse is the first critic to attempt to demonstrate that the poem is based on a clear intellectual framework and reveals an intelligible progression of thought.⁷ According to Woodhouse, the frame of reference upon which Comus and many other seventeenth century works of literature are based assumes two levels of existence: the order of nature (which includes not only the whole physical world, but also man "considered simply as a denizen of that world"⁸ and the order of grace (to which "belongs man in his character of supernatural being, with all that concerns his salva-

⁷ Woodhouse's discussion of Comus is to be found in two articles: "The Argument of Comus", University of Toronto Quarterly, XI (1941), pp. 46-71, "Comus Once More" Ibid., XIX (1949), pp. 218-223.

⁸ "The Argument of Comus", p. 48.

tion and the two dispensations, the old and the new"⁹). Milton, as a Christian humanist, says Woodhouse, refuses to divorce the two orders of reality (as certain other thinkers of his time tended to do), and Comus represents an attempt to unify the two orders. The argument between Comus and the Lady thus moves from an appeal by Comus on the basis of nature, which the Lady counters with the natural virtues of temperance and continence, to the Lady's insistence on the virtue of chastity which belongs to an area common to both nature and grace, to a final consideration of the "sage / And serious doctrine of virginity" (786-7) which is found only in the order of grace and which Comus is therefore incapable of understanding. So far as the general movement of the poem is concerned, the Lady resists the threats of Comus on the natural level of human will and aspiration but ultimately can only be freed from the tempter's power by Sabrina, who brings an infusion of supernatural grace. Finally, the epilogue summarises the whole movement of the poem: the Spirit flies first to the Gardens of Hesperus where lie Venus and Adonis, who represent "the powers and processes of nature,"¹⁰; he next rises to the realm "far above" where "in spangled sheen" (1003) embrace Cupid and Psyche, who stand for "ascent to the highest virtue and wisdom accessible on the natural level, or rather ascent to an area common to nature and grace,"¹¹; he finally invites mortals to follow him "higher than the Sphery chime" (1021) to the level of grace alone.

⁹ "The Argument of Comus," p. 48.

¹⁰ P 70.

¹¹ Ibid.

Although Woodhouse's explication throws much light on Comus, and particularly on the question of dualities in the poem, it still leaves a number of questions unanswered. As he himself admits, Milton does not avoid "all occasion of conflict between nature and grace."¹² Such resolution as he does achieve is not simple or straightforward. Woodhouse does not say definitely to which order the Attendant Spirit belongs but merely asserts that he "is the agent and symbol, not of grace in its full extent, but of divine protection and a measure of guidance."¹³ The Spirit comes from the threshold of Jove's court, suggesting that he is associated with the supernatural order. But if this is so, why is his power so limited? Unable to release the Lady from the spell of Comus, he must summon Sabrina, an agent of divine grace, to accomplish this difficult task. Yet Sabrina, who supposedly belongs to the supernatural order of reality, is unmistakably portrayed as a nature goddess, and rather than descending from heaven above she rises from her dwelling-place beneath the water. Much of our understanding of the role of good and evil in the poem turns on what Milton understood by chastity, the virtue which is so central to Comus. Does the term refer to perpetual virginity or rather to pre-marital chastity or does it imply a much broader concept of purity of body and soul and single-hearted devotion to God in which physical chastity plays only a part? Is there any real communication between the Lady and Comus even when they are arguing solely on the level of nature? Can the beliefs of the two brothers be

¹² "The Argument of Comus," p. 61.

¹³ "Comus Once More," p. 220.

reconciled in any real sense? I believe that a close examination of the text will provide definite answers to some of these questions, thus clarifying to some extent the relationship between the various dualities which are evident in the poem.

The problem of relating the various space areas (and the characters associated with them) to these dualities is simplified somewhat if one keeps in mind that Milton undoubtedly bases Comus (like the "Nativity" Ode), on the Ptolemaic or Aristotelian conception of the universe. According to this view as it was held throughout the Middle Ages (and even in Milton's own time by some people), the earth was at the centre of the universe and enclosed by ten concentric spheres to which were attached the planets (in the case of the first seven spheres) and the fixed stars (in the case of the eighth sphere, called the Firmament). "Above the outermost sphere [the Primum Mobile, which turned all the other spheres so that the stars and planets encircled the earth] of astronomy was the heaven of theology [the Empyrean Heaven, dwelling-place of God and of the elect], pictured in the same diagram."¹⁴ In this system it is thus assumed that the realm of nature (the earth and its spheres) is bordered by the realm of the supernatural (beyond all the spheres). Jove's court must therefore be found in the Empyrean Heaven, the supernatural realm of grace. To this realm mortals are invited to ascend "higher than the Sphery chime" (1021), above all the spheres and their music. The Spirit dwells "before the starry threshold of Jove's Court" (1), that is, some-

¹⁴ Herbert Dingle, "Copernicus and the Planets," A Short History of Science, Origins and Results of the Scientific Revolution, A Symposium, (New York, 1951), p. 21.

where close to the firmament of the fixed stars. Also close to, or within, the firmament of the stars are Cupid and Psyche, "in spangled sheen" (1003). All three thus inhabit a region which is on the highest level of the natural order and on the verge of the supernatural order (rather than in an area common to nature and grace as Woodhouse suggests).¹⁵

Madsen is surely correct when he asserts that the Attendant Spirit "represents not supernatural grace but the higher potentialities of human nature...specifically perhaps the human soul. He represents the interpenetration of nature and grace from the point of view of nature.... He symbolizes the knowledge of right and wrong conferred by reason."¹⁶ For this reason he can offer the Lady guidance and point toward good but cannot rescue her from evil or enable her to rise toward good.

Comus' position in the framework of nature and grace is considerably more simple: he stands for nature uninformed by any higher purpose and, more specifically, for the instinctual and the sensual enjoyed for themselves and not seen in the light of supernatural grace or even in the light of natural reason. Thus Comus calls for unrestricted indulgence of the senses but in darkness; he excludes the use of sight, the sense most closely linked with the intellect. As for the supernatural, Comus can only see this as unnatural. Yet Comus feels that natural beauty should not only be enjoyed but displayed in a sophisticated environment far removed from the simple world of nature.

¹⁵ "The Argument of Comus," p. 70.

¹⁶ William G. Madsen, "The Idea of Nature in Milton's poetry," Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton, ed. B. J. Nangle (Yale University Press, 1958), p. 216.

Beauty is nature's brag, and must be shown
In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities
Where most may wonder at the workmanship.... (745-747)

Thus even he would turn nature aside into artificiality.

And what of the wood with which Comus is associated? Woodhouse suggests that it represents "this world, the order of nature, where good and evil grow up together...."¹⁷ This is, I feel, too broad an interpretation of the image. In both Comus and the Faerie Queene, Book I, the forest image (its occurrence in the former is patterned to a large extent on its appearance in the latter) is only a part (though an area large enough to get lost in) within a much larger total setting. In Comus, then, it surely cannot be seen as symbolic of the whole of the natural order. Furthermore, there is some doubt as to whether it can be considered good as well as evil. Although the forest obviously derives from the delightful wood of the pastoral, which the Genius in "Arcades" referred to as a "fair Wood" (45), (and some traces of this convention are still evident in Comus) Milton modifies the traditional pattern in a most definite way so that the dominant picture of the wood suggests that it is an evil, dangerous place. The brothers see the wood only as fearsome, as does the Attendant Spirit. Comus, of course, has his own reasons for wanting the wood to seem attractive to the Lady. Early in the poem the Lady herself speaks of "the blind mazes of this tangl'd wood" (181) and it is puzzling to find her a little later referring to "the spreading favor of these Pines" (184) and to "the kind hospitable woods" (187) even before she meets Comus. I think, however,

¹⁷ "Comus Once More", p. 220.

that in speaking these lines, the Lady is at this point momentarily deceived for the Attendant Spirit, who presumably is permitted to know the real nature of things, sees the wood as only evil: he tells of

the perplex't paths of this drear Wood,
The nodding horror of whose shady brows
Threats the forlorn and wand'ring Passenger.... (37-39)

of Comus in

this wood
And in thick shelter of black shades imbow'r'd (61-62)

and later of "this hideous Wood" (520) within the navel of which Comus resides. Finally, after the Lady's rescue, he demands that they depart "this cursed place" (939). Surely these passages imply not that only part of the wood is evil but rather than the whole wood is to be feared and detested. It is Comus' environment and like him stands for nature corrupted and perverted because unenlightened by grace. His evil presence and low motivation thus transform the delightful and innocent pastoral wood into its very opposite.

How does Sabrina relate to the framework of nature and grace? As has already been mentioned, Sabrina, although associated by Woodhouse with the order of grace, has many characteristics which seem to link her with the order of nature and with the more basic, primitive and sensuous levels of human experience. At the same time, she has, contrary to expectation, several features in common with Comus, who, as we have seen, is certainly closely related to nature, not grace, and stands for evil, not good.

Both Sabrina and Comus are associated with primitive magic though

Comus uses his power to entice people into moral dissolution and to bewitch those who refuse, while Sabrina uses her powers to heal the ills of nature caused by malicious fairies, and to free those whom Comus has imprisoned with his sensuality. There is considerable similarity between the habitation of Comus and that of Sabrina. Both live deep in a natural environment--Comus' wood is described as a dungeon, and Sabrina, of course, lives at the bottom of a river. These environments enclose them on all sides and are powerful and potentially dangerous, since they are uncontrollable by the hand of man--one can get lost in Comus' wood, and Sabrina's stream, as the spirit points out (930 ff.), can overflow its banks. Finally, it is a most surprising fact that both Comus and Sabrina are associated with the sirens--Comus' mother and the sirens all sang enchantingly together as they culled poisonous herbs (252-257); Sabrina is invoked by the Spirit in the name of the "Songs of Sirens sweet" (878)--those creatures who, like Circe, lured men from their duty into the pleasures of the senses.

But Sabrina is also linked very firmly with the order of grace and to the things of the spirit. She is invoked in a manner reminiscent of the Anglican litany--each petition being followed by the refrain "listen and save." She brings grace and salvation to the Lady and frees her from Comus' spell in a ritual not unlike the Christian sacrament of baptism or the anointing with holy oil or holy water, after which the Spirit urges the Lady and her brothers to depart "while Heaven lends us grace." (938).

In view of these apparent contradictions, Sabrina must be seen as

more than simply an agent of divine grace (as Woodhouse suggests)--she is related to both nature and grace and can best be described as nature illuminated by grace, or as Madsen puts it, "the interpenetration of nature and grace...from the point of view of grace...."¹⁸

In Comus Milton thus attempts, as Woodhouse and other critics have affirmed, an integration of the order of nature and the order of grace. This attempt to reconcile the two worlds is by no means unsuccessful, though Milton achieves his resolution in an unexpected fashion. The Lady reaches up toward the order of grace with great energy and determination but her efforts, strenuous though they are, end only in a kind of paralysis. She is able to resist evil and remain unsubdued by it, but cannot, through her own strength, free herself from its influence enough to achieve positive good. This must be brought about by grace working through nature. This pattern is reflected in the development of the poem: the first part of the Comus (up to the Lady's rescue by Sabrina) is filled with discussion, argument and conscious reasoning which leads nowhere: it does not prevent the Lady from falling into danger nor release her when she is in the hands of evil powers. The latter part of the poem involves action rather than thinking. We are concerned, not with high-flown abstractions, the "charming...divine philosophy" (476) of classical and Christian thinkers, but with a much deeper level of human experience involving ritual, poetry, incantation and magic. "Release and relief from the clash between the sensuous world and the world of straining idealism comes from unconscious sources,

¹⁸ "Comus Once More", p. 216.

from underneath the waters, from the flowery banks, from music and poetry and memory, all the deep wells of nature's purity and innocence."¹⁹

The Lady, in order not to be imprisoned by the sensuous, feels compelled to reject the whole world of the senses. This she can achieve by strenuous effort but is unable to achieve a free and harmonious relationship with nature except through grace. The natural delights of freedom, youth and joy cannot be pursued for themselves but are ultimately conferred by grace upon those who are devoted to the things of the spirit. As Woodhouse points out, whenever one has an ascending scale of values, some negative elements are inevitable: "there will be necessary renunciation within a scheme whose note is not renunciation, but comprehension and ascent."²⁰ Thus, although Comus boasts of joy, youth and freedom, he invites his companions to the night's activities with these words:

...welcome Joy and Feast,
Midnight shout and revelry,
Tipsy dance and Jollity....
Rigor now is gone to bed,
And Advice with scrupulous head,
Strict Age, and sour Severity,
With their grave Saws in slumber lie... (102-4; 107-110)--
 pleasures

the Lady must reject these/at his corrupt and depraved hands:

none
 But such as are good men can give good things,
 And that which is not good, is not delicious
 To a well-govern'd and wise appetite. (702-705)

Yet we are assured that the person who thus renounces natural youth, joy and freedom in preference for higher things, will eventually be rewarded

¹⁹ Roy Daniells, Milton, Mannerism and Baroque (Toronto, 1963), p. 37.

²⁰ "The Argument of Milton's Comus", p. 61.

with them. For this reason, as the spirit soars upward through the order of grace, he meets "far above in spangled sheen" (l. 1003) Cupid, shortly to be wedded to Psyche from whose

fair unspotted side
Two blissful twins are to be born
Youth and Joy; so Jove hath sworn. (1009-1011)

Only through the aspiration towards good can these gifts be accepted together with the crowning grace, freedom.

Mortals that would follow me,
Love virtue, she alone is free.... (1018-1019)

As to the problem of salvation: Comus demonstrates Milton's conviction that both human will and divine grace are necessary if man is to be rescued from evil.. The Lady must prove herself first before she can receive grace but, having expended all the effort of which she is capable, she cannot save herself without supernatural aid. Dick Taylor, Jr.,²¹ has shown us that this pattern of salvation is generally true of all Milton's major poems. Man strives to his utmost to reach God and is ultimately rewarded by a miraculous outpouring of divine grace. Of Comus in particular he points out:

The Lady is denied any external aids, until she has proven herself; but there are aids at hand on the level of nature under the proper circumstances, in the Attendant Spirit and her brothers.²²

...the Sabrina episode...represents the extension of grace to the Lady after her successful struggle.²³

²¹ "Grace as a Means of Poetry: Milton's Pattern For Salvation," Tulane Studies In English, IV (1954), pp. 54-90.

²² P 63.

²³ P. 62.

Although the natural and the supernatural are obviously two of the most prominent dualities in Comus, related to them are another important pair of opposites: good and evil. A hasty survey of the poem might lead the reader to suppose that Milton expresses here a simple dualism: the pleasures and indulgences of the body, and of the senses, are totally evil and the life of the spirit is absolutely good. There is some evidence in the poem to suggest this, perhaps, as we have already noted. But ultimately evil in Comus is the error of trying to make a part (the world of nature) into the whole thus worshipping the creation instead of its creator, that is, falling into idolatry. Good in Comus consists in seeking God with one's whole heart and discovering in the process that those things which one felt constrained to renounce are given back. This accounts, in part, for the attractiveness of Comus, and the ungraciousness of the Lady in rejecting his charms. In this poem, it must be admitted, Milton does not quite manage to reconcile an intense love of natural beauty and an equally intense devotion to the will of God.

In terms of the plot, the triumph of good over evil is not final: Comus merely flees into another part of the wood; he is not resoundingly defeated in open conflict and entirely cast out of his dwelling place as is Satan in Paradise Lost, nor is his evil environment destroyed as is Acrasia's Bower of Bliss in the Faerie Queene, Book II. (Comus obviously has certain close resemblances to Acrasia.) It is the Lady and her companions who must flee from danger while they are still under the protection of Heaven.

Body and soul or matter and spirit are the final significant pair

of oppositions in *Comus*. As suggested before, there seems to be considerable evidence in the poem that Milton at this point subscribes to a simple dualism: matter and the body are evil; the highest good for man is a state of pure spirit in which the soul is in the closest relationship with the Supreme Good. Passages in the first seventeen lines in the poem seem to suggest this most strongly. The Spirit suggests a sharp distinction between his heavenly habitation and the corrupted environment of man, for he dwells

Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care
Confin'd and pester'd in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and Feverish being.... (5-8)

A certain dualism of body and soul is also suggested in that the Spirit asserts that if it were not for those who aspire to virtue, he

would not soil these pure Ambrosial weeds
With the rank vapors of this Sin-worn mold. (16-17)

Critics²⁴ have found parallels between ll. 466-475 of *Comus* and Socrates' argument for the soul's immortality (*Phaedo*, 81). The whole of Plato's *Phaedo* does seem to suggest a marked dualism--the body is pictured as the source of all evil, and the soul's greatest good is seen as release from the body's enslavement. In addition, as we have already noted, such passages as those where the Lady asserts the intrinsic value of chastity and virginity suggest a disapproval in principle of the pleasures of the flesh. Finally, as pointed out before, the brothers express an ambivalence in their understanding of chastity as to whether it involves primarily physical integrity or simply inner purity.

²⁴ E.g., Hughes, p. 101.

This supposed dualism is, however, not nearly so decided as it seems. Close reading of both Phaedo and corresponding passages in Comus show that the views expressed in the two works are by no means identical even though in the latter Milton does echo some of the phrases of the former. Plato (in Phaedo) suggests the sharpest possible antagonism between body and soul. To Milton, however, who stands, in this respect, in the central Christian and Biblical tradition, the body is not intrinsically evil, since it is created by God, but it can become evil if man turns away from God and makes sensuous pleasure his sole aim in life (as Comus does). Thus it is possible for Milton to suggest (as it was surely not so for Plato at the time that he wrote Phaedo) that the spirit aspiring to heavenly things and purifying itself and being purified can itself transform the body into immortality. The sincerely chaste, pure soul can have discourse with angels

Till oft converse with heav'nly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th'outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal.... (459-463)

Note that Milton speaks of the body as "the unpolluted temple of the mind" not as the "prison-house of the soul" as the Greek proverb (with which Phaedo is in accord) expresses it.²⁵ This view of Milton's is thus much closer to (though not identical with) the non-dualistic Christian belief in the resurrection of the body than to the dualistic Greek belief in the immortality of the soul.²⁶ There is no necessary conflict

²⁵ Cf. I Cor. 6.19 where Paul says "know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you...."

²⁶ See Robert McAfee Brown, "Soul (Body)" and Stanley Romaine Hopper, "Spirit," Handbook of Christian Theology, ed. Marvin Halverson, (New York, 1958).

in Milton's thought between body and soul. When man is in his proper relationship with God the two are in perfect harmony in the same way that the natural and supernatural are.

This does not rule out the instances of incidental (as opposed to essential) dualism in the poem, especially insofar as Milton uses Plato's concepts (as expressed in Phaedo) and also uses the Ptolemaic universe as the basis of his cosmology in Comus. Nor does it entirely reconcile two strong and divergent impulses in Milton's mind as expressed in the argument between the two brothers. The discussion reflects a strong desire for physical security and for the things of this world and at the same time a conviction that if it came to the test, the things of the spirit and of the supernatural world are of prime importance. (In Comus, however, one surmises that Milton is most unwilling for it to come to the test.) The conflict cannot be explained away by suggesting, as Madsen does,²⁷ that Milton simply does not intend the speech of the younger brother to reflect true (i.e. Milton's) insight.²⁸

In the final lines of the poem, we discover that the pleasures of the senses, necessarily rejected at the hands of one whose sole concern is pleasure, are returned to one whose intent is set on higher things. In the problem of matter and spirit (as in that of nature and grace) Milton strives for and ultimately attains unity but often in an oblique

²⁷ Pp. 208-210.

²⁸ The conviction about the necessity of inner illumination expressed in ll. 381-385, the first two lines of which Madsen refers to on p. 209 as being deliberately meant to sound over-enthusiastic and even priggish, is intensely Miltonic and can be paralleled by passages in later poems, for example, Paradise Lost, III, 51-55, Samson Agonistes, 1687-1691.

and not absolutely complete manner which leaves a certain amount of unresolved tension.

Viewing Comus as a whole, what can one conclude about Milton's handling of the dualities prominent in the poem? The resolution which Milton does achieve of these conflicting dichotomies is on the one hand limited and incomplete and on the other oblique and in many ways totally unexpected.

This resolution is limited in both space and time. Although a fully developed cosmology (the Ptolemaic one) is hinted at in the poem, it is nowhere clearly delineated as is the universe in Paradise Lost.²⁹ Only by careful examination can it be pieced together. The poem itself focuses on a comparatively small area (in contrast to the Faerie Queene to which it owes much, and to Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes): a wood, a nobleman's estate close by. There is no direct evidence in the poem that, as Woodhouse suggests, "Ludlow...is...a symbol of the Heavenly City,"³⁰ it is only a temporary resting place. The wood is by no means the whole natural world but only part of it. The action which takes place in Comus represents only a small episode in the lives of the Lady and her two brothers. All three are very young (not mature as are Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost, the Son in Paradise Regained, and Samson in Samson Agonistes) and inexperienced, and we have no doubt that they will again meet temptation and danger--perhaps at the hands of the undefeated Comus.

²⁹ To some extent, this can be explained as the result of the restrictions of the Masque which, of course, necessitated that more or less the whole setting of the poem be represented on the stage.

³⁰ "Comus once More," p. 220.

It is incomplete in that although the major dualities are more or less harmonized within the overall pattern, certain tensions still remain unresolved. For example, a great love of natural beauty versus an intense devotion to higher things, and a desire for physical protection versus a conviction that spiritual integrity alone is essential.

Finally the resolution is oblique and unexpected. The Lady appears to move in her aspiration straight towards heaven, and if effort and will alone were sufficient, one would suppose that she would deserve to do so. But she is surprisingly frustrated in her movement toward the good and must be rescued awkwardly and unexpectedly not from Heaven above but supposedly from nature below; not by reason and will but by the deeper and more primitive springs of human nature. In this roundabout fashion she is freed to rise toward that order of grace which she so much desires.

Chapter Three: Lycidas

Although Lycidas does not present us with a fully developed narrative (as do Comus, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes), it does have certain dramatic characteristics through which various dualities are expressed. These dramatic characteristics include a setting (or rather several settings), characters and even elements of a plot--the relation of the inner processes of the poet's mind as it moves through cycles of question and answer to final resolution. The dramatic context of this process is also indicated by the concluding eight lines of the poem which are in the third person, the preceding part of the poem being in the first person almost in the style of a dramatic monologue. Behind this series of inner experiences lies an imagined exterior sequence of events: the death and apotheosis of Lycidas, accompanied by the lamentation and finally the rejoicing of those who view his fate.

By far the major duality in Lycidas is that of good and evil, but other dichotomies are also significant, for instance, the struggle between the concerns of earth and those of heaven. As in Comus, this problem is not simply left in general terms but focused on the specific question as to whether heavenly reward is an adequate recompense for loss of earthly fulfillment. The question of possible salvation from evil and suffering and whether this salvation is accomplished by man or by God again arises. Of considerable interest, especially in the light of Milton's final great trilogy, is the relationship between faith and culture, especially poetry, in Lycidas. Evident in the poem, finally, is a certain opposition between the desires of the flesh and the demands

of the spirit and intellect.

The representation of these dualities in poetic and dramatic terms is not so complex as in Comus, though sometimes dualities are not associated with specific characters or with specific areas within the total setting. Recalling the basic structural elements of Milton's thought we find the good is represented both by the classical divinities Jove and Phoebus and by the Biblical figures Christ and his disciple Peter. These personages (and later Lycidas himself) are associated with "heaven". Struggling humanity is represented by Lycidas and Milton himself, and the latter, of course, identifies himself to a large extent with the former. Evil is not associated with any particular individual character as in Comus, and again differently from Comus, it is presented primarily not so much as a temptation to be resisted but as an indisputable fact to be reconciled with the poet's belief in the ultimate meaning of things.

The basic problem which Milton raises in Lycidas in regard to evil is the simple, age-old query "why do the righteous suffer?" Evil nevertheless appears in the poem in several guises. There is first of all moral evil. This is to be found in the church amongst those who are supposed to be dedicated to the service of man and God but who are simply taking advantage of their position to further their own personal pleasure and ambition. It can also be seen amongst those poets who, likewise contrary to their profession, lack any sense of dedication and are concerned only with the satisfaction of their own erotic impulses. Though the temptation motive is hardly noticeable at all in Lycidas as compared with Comus, there is nevertheless the question as to whether it is worthwhile

to dedicate onself to higher things if one may suffer physical deprivation (in Lycidas, loss of life; in Comus, loss of youth, joy and freedom) in the process.

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted Shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with tangles of Neaera's hair? (64-69)

As Taylor comments regarding Lycidas;

Since its major theme is the trial and reaffirmation of Milton's creative faith, the poem can be viewed against the large perspective of temptation. The powerful forward movement of the thought and verse is toward a vantage point at which the author's doubts and weaknesses of spirit have been overcome. We watch the poet as he struggles, for long periods without any real comfort, with his clear awareness of the evils and disadvantages attending upon the sternly dedicated poet and the devoted / clergyman and with his fears of a death before any notable achievement, while many undedicated and unworthy persons are staying on in a³¹ life of aimless pleasure and unmerited prosperity.

The source of temptation in this trial is not an external agent, as it is in Comus, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, but rather Milton's own inmost doubts and questionings.

The problem of the evil of human suffering is also prominent in Lycidas. It is evident in the Anglican church in the suffering of the flock because of the perfidity of its pastors, but most importantly in the early death of a young man like Edward King, who, as an intended minister in the Anglican Church had devoted himself to the service of man and God. Milton's identification of himself with this young man is obvious but must not be taken too literally, as Edward Wagenknecht, who sees

³¹ Pp. 66-67.

Lycidas basically as a consideration of the problem of evil, has warned us:

Milton was not interested in Edward King qua Edward King, but he was intensely interested in Edward Kingliness. Here was a richly endowed young man...who had consecrated all his gifts to the service of his country and his God.... What kind of a world is it in which such a life can be snuffed out, cast aside, wasted, before (through no fault of its own) it has had a chance to render the service for which it is so eminently fitted? How can a young man--how can any young man--feel at home in such a world? How can he go on living without first having made some attempt to think this problem through?³²

As Wagenknecht goes on to point out, Lycidas represents Milton's attempt to think this problem through.

As we come to consider the manner and extent of Milton's resolution of the problem of evil and suffering in the present poem, Arthur Barker's remarks (in "The Pattern of Milton's Nativity Ode") on the structure of Lycidas are of considerable help. He points out that Lycidas consists of an introduction and conclusion and three movements "practically equal in length and precisely parallel in pattern."³³ He then goes on to discuss each movement in some detail showing how each begins with consideration of an emotional problem of the poet and ends with a resolution of this problem. Let us examine each of these movements more fully in regard to the problems with which they are concerned and to the solutions at which they arrive.

The first movement deals with Milton's struggle with evil and suf-

³² "Milton in 'Lycidas'", College English, VII (1946), p. 395.

³³ p. 171.

fering as a dedicated poet (like Edward King). It

laments Lycidas the poet-shepherd, its problem, the possible frustration of disciplined poetic ambition by early death, is resolved by the assurance, "Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed."³⁴

The violent passage which refers to Orpheus, and the succeeding lines of complaint, leave no doubt as to the depth of Milton's emotional involvement in the problem. Nor can we doubt the sincerity of his belief in a future heavenly reward. Yet this conviction does not and cannot provide a complete resolution to the problem within the context of the poem for it does not meet the pressing urgency of Milton's questioning but merely projects the issue into a rather vague future time far removed from the immediate here and now.

The final couplet [83-84, referred to above] ...rings somewhat hollow.... / It is far inferior in resonance to the passage of complaint which leads up to it. It is weak because what is in question is the pulse of dedication, while the reward is for achievement duly surveyed and registered.³⁵

The resolution though not all-embracing is, however, sufficient for the poet to regain his composure and continue with the poem more or less serenely.

Milton next goes on to consider the problem of evil as it relates to Lycidas and himself as devoted young ministers of the church.

The second [movement] laments Lycidas as priest-shepherd; its problem, the frustration of a sincere shepherd in a corrupt church, is resolved by St. Peter's reference to the "two-handed engine" of divine retribution.³⁶

³⁴ "Milton in 'Lycidas'". p. 172.

³⁵ Daniells, pp. 44-45.

³⁶ Barker, p. 172.

It would appear, thus, that the problem presented in the second movement is much more emphatically resolved than is that of the first movement. Yet the solution for all its supposed finality is ambiguous in the extreme as is attested to by the number of articles (more than twenty) written to explain the key phrase "two-handed engine!" Professor Daniells' suggestion³⁷ that it refers to the sword of Michael (mentioned in Paradise Lost, VI, 251 and 318) seems a reasonable one but within Lycidas itself, Milton gives us very little help in the precise interpretation of the image. We are furthermore given no details as to the time or place where this divine judgment will take place.

Again calm is restored to the poem and Milton launches into the final passage in the poem. These lines, as Barker indicates, form an apt concluding movement for they deal with the problem of evil as found in both of the preceding movements. Milton's concern for Lycidas (and himself) as a poet finds expression in his agonized contemplation of the body of the unfortunate young man being wafted aimlessly back and forth by the currents and tides of the sea. Milton has been brought to the upsetting realization that Lycidas has no deserved "Laureate Hearse" (151) upon which flowers can be strewn. Yet even as the poet imagines the far reaches of the sea where the body of Lycidas may have been carried, he recalls the evil in the church which is to be found close at hand in England itself: "Look homeward angel now, and melt with ruth." (163)

These unhappy contemplations are swept away by the thought of Lycidas' apotheosis as a "Genius of the shore" (183) and guide "to all that wander

³⁷ Daniells, pp. 40-41.

in that perilous flood." (185)

The third [movement] concludes with the apotheosis, a convention introduced by Virgil in Eclogue V but significantly handled by Milton. He sees the poet-priest-shepherd worshipping the Lamb with those saints "in solemn troops" who sing the "unexpressive nuptial song" of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation. The apotheosis thus not only provides the final reassurance but unites the themes of the preceding movements in the ultimate reward of the true poet-priest.³⁸

But even this final solution to the conflict created by the prevalence of evil and suffering is a limited one. The description of Lycidas' elevation places him in the joyous company of the saints but stops short of the beatific vision of God. Furthermore, we seem to sink somewhat as we move from this Christian context to the description of Lycidas as Genius of the shore, a being associated surely with paganism. Even this assurance is rather vague.

Finally as we move from concern with Lycidas' fate to concern with that of the poet who is telling the story, there is the strong suggestion that the problem has been solved only for the time being. Having finished his meditation, the poet

rose, and twitch'd his Mantle blue:
Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new. (193-4)

He turns to new experiences with a feeling of content even though (like the Lady and her brothers in Comus) he may have to face this and similar problems in the not too distant future. The conflict between good and evil in Lycidas, as in Comus, thus finds only provisional and temporarily satisfactory solution.

³⁸ Barker, p. 172.

Although the major conflicts in the poem arise from the struggle of good and evil, other oppositions arise from the relationship between man and God. Although the two orders of nature and grace are not so clearly implied here as in Comus, there is still the problem as to what extent salvation from evil is by human resources and to what extent by divine grace. Taylor demonstrates that the same pattern holds here as in Comus: man must struggle valiantly on the level of nature before being rewarded on the level of grace. Of the triumphant reception of Lycidas into heaven he says:

it could come only after the author had strengthened his mind, by trial, to the point that the apotheosis would be completely meaningful and would solve finally and satisfactorily the problems vexing him: it would have failed in its effect if presented at an earlier stage of his spiritual conflict. The poet must have made his journey along the difficult road.³⁹

As the reader will already have noticed, however, there is to a certain extent release on the supernatural level in the first two movements as well as in the third. In the first movement the two orders of reality do not really come together. Here as in Comus, one senses that Milton desires fulfillment both on the natural level (in the form, in the case of Lycidas, of earthly fame) and on the supernatural level (in the form of heavenly reward). The second crowns the first but cannot really be a substitute for it. The resolution in the second movement is definitely from the supernatural level but though resounding, it is, as already noted, curiously ambiguous. Even in the final movement the relationship between the natural and supernatural is not absolutely clear.

³⁹ P. 67.

Lycidas is not said to be in the divine presence in the heaven of supernatural order but only with the saints. The mention of Lycidas as Genius of the shore, and the final lines which tell of the every-day experiences of the "uncouth swain" (186) bring us by steps back down to the natural level. We must therefore conclude that both the natural and supernatural realms are important but, as in Comus, are not completely reconciled nor (differently from Comus) are they definitely placed in a rising scale.

The relationship between religion, which conveys God's gracious revelation of himself to man, and the arts, which represent the height of human endeavour, hardly figures in Comus but does arise in Lycidas. Nevertheless, while the relationship gives rise to considerable conflict in Milton's later poetry, in Lycidas the two areas of concern are equally valid and are linked together without tension. As Barker makes clear, Lycidas is presented both as priest and as poet, and throughout the poem is linked in both capacities with the pastoral figure of the shepherd. Milton is deeply concerned with Lycidas' and his own fate in both vocations. Milton invokes the pagan muses (15 ff.) without apology, whereas in Paradise Lost he is careful to insist that the source of his inspiration is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Christian Trinity. Pheobus Apollo, the Greek god of poetry and at the same time an analogue, in later Christian tradition, of Christ, the Lord of those who serve in the ministry of the church, comforts him after his outburst about the fate of Lycidas the poet. There is no sense of conflict over this dual role of Apollo. Finally, Milton identifies himself here with Orpheus, the famous singer of classical antiquity whose mother was Calliope, one

of the pagan muses.

The relationship between body and soul can hardly be said to enter Lycidas although the reference to sporting "with Amaryllis in the shade" (68) does have strongly sexual implications. This is, however, at the most only a passing temptation to the dedicated poet and the final outcome of the poem leaves no doubt but that the pleasures of the flesh must be subordinated to the demands of the spirit.

Considering in general Milton's handling of the various dualities in Lycidas we can see that the resolution of these dualities is to some extent unexpected though not as oblique as in Comus. Again, as in the earlier poem, certain unresolved tensions remain when the poem is surveyed as a whole. Finally, the provisional nature of the resolution of the various dichotomies can be better understood when it is remembered that both Lycidas and Milton are young and inexperienced. Milton makes this clear in both the opening and concluding passages of the poem. Much time is to elapse before he can achieve in his last three great poems a more mature and far-reaching solution to his inner conflicts than he was able to attain in Comus and Lycidas.

Chapter Four: Paradise Lost

In Paradise Lost we find represented with more or less equal emphasis all the major oppositions with which Milton is concerned. In earlier individual poems often some dualities were given greater prominence than others, and at times some were virtually excluded from consideration. In sharp conflict within Paradise Lost are three major sets of dualities: good and evil, the human and the divine, and two means of salvation from sin--man's endeavour and God's grace.

These dualities are presented in their greatest complexity, many aspects of them being shown. In Paradise Lost Milton pictures vividly the struggle between the goodness of God and the evil of Satan. He furthermore tries to reconcile the suffering of men with the beneficence of their maker. The conflict between man and God involves the opposition of body and soul, matter and spirit, the pleasures of the flesh and demands of the spirit, and finally the fine arts (particularly when viewed as part of a world dominated by Satan) and the demands of dedication to God. Several dichotomies arise out of the problem of salvation: human will versus divine assistance, free will versus predestination, and grace versus good works.

In terms of setting and characterization, the major dualities are expressed in the most universal and archetypal forms. The Supreme Good is represented, not by the pagan Jove as in Comus and Lycidas, but by the Christian God in his three persons: the Father, who in Milton's view is alone entitled to be called the true God; the Son, who receives his godhead directly from the Father, and the Holy Spirit, who in Paradise

Lost tends to be a somewhat less than personal power emanating from the Father.⁴⁰ In his work for good, God is aided by the angels, who, however, are not permitted to detract from the power and glory of God himself. Satan, supported by Sin and Death, who together with himself are a demonic counterpart of the heavenly Trinity, above, and by the fallen angels, stands for evil in the poem, but unlike Comus, is the source of all evils, not merely of a particular kind of evil. Adam and Eve, representing the whole of mankind, are unlike the human characters of earlier poems (for example, the Lady and her brothers in Comus, and Lycidas and Milton in Lycidas). Rather than being two individuals with particular personality traits which might distinguish them from any other pair of human beings, they are clearly intended to be universal man and woman. The setting is on the widest possible scale. Milton, by various devices, gives the illusion of including the whole of created reality, and the whole of man's actual and imagined experience. Both the various characters and the various space areas (Heaven, Hell, Earth and Chaos) within the total setting relate to each other clearly and unambiguously.

In Paradise Lost a causal link is established between two kinds of evil: pain, disease, war and death itself all result from the initial act of disobedience by Adam and Eve. In poems already discussed, moral evil is often of only one or two kinds, but in Paradise Lost it appears in an almost endless variety of forms, which are nevertheless all related to the relatively simple act of disobedience. Evil in Paradise Lost thus consists essentially of idolatry, of refusing to accept the

⁴⁰ See Maurice Kelley, This Great Argument, A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost (Princeton, 1941).

lordship of the Almighty and of trying to set up oneself or something else in his place. He who acts in this way transgresses God's will because he allows himself to be ruled by selfish impulses rather than by that right reason which recognizes God alone as sovereign. Disobedience leads to the further evil of disunity in man's total field of relationships. It causes disruption in the relation of man to God, to his fellow human beings, to the natural and material world around him, and to himself.

In the poem itself there are, of course, three major acts of disobedience, each of the second two resulting from the previous one. Satan rebels against God because he also wants to be king. Eve's downfall is caused by a similar desire for godhead while Adam's sin is the result of his putting his love of Eve before his duty to his creator. After their original acts of disobedience, Adam and Eve fall into further sin: both descend into a state of near despair, they give way to lust; later (X, 867ff.), Adam rejects Eve in a most cruel way. In the long history of the human race we see a developing demonstration of evils: murder and hatred, subjection to the appetites, war and conflict, usurpation of God's kingship by man to rule over his fellows and finally corruption even in the church.

How in Paradise Lost does Milton reconcile all this evil with the goodness of God? The answer to this question must begin with a consideration of the problem of Satan. The plot of Paradise Lost is in large measure the narration of a series of conflicts between God and the Devil. After each encounter between the two mighty beings, God the Father brings

greater good from the evil which Satan has caused and in each case but the last the Evil One seeks and finds the means to cause more ill.

The conflict begins with the rebellion of Satan in Heaven against the Almighty. The ensuing war ends, of course, with the resounding defeat of Satan, and his forceful expulsion from Heaven, now no longer his home. God counters this destructive suppression of Satan in Book VI with a great creative act in Book VII, "for to create / 'Tis greater than created to destroy." (VII, 606-607) No sooner have Adam and Eve been brought into this world than Satan is at work to cause their downfall. Yet there is still hope in the battle against evil. After Adam and Eve have repented their sin and accepted the divine judgment they also receive the promise of God's continual presence and of a paradise within. To this promise of inner regeneration from the evil caused by Satan, Adam can only respond in deep gratitude for the inestimable mercy of God:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good, more wonderful
Than that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By mee done and occasion'd, or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
To God more glory, more good will to Men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound. (XII, 469-478)

In this passage and in the one that follows we have evidence that Milton regards man's regenerate state as higher than his state of primal innocence, for the Son describes Adam's sighs and prayers of repentance after the fall as

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. (XI, 26-30)

Yet Satan's might has not been totally suppressed by any means, as we see in Michael's relation of the history of the human race subsequent to Adam and Eve. Sins and crimes of every description abound. Only the Son of God can quell the tempter, for the death of Christ will destroy the strength of Satan, Sin and Death. Nevertheless after this great defeat, Satan is still possessed of certain residual powers and evil creeps even into the church amongst the followers of Christ. Satan is to be utterly destroyed by God only at the end of human history. At this point will come the triumphant vindication of the goodness of God throughout the universe in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

In discussing Milton's handling of the problem of evil in Paradise Lost it is necessary to discuss Satan not only as a metaphysical force in human history but also as a character in the story of Paradise Lost. From his first appearance as a defiant rebel in Book I until his last appearance in Book X as a pitiful being unwillingly transformed into the most despised of animals, a snake, it is clear to even the most undiscerning of readers that the lord of Hell steadily declines in stature. To A. J. A. Waldock, this decline represents a degradation of Satan from ^{de} without rather than his/ generation from within. "Satan...does not degenerate" he is degraded.⁴¹ Without initially committing ourselves to either point of view, let us briefly recall the process of Satan's decline, before considering Milton's wisdom in his treatment of the problem.

⁴¹ Paradise Lost and its Critics (Cambridge, 1962), p. 83.

Satan is the first personage in Paradise Lost to be given complete delineation, and after his striking presentation in the opening pages, goes on to dominate Books I and II. Even in these first two books, as Waldock points out in some detail, Milton inserts constant reminders that the words and actions of Satan and his followers are not to be esteemed heroic by the reader, they are the product of a false and corrupt intelligence. Nevertheless it is Waldock's contention that Satan here displays a greatness of stature which completely disappears in the rest of the poem. As we examine later books in Paradise Lost, we shall discover that there is considerable justification in this statement. One of the most prominent ways in which Satan is reduced in size is the association of the fiend with ugly or repulsive animals. He is linked successively with a vulture (III, 431), a cormorant, the symbol of greed (IV, 196) and a toad (IV, 800). To enter Paradise the second time, Satan must significantly find a devious route low under the ground. Milton makes the most of the Biblical representation of the tempter as a snake. Satan himself is intensely aware of his lowly disguise.

O foul descent! that I who erst contended
With Gods to sit the highest, am now contrain'd
Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime
This essence to incarnate and imbrute,
That to the highth of Deity aspir'd. (IX, 163-167)

This passage, of course, anticipates the final view of Satan in the poem, on his return to Hell after the temptation. Of this scene Waldock insists:

It is most interesting to observe that the technique of it is exactly that of the comic cartoon. The method of the cartoon / is to allow the villain of the piece to reach a pitch of high confidence and vainglory, and then to dash him down. The whole point is that he is

dashed down, the essence of cartoon-technique being to bring your adversary to grief by unfair means-- in short, by some form of practical joke. This, of course, is precisely how Satan is treated here.⁴²

It is difficult to disagree with Waldock's comment at this point but I believe that on the whole a case can be made for the possibility that Satan's decline in the course of the story is^a logical and inevitable result of his initial act of disobedience. This decline, if it must be referred to as degradation, is not so clumsy and inappropriate as might at first be thought. It was Milton's firm belief that he who chose against God lost both his inner liberty and his outward freedom. Thus those who, in Book XII, were subjected to the tyranny of their fellow men, were themselves partly to blame. If man permits

Within himself unworthy Powers to reign
Over free Reason, God in Judgment just
Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
His outward freedom: Tyranny must be,
Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse.
Yet sometimes Nations will decline so low
From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,
But Justice, and some fatal curse annex
Deprives them of their outward liberty,
Their inward lost. (XII, 91-101)

Surely this passage is in some way applicable to Satan: he chooses freely not to serve God and after this sinful act his ability to choose freely what his state will be steadily diminishes. C S Lewis's remarks about Satan are not beside the point:

It is by his own will that he revolts; but not by his own will that Revolt itself tears its way in agony out of his head and becomes a being separable from himself, capable of enchanting him (II, 749-66) and bearing him unexpected and unwelcome progeny.

⁴² Pp. 91-92.

By his own will he becomes a serpent in Book IX; in Book X he is a serpent whether he will or no.⁴³

Lewis goes on to describe the process of degradation and concludes with these significant comments:

This progress, misunderstood, has given rise to the belief that Milton began by making / Satan more glorious than he intended and then, too late, attempted to rectify the error. But such an unerring picture of the "sense of injured merit" in its actual operations upon character cannot have come about by blundering and accident. We need not doubt that it was the poet's intention to be fair to evil, to give it a run for its money--to show it first at the height, with all its rants and melodrama and "Godlike imitated state" about it, and then to trace what actually becomes of such self-intoxication when it encounters reality.⁴⁴

One problem remains however: if Satan has reached the despicable and degenerate state in which he is pictured in Book X, why is he still a threat to mankind and able to tempt the children of men, as we have already seen, to dastardly sins not only of the flesh but also of the spirit? Why is it still necessary, as we have already noted, for the Son to enter into conflict with him in/^{his} [the Son's] death, and finally for him to annihilate Satan before the millennium? At this point we must, I feel, keep in mind that Satan is presented in Paradise Lost on two levels: as a metaphysical power in the universe who retains his ability to lead men into perdition, and as a character in the story who progressively degenerates because of his fatal inability to accept any kind of authority over him. Milton does his best to resolve the problem on both levels and in view of the immense difficulty of the task is, I believe, surprisingly successful.

⁴³ A Preface to Paradise Lost (London, 1942), p. 99.

⁴⁴ Pp. 99-100.

The prevalence of moral evil in Paradise Lost is equalled by the presence of suffering in the poem. The first suffering that appears is that amongst Satan and his followers, which for obvious reasons the reader is not encouraged to sympathize with. Milton instead directs our attention throughout the first eight books toward the evil that will result from the Fall in Book IX. The Fall of Adam and Eve thus seems to be the final calamity in the story. How does Milton reconcile this Fall and the immense suffering resulting in the human race with the goodness of God? Let us examine carefully the poet's handling of the problem of suffering in the last three books of the poem.

Soon after the Fall Adam and Eve are visited with many of the evils which are to afflict the human race ever afterwards. They fear death, yet desire it as an escape from their present misery and at the same time fear everlasting punishment. The harmonious relationship between the pair before the Fall is now disrupted and at the same time the whole of the natural universe is disjointed. Perplexed and confused, Adam can only exclaim in despair:

O Conscience, into what Abyss of fears
And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which
I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd. (X, 842-844)

None of the disturbing questions which they raise is fundamentally resolved. Adam and Eve appear to accept vague and indefinite answers.

The reader is not, however, permitted to ponder on the insufficiency of these assurances but is carried forward to the arrival of Michael and his great panorama of world history. But this panorama seems to reveal even more human grief. Much suffering results from the universal occurrence

of death and disease among human beings. Man brings even more misery upon himself by his own crimes and immoralities including adultery, murder, war, tyranny and all kinds of violence. Even though the Messiah eventually brings man's redemption, corruption and schism spring up within his church. The history of mankind is a long succession of ills to which Adam is, at the time, given only provisional answers.

The reader is not allowed to dwell on all this misery but is rapidly swept forward to the final vision of the poem. By various devices Milton increases the pace and momentum in these last two books. The pattern in Book XI of vignette and commentary is followed in Book XII by the swifter and simpler procedure of verbal presentation alone. At the same time Raphael's narration broadens out to continually greater numbers of people and makes increasingly larger leaps in time. The reader is thus carried along convincingly and irresistibly toward Milton's glorious conclusion.

The tragic elements of pain and suffering in Paradise Lost are not ultimately eliminated but become part of the greater whole of the epic. The difficult problems raised by Adam and by Raphael in his view of history are not conclusively resolved; they dissolve into the final vision of the poem--the vision of a paradise within, happier far, and vision of a new heaven and a new earth. The first answers the problem of Adam's future as an individual; the second, that of the whole human race. Both seem to compensate Adam more than adequately for the paradise that he is about to lose.

The justification of the ways of God to man is thus not reached by the presentation of a logically unassailable argument, however much Milton's

God may insist, with apparent plausibility, that he is guiltless of man's Fall into sin and misery. It is achieved rather by a total change of focus--a complete shift in perspective. The attention and concern of both Adam and the reader are freed from limited concentration on immediate problems and raised to a panoramic view of the totality of things. At this point all the negativities of human existence vanish into the mysterious and all-encompassing wholeness of the eternal purpose of God the Father.

As in Lycidas and Comus, Milton here resolves the problem of evil by upward and forward movement. In Paradise Lost, however, this movement progresses in a straightforward manner right to infinity. It does not proceed in an oblique fashion, as in Comus, nor is it arbitrarily cut off and deflected as in Lycidas.

Since the Fall is the central event in Paradise Lost the question of man's salvation from its evil effects is of great moment. Milton comes to grips with this problem in three significant passages in the poem. A large section of Book III, where the Father and the Son consider man's impending Fall, presents the problem in a theoretical and doctrinal manner. and In Books IX,/X and in the first part of Book XI we see the problem as it directly confronts Adam and Eve in their own experience. Finally the implications of this experience are explored in the latter part of Book XI and in the whole of Book XII in terms of the history of the whole human race.

Before turning to these passages let us examine briefly the nature of man's aspiration toward God before the Fall as it is represented by

Raphael in Book V. Before man sins his desire for union with God meets with no obstacles. As Raphael puts it:

...one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not deprav'd from good.... (V, 469-471)

Adam's reply to the angel's explanation shows that he understands man's aspiration toward God in terms of the Platonic ladder by means of which man rises gradually and easily to his creator.

In contemplation of created things
By steps we may ascend to God. (V, 511-512)

This happy state of affairs is, of course, completely done away by man's first act of disobedience, which effectually alienates him from God, and which makes necessary an act of divine grace before the relationship can be restored.

Is man saved in Paradise Lost by his own will or by supernatural grace? For Milton the question is essentially paradoxical as the poet indicates in this central passage from Book III.

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
Freely voutsaf't.... (III, 173-175)

Taylor suggests that the relationship between human will and divine grace is more or less simply a temporal one: "...man works toward salvation through moral strength and intellectual perception; grace comes after his victory in trial."⁴⁵ Yet a closer examination of the relevant lines in the text will show, I feel, that in Paradise Lost the whole matter is rather more complex than this.

⁴⁵ "Grace as a Means of Poetry: Milton's Pattern for Salvation," p. 57.

There is no question but that Milton believes that man cannot save himself by his own unaided effort. God the Father accepts the Son's offer to sacrifice himself for man, for "thou only canst redeem...." (III, 281). But as to whether human effort or enabling divine grace comes first or whether both occur simultaneously, there is some ambiguity in Paradise Lost. From time to time in Book III it seems that Milton intends to convey the idea that man can do nothing towards his own salvation. God the Father declares his purpose to redeem man in order that

Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand
On even ground against his mortal foe,
By me upheld, that he may know how frail
His fall'n condition is, and to me owe
All his deliv'rance, and to none but me. (III, 178-182)

It stands to reason that man must at least repent so that he can accept the gift of grace, but Milton implies that man's ability to do even this depends on divine help. Those who are not already amongst the elect and who have not deliberately and completely rejected God

shall hear me call, and oft be warn'd
Thir sinful state, and to appease betimes
Th' incensed Deity while offer'd grace
Invites, for I will clear thir senses dark,
What may suffice, and soft'n stony hearts
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.
To Prayer, repentance, and obedience due,
Though but endeavor'd with sincere intent,
Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut. (III, 185-193)

But even here human effort, however feeble, is not absent. Yet grace always exceeds what man either desires or deserves as the Son points out regarding his sacrifice of himself:

...man shall find grace;
And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,
The speediest of thy winged messengers,
To visit all thy creatures, and to all

Comes unprevented, unimplor'd, unsought?
Happy for man, so coming; he her aid
Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost;
Atonement for himself or offering meet,
Indebted and undone, hath none to bring. (III, 227-235)

It is next necessary to relate to the actual situation of Adam and Eve the pronouncements on grace made by the Father and the Son. A survey of Book X would seem to justify many of Taylor's remarks about the relationship of human will and divine will in Paradise Lost. As he indicates, in Book IX Adam has been tried and found wanting. After the Fall, before he can be reconciled to God, he must face further trials.

In his post-Fall circumstances, however, his temptation is possibly even greater than before, since it involves despair, defeatism, and the desire to shift the blame from himself to God and Eve. Since he fell because of his love for Eve, a special part of this new temptation involves a sound readjustment of his relationship with her. The journey ahead is a hard one for him to traverse.⁴⁶

Adam, however, eventually overcomes all these obstacles and at the end of Book X reaches the point where he knows he must repent with great humility and where he can believe that his prayers will not go unanswered by God. Adam asserts of God that

Undoubtedly he will relent and turn
From his displeasure; in whose look serene,
When angry most he seem'd and most severe,
What else but favor, grace, and mercy shone? (X, 1093-1096)

At the beginning of Book XI we are told of the descent of the longed-for grace, which at first glance seems to be the answer to Adam's prayer of repentance. Yet we are told that even the ability to regret one's sins and pray for forgiveness is bestowed by heavenly grace. Adam and Eve

⁴⁶ P. 72.

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.... (XI, 1-8)

The conclusion must be drawn that in Paradise Lost human will and divine will are inextricably bound up with each other, both being essential for man's salvation.

The same can be said of the relationship between faith, the acceptance of supernatural grace, and good works, the result of human striving and effort. For Milton good works are the inevitable fruit of a lively, valid faith. His position in this matter would seem to be that of the apostle James who said that "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2.26). Thus we are told in Book XI that in order for man to attain to life after death he must first in this life be

Tri'd in sharp tribulation, and refin'd
By Faith and faithful works.... (XI, 63-64)

Later on in Book XII, the death and resurrection of Christ bring deliverance from death for those who embrace this benefit "by Faith not void of works...." (427)

There is a similar balance of the human and the divine in another aspect of the problem of salvation, the relationship between predestination and free will. Milton's God is absolute in every sense. In addition to being omnipotent and omnipresent, he is also omniscient. This means that he knows in advance the choices that men will make and the ultimate destiny

to which these choices will lead them. At the same time Milton's view of man in general and of human responsibility in particular commits him to the belief that human beings are completely free in their moral choices. Their thoughts and deeds are not rigidly predetermined by some outward force over which they have no control.

In terms of the poem at hand, these convictions of Milton result in the fact that God the Father is aware from the beginning that Adam will rebel and fall from grace, hence the long discussion in Book III. Yet Raphael, who comes to Adam as a direct emissary from God, insists that Adam must serve God with his own free will, just as the angels do in heaven.

God made thee perfect, not immutable,
And good he made thee, but to persevere
He left it in thy power, ordain'd thy will
By nature free, not over-rul'd by Fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity;
Our voluntary service he requires,
Not our necessitated, such with him
Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how
Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve
Willing or no, who will but what they must
By Destiny, and can no other 'choose? (V, 524-534)

To this conflict of free will and predestination, which has perplexed Christian thinkers from the beginning, Milton does not bring a simple rational solution but merely asserts vigorously both sides of what is essentially a paradox (like that of human will versus divine grace). God the Father thus asserts of the angels the truth which holds equally of Adam and Eve:

They therefore as to right belong'd,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate;
As if Predestination over-rul'd
Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree

Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown. (III, 111-119)

The relationship between human will and divine grace is obviously different here from what it is in Comus. In the earlier poem the two are at times simply juxtaposed without resolution--this is especially the case in the last few lines of the masque. In Paradise Lost human and divine initiative are harmoniously related together in a well-integrated whole. In addition, in Paradise Lost there is a more direct relationship between man's natural capacity for aspiration toward God on the one hand, and on the other hand that supernatural grace which enables man to transcend whatever he could hope to attain by his own effort. Adam prays directly up to God after the Fall and grace descends in a perfectly straightforward manner from above; it does not arrive by a devious route from below as in Comus.

In Paradise Lost we find the divine-human relationship pictured in all its aspects. In earlier poems only certain areas of man's total field of interests are represented but in the present work the whole range of human activity is set over and against the demands of faith and religion. The result is the existence of a whole series of dualities. Against man's unconditional relationship to his heavenly father is set his involvement in such intellectual pursuits as the arts, science, and philosophy, in the world of human relationships, especially the love of man and woman and the broader relations between men in society and finally in the pleasures of the body and the senses including eating and drinking

and sex. In Paradise Lost, furthermore, Milton sets out more fully than elsewhere the relationship between God and his creatures, both as it ought to be and in distorted forms. The state of Adam and Eve before the Fall is thus contrasted with their state after the Fall, and the state of the devils in Hell is set against that of the unfallen angels in heaven.

Milton's general view on the relationship between the world of man and the world of God is simple and as set out in Paradise Lost differs little essentially from its expression in earlier poems, particularly in Comus and Lycidas. The concerns of man's world are essentially good but must be held strictly within the framework of man's obedience to God. If exalted into a position where they would compromise man's unconditional allegiance to his creator they become evil and idolatrous. Let us explore the implications of these statements in regard to Milton's depiction of various human activities in Paradise Lost.

The two areas which receive special prominence in Paradise Lost are of course poetry and music. In Lycidas, the reader will recall, Edward King's dual roles as priest and poet were given equal emphasis by Milton and the poet's invocation was to the pagan muse. In Paradise Lost, however, it would appear that Milton feels his vocation as a poet must be subordinated to his role as singer of divine truth. The source of his inspiration is therefore not the pagan muses but the third person of the Christian Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The poet will ascend far higher than the mountain of the classical muses. To his heavenly muse Milton thus speaks:

I thence
Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme. (I, 12-16)

Music abounds in Paradise Lost. The Devil and his followers march into battle to the music of flutes and recorders. While Satan is absent the fallen angels while away the time by singing of their heroic deeds and of their fall from heaven. But "thir Song was partial" (II, 552) even though the harmony was ravishing. Through song and music the unfallen angels in heaven praise their great Lord. Music later appears in human history, however, in less happy circumstances. No sooner has Jubal created music upon the harp and organ, than men use this music to seduce young women into amorous involvement.

Such happy interview and fair event
Of love and youth not lost, Songs, Garlands, Flow'rs,
And charming Symphonies attach'd the heart
Of Adam, soon inclin'd to admit delight
The bent of Nature..... (XI, 593-597)

Michael immediately points out, however, that this use of art and music is evil because it is intended for man's own selfish purposes rather than for the glory of God.

Judge not what is best
By pleasure, though to Nature seeming meet,
Created, as thou art, to nobler end
Holy and pure, conformity divine.
Those Tents thou saw'st so pleasant, were the Tents
Of wickedness, wherein shall dwell his Race
Who slew his Brother, studious they appear
Of Arts that polish Life, Inventors rare
Unmindful of thir Maker, though his Spirit
Taught them, but they his gifts acknowledg'd none.
(XI, 603-612)

It may appear, in view of this passage, that Milton condemns art only when

it leads man away from spontaneous worship of God into human artifice.

The words which describe the morning prayer of Adam and Eve suggest this.

Lowly they bow'd adoring, and began
Thir Orisons, each Morning duly paid
In various style, for neither various style
Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
Thir Maker, in fit strains pronounc't or sung
Unmeditated, such prompt eloquence
Flow'd from thir lips, in Prose or numerous Verse,
More tuneable than needed Lute or Harp
To add more sweetness.... (V, 144-152)

It may also seem that, in general, as compared to hell, and to human history after the Fall, Eden holds little art. Madsen sums up the problem thus: "Milton's use of 'art' as a symbol of fallen existence, both angelic and human, has led some critics to regard him as an enemy of human civilization."⁴⁷ But this interpretation of Milton's poetry in general, and of Paradise Lost in particular, cannot be supported. However spontaneous the outburst of praise for God by Adam and Eve, their prayer is in fact carefully and artistically structured. The Garden of Eden itself is not without the control of art, as Madsen indicates. "...Adam and Eve's bower is a work of art as much as it is a work of nature, and... man's art of cultivation and pruning is required to keep the garden in a proper condition."⁴⁸ Clearly art is not a necessity for human salvation, but neither need it necessarily lead man into perdition unless he himself willfully misuses this gift from his creator.

The beings who inhabit heaven and hell and earth show considerable interest in the use of the intellect, particularly in the abstract sub-

⁴⁷ Madsen, p. 262.

⁴⁸ P. 263.

jects of theology and philosophy. But for Milton, the activity of the mind is only good if used in accordance with the will of God, that is, according to right reason. Thus the philosophizing of the devils in hell leads only to endless confusion. Since they have deliberately rejected service of God in practice they cannot attain to any sound theoretical knowledge about him or about the metaphysical structure of the universe he has created.

In discourse more sweet....
Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
Fixt Fate, Free will, Foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost. (II, 555, 557-561)

Their reasonings are branded "false Philosophie" (II, 565) for they do not lead to any saving insights but only serve to divert temporarily the minds of the devils from the pains of hell. In heaven such supposed problems as predestination and free will, as they are discussed by God the Father, are obviously intended to be clear and straightforward. After hearing Raphael's talk, the unfallen Adam also appears to grasp the matter clearly, though he is encouraged to concern himself with the practical question of obedience to the Almighty rather than with enquiring too closely into heavenly things. This is also true, of course, in regard to Adam's deep curiosity about the scientific nature of the universe. This desire for knowledge is not evil in itself but must not deflect Adam from his commitment to God. Raphael warns Adam:

Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,
Leave them to God above, him serve and fear.... (VIII, 167-168)

Milton suggests that indulgence in pleasures of the mind must be controlled

just as bodily appetites must be restrained:

...Knowledge is as food, and needs no less
Her Temperance over Appetite, to know
In measure what the mind may well contain.... (VII, 126-128)

As Madsen says, "We might observe that there is a temperance of intellectual desire as well as of sensual desire...."⁴⁹

The relationship between man and his fellow human beings must also be subordinated to his duty to his creator. Nevertheless, love between human beings, including those of the opposite sex, is basically good. The affection between Adam and Eve before the Fall is everywhere evident. Satan, in contrast to Adam and Eve, cannot feel love for someone of the opposite sex but only lust. He nevertheless envies the pair their happiness together before the Fall.

Sight hateful, sight tormenting! thus these two
Imparadis't in one another's arms
The happier Eden, shall enjoy thir fill
Of bliss on bliss, while I to Hell am thrust,
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Among our other torments not the least,
Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines.... (IV, 505-511)

Raphael, however, admits that there is between the angels in heaven something analogous to the earthy love of Adam and Eve:

Let it suffice thee that thou know'st
Us happy, and without Love no happiness.
Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st
(And pure thou wert created) we enjoy
In eminence, and obstacle find none
Of membrane, joint, or limb exclusive bars:
Easier than Air with Air, if Spirits embrace,
Total they mix, union of Pure with Pure
Desiring; nor restrain'd conveyance need
As Flesh to mix with Flesh, or Soul with Soul. (VIII, 620-629)

⁴⁹ P. 246.

His speech concludes, however, with a warning to Adam not to let his love for Eve turn him away from God. This is, of course, exactly what Adam does, to his own downfall. Eve herself is also to blame for seducing him. The result of this unfortunate act is a disruption of his relationship with his beloved spouse. Only after Eve has repented her misdeed in leading him into this temptation and Adam has forgiven her and accepted her back and acknowledged his own guilt can Adam and Eve's relationship with God be restored. The problem of man's relationship to woman remains, however, to plague the human race throughout its history as can be seen from Michael's presentation of the evils that befall men who give themselves over to amorous delight to the exclusion of everything else.

Man's relationship to society, like that to an individual of the opposite sex, can also be distorted if allowed to come between man and his God. Tyranny and all the misery it causes enter the human scene when man usurps the place of God who alone can demand absolute obedience from human beings. Adam's reaction to such a tyrant is immediate and severe:

O execrable Son so to aspire
Above his Brethren, to himself assuming
Authority usurpt, from God not giv'n:
He gave us only over Beast, Fish, Fowl
Dominion absolute; that right we hold
By his donation, but Man over men
He made not Lord, such title to himself
Reserving, human left from human free. (XII, 64-71)

But, as already pointed out, those who succumb to tyranny are also to blame.

The final duality that must be discussed in this chapter is that of body and soul or of matter and spirit. In Paradise Lost Milton goes to greater lengths than anywhere else in his poetry to establish the goodness of matter and the body. It is also immediately clear here, as it is not

to such an extent in Comus, that Milton definitely does not subscribe to the dualism of Plato, as expressed in Phaedo. Raphael's speech in Book V suggests that matter and spirit are part of a continuum in which the one merges easily into the other. The vital organic unity between body and soul is suggested by the use of the image of a tree whose roots, immersed deep in the dark, solid earth, represent the physical basis of man's existence, and whose flower, held aloft in the bright air, suggest man's spiritual aspirations.

The goodness of the whole of the physical universe is attested to in Raphael's account of the creation in Book VII. The world of Adam and Eve is essentially good because it finds its ultimate source in God, the "Author and end of all things" (VII, 591). Thus Milton includes the Biblical refrain after each act of Creation and uses it again at the end of the sixth day with special emphasis:

Here finish'd hee, and all that he had made
View'd, and behold all was entirely good. (VII, 548-549)

Not only is man's body essentially good, but also his natural passions--so long as they are directed by right reason according to the will of God. Madsen succinctly expresses the matter thus: "Appetite is 'natural' in the sense that it is part of man's nature, but it is 'unnatural' to exalt it over reason, which is superior to appetite in the psychological hierarchy and which ought to rule it--not suppress it--at all times."⁵⁰ In Book IV Milton stresses the goodness, in particular, of man's sexual desires. He is careful to place the wedding night of Adam and Eve before

⁵⁰ P. 244.

the Fall. Adam and Eve appear naked before they fall into temptation and there is no shame in this. After the fall, of course, all is changed. Uncontrolled lust takes the place of the pure and innocent love which they enjoyed before the Fall. The history of the human race, shown by Raphael, presents many examples of men and women who likewise gave way to sexual desire, forgetting the devotion which they owed to their maker. There are also instances of men misusing their appetites in other ways by seeking luxury and creature comforts before God. This indulgence leads to all sorts of evils. Adam views the children of men after their first involvement in full-scale war and sees

All now was turn'd to jollity and game,
To luxury and riot, feast and dance,
Marrying or prostituting, as befell,
Rape or Adultery, where passing fair
Allur'd them; thence from Cups to civil Broils. (XI, 714-718)

Milton's heaven is surprisingly materialistic. The angels eat, and drink and sleep, and even, as indicated before, experience something like sexual love. They seem to enjoy most of the pleasures of the body and of the senses, even to the extent of holding games before the Gate of Paradise. As Gabriel keeps guard

About him exercis'd Heroic Games
Th' unarmed Youth of Heav'n.... (IV, 551-552)

This pleasure in the contest of physical skill finds, typically, its distorted counterpart in hell, where the games end in unrestrained violence.

The emphasis in Paradise Lost generally in regard to the activities of man is on moderation and temperance rather than as in Comus on outright if only temporary, rejection of these things. The alienation from God which idolatrous subjection to merely human concerns can bring must be

overcome, in the lives of Adam and Eve and of all mankind, by moral effort and by the grace of God. In this process not all tensions between man and God can be removed until the final vision where there is complete, not, as in Comus and Lycidas, merely partial, resolution of the conflict between the concerns of man and the concerns of God. This resolution is given expression in the Biblical vision of a new heaven and a new earth. Michael speaks of a time when heaven and earth will be one perfect and blissful whole: after his defeat of Satan, the Son will

Then enter into glory, and resume
His Seat at God's right hand, exalted high
Above all names in Heav'n; and thence shall come,
When this world's dissolution shall be ripe,
With glory and power to judge both quick and dead,
To judge th' unfaithful dead, but to reward
His faithful, and receive them into bliss,
Whether in Heav'n or Earth, for then the Earth
Shall all be Paradise, far happier place
Than this of Eden, and far happier days. (XII, 456-465)

In the meantime Adam is shown the way to find a heaven within his human heart.

The relationship of dualities in Paradise Lost is generally far more direct than in Comus and Lycidas. Although both sides of these dualities are asserted with equal force, as in the earlier poems, there are less negativities and ultimately fewer unresolved tensions in the epic than in the two minor poems. The resolution achieved in Paradise Lost of the dominant dualities is more complete and straightforward than in any of the earlier poems.

Chapter Five: Paradise Regained

In Paradise Regained some of the dualities are the same as those prominent in Paradise Lost but there are important differences in Milton's handling of them.

In Paradise Lost the struggle between good and evil dominates the poem; in Paradise Regained evil again manifests itself in almost every kind of temptation and is always related directly to the basic sin of disobedience to God. The problem of human suffering again arises, but there is not the same emphasis as in Paradise Lost on the reconciliation of the Fall of man with the goodness of God. The question of salvation arises in rather different terms than in Paradise Lost. In the latter Adam and Eve were unsuccessful in their initial encounter with evil. After the Fall it becomes more than a theoretical possibility for them to use their human wills against the will of the Almighty. They must therefore be rescued somehow from this state of enmity toward God, and as we have seen, this salvation involves both their own human efforts and the supernatural grace of God. The Son, of course, has never experienced a lapse into sin, therefore his will is still in essential harmony with that of his Father. There is no question of his own supremacy in an encounter with evil. He comes rather as a saviour of man from sin. The question which arises in Paradise Regained, then, is not how Christ is to be saved but how he is to save. What is the nature of his kingdom, earthly or heavenly? Will he establish it through trust merely in human force of arms or through absolute faith in the power and providence of God? Will he seek to win men to his cause by a display of mere human glory and fame or by a revelation of divine

truth? The conflict between man and God is evident in Paradise Regained not only in the problem of salvation but also in the general opposition between the concerns of man and God. Almost every conceivable human value or delight which might be sought as an end in itself is set against the demands of a life dedicated solely to God.

Evil in Paradise Regained, as in Paradise Lost, consists simply of disobedience to the will of God. In more specific terms this means trying to enjoy or use something, in itself good, apart from God. Evil is thus the sin of idolatry. What is the nature of the particular temptations to which the Son is subjected? As stated above, they vary widely. The arrangement of these temptations in the poem (apart from its basic adherence to the gospel of Luke) is in no way haphazard, but, as Woodhouse has demonstrated, is climactic.⁵¹ It can easily be seen that the temptations increase in subtlety and complexity from the first to the last. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an appeal to simple physical need. The temptation of voluptuous women, proposed by Belial and rejected by Satan, is an appeal not to one of the physical necessities of life but to physical desire. The next temptation, a sumptuous banquet placed in a beautiful natural setting and accompanied by lovely music and by fair nymphs and goddesses, rises above the satisfaction of bare physical need to the gratification of the desire for sensuous pleasure and delight. The next series of temptations present successively riches, which provide material security, and glory, fame and power. After these the temptation

⁵¹"Theme and Pattern in Paradise Regained," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXV (1955), pp. 167-182.

to knowledge appeals simply to the mind. Finally, the temptation for Christ to cast himself down from the temple, thus necessitating use of the supernatural power given to him by his Father, is a purely spiritual temptation. The arrangement of the various temptations is not only climactic but also balanced. The first temptation (to turn stones into bread) appeals to a physical need which man shares with the animals. The next group of temptations are purely human ones. The final temptation is an appeal to Christ not merely as a man but as the divine Son of God. Satan himself makes this clear. Before transporting Christ to the temple, he admits that he has found the Son firm as a rock,

To th'utmost of mere man both wise and good,
Not more; for Honors, Riches, Kingdoms, Glory
Have been before contemn'd, and may again:
Therefore to know what more thou art than man,
Worth naming Son of God by voice from Heav'n,
Another method I must now begin. (IV, 535-540)

Christ is thus tempted on every level of his being to commit the sin of disobedience against his Father. At every point he refutes the wiles of the Evil One, and rejects completely what the tempter offers. Good thus triumphs over evil through the Son's strict obedience of his Father.

The struggle between Good and Evil in Paradise Regained is different from that of Paradise Lost where Satan is successful in seducing Eve into sin. In Paradise Regained there is no possibility of success for any of Satan's endeavours since the virtue and strength of the Son are absolutely unassailable. Satan knows from the beginning the identity of the Son. He has witnessed the Baptism of Christ and heard the voice pronouncing him the Son of God. (Satan's argument at the end of Book IV that he did not

understand in what sense Christ was the son of God is surely sheer sophistry.) Satan's address to his comrades in Hell in Book I is dominated by a single emotion: fear. In this speech and in the description of the devil's reaction to it the words "fear" or "dread" or words derived from them recur several times together with words and phrases like "deep dismay", "ill news", "sad tidings", "danger" and "hazard" As Satan later speaks to the fallen angels at the beginning of Book II to consider how he may tempt the Son he clearly lacks the assurance which he possessed when he approached Eve in Paradise Lost.

...I am return'd lest confidence
Of my success with Eve in Paradise
Deceive ye to persuasion over-sure
Of like succeeding here, I summon all
Rather to be in readiness with hand
Or counsel to assist; lest I who erst
Thought none my equal, now be overmatch'd. (II, 140-146)

As the temptations progress Satan is amazed and struck down each time the Son refutes him. After the final unsuccessful temptation Milton uses two epic similes to emphasize the completeness of the tempter's downfall and then goes on to state:

So struck with dread and anguish fell the Fiend,
And to his crew, that sat consulting, brought
Joyless triumphals of his hop't success,
Ruin, and desperation, and dismay,
Who durst so proudly tempt the Son of God. (IV, 576-580)

The images associated with Satan reveal his pathetic weakness. He is several times linked with the snake, most hated of animals. (I, 120, II, 157; III, 5) He is called by the Son a "poor miserable captive thrall" (I, 411), and a "fawning parasite!" (I, 452)

On the other hand, we know that the Son is all points triumphant over

his adversary. Rather than threatening the virtue of the Son, the temptations bring about a demonstration of the Son's complete devotion to the will of God. This demonstration or proof is, of course, the purpose of the Father:

To show him worthy of his birth divine
And high prediction, henceforth I expose
To Satan....
He now shall know I can produce a man
Of female Seed, far abler to resist
All his solicitations, and at length
All his vast force, and drive him back to Hell,
Winning by Conquest what the first man lost
By fallacy surpris'd. (I, 141-143; 150-155)

The invincibility of the Son is emphasized by the comparison of Christ to a rock about which the waves dash in vain. (IV, 18, 533)

The conflict between Satan and the Son takes place quite differently in Paradise Regained than in Paradise Lost. While there was considerable emphasis on the physical combat between the foes in the earlier poem, in the sequel the contest between Satan and Christ is solely on the intellectual and moral level.

...the theme is...heroic, as epic demands, but not
as in Paradise Lost an indeterminate mingling of
conventional, if idealized, warfare with "patience and
heroic martyrdom." It is the latter only and "in /
secret done," in the desert.⁵²

Evil is overcome by what would seem to be (in comparison with Paradise Lost, at any rate) the passivity of the Son. His victory is won by his refusal to perform certain actions rather than by his accomplishment of splendid deeds.

There might at this point seem to be a conflict between moral and

⁵² Daniells, pp. 195-196.

spiritual self-discipline on the one hand and outward action on the other. But the two are not as widely driven apart in the poem. The kind of inward life in which the Son is involved during the whole of the poem is presented as a necessary prelude to action. Milton thus reconciles a traditional opposition amongst Renaissance humanists between the man of war and the man of wisdom.

In Paradise Regained Milton again approaches the mystery of evil as seen in the problem of human suffering. Milton himself said that the epic was patterned on the book of Job. There are obvious parallels between Job and Christ. Job, once possessed of great wealth, lost his material possessions and many of the other things which he valued such as his health and his children. His suffering fell upon him as a direct result of the malice of Satan and in accordance with the permissive will of the Almighty. But because Job remains faithful to God despite all his trials, he is eventually rewarded with all he had previously lost. In Paradise Lost, the Son, who has enjoyed great renown in heaven, has descended to earth to a role in ignominy and poverty. In order to serve God and frustrate the wiles of his adversary the devil, he must refuse fame and wealth when it is offered to him. Satan, in contrast, has the power to give the unworthy riches and power, and to afflict the virtuous, including the chosen people of God, with bondage, pain and death. How does Milton reconcile these gross injustices with the goodness of God?

Milton solves the problem by suggesting that if the individual human being dedicates himself unreservedly to the will of God, as the Son does, he will not go unrewarded. Indeed heroic suffering, undertaken by the

will of God, brings its own reward. As Woodhouse suggests⁵³ the Virgin Mary, referring to her own suffering, speaks also of the suffering of her Son when she says,

this is my favor'd lot,
My exaltation to afflictions high;
Afflicted I may be, it seems, and blest,
I will not argue that, nor will repine. (II, 91-94)

Milton insists that Satan's ability to deal out pain and woe is strictly controlled by the permissive will of God. After the first temptation the Son affirms the ultimate control of God over everything Satan does: "...do as thou find'st / Permission from above; thou canst not more." (I, 495-496) It is the Father's will that after this tempting, successfully resisted by the Son, Satan will be utterly defeated so that he can no longer permanently afflict the children of men with misery.

The problem of salvation is rarely presented in terms of specific characters in the poem. Yet there is some mention of the disciples, and their aspirations towards God through the Son. In this matter it is clearly God, through Christ, who takes the initiative, and the disciples who must accept his call and follow him. Thus, while wondering at the Son's sudden disappearance,

they out of their complaints new hope resume
To find whom at the first they found unsought. (II, 58-59)

The divine is thus embodied in the human.

The main concern, however, is with the way in which Christ will bring salvation to men. His temptations in the wilderness are concerned to a large extent with this matter. Woodhouse states that Christ's unshakable

⁵³ P. 182.

position throughout the ordeal of the temptation is "a position of absolute obedience and complete trust."⁵⁴ As has been shown, the Son firmly rejects, in all the temptations, the call to disobedience. He also, at every point, suppresses any suggestion that he not put his full trust in his almighty Father. The first and third temptations, in particular, are shown by Woodhouse as representing an attempt to encourage defects in the faith of the Son. "We...observe that the first temptation, to distrust, is balanced by the third, to presumption, the extreme of defect balanced by the extreme of excess."⁵⁵ The second set of temptations is also an attempt to undermine the faith of the Son. Satan tempts Christ to a lack of faith in the providence of God in regard to the establishment of the kingdom of heaven and in regard to the salvation of men. Satan tries to persuade the Son to achieve these two great ends at the wrong time, that is, at the time suggested by Satan rather than that pre-ordained by the Father, and by the wrong means, namely, through human resources alone, rather than through divine resources. The question of the time and means for the establishment of the kingdom of heaven are closely related throughout the poem. Satan more than once suggests that the Son is passing away his time in idleness while his people suffer under the yoke of Rome, which he could lift from their shoulders. The tempter suggests a succession of means by which Jesus might assert his reign over all the earth: riches and fortune, force of arms (in particular an alliance with the Parthians or a take over of Rome) and finally a display of knowledge. Satan ends his second temptation with

⁵⁴ P. 174.

⁵⁵ P. 170.

the following threat which lays great stress on both time and means:

Did I not tell thee, if thou didst reject
The perfect season offer'd with my aid
To win thy destin'd seat, but wilt prolong
All to the push of Fate, pursue thy way
Of gaining David's Throne no man knows when,
For both the when and how is nowhere told,
Thou shalt be what thou art ordain'd, no doubt;
For Angels have preclaim'd it, but concealing
The time and means, each act is rightliest done,
Not when when it must, but when it may be best. (IV, 467-476)

The Son, however, emerges triumphant from the trial, his faith unshaken that God will eventually show him when and how the salvation of mankind is to be attained.

Does this mean then that in the salvation of mankind human resources are not employed at all? Obviously such is not the case, for although Christ rejects all the more obvious ways of establishing his kingdom by human strength and power, we know that in the future he will rescue man from sin by the very human experience (although undertaken in divine love) of suffering and death.

In his strict obedience does the Son not unduly suppress justifiable human concern with the things of earth as well as those of heaven? The apparent wholesale repudiation not only of the glory and power of Rome but also of the knowledge and culture of Greece, which Milton had spent his life studying and enjoying, has struck many readers as extremely unattractive and distasteful, suggesting the triumph of a rigid puritanism over innocent human appreciation of civilization. It is most important, therefore, that the reader understand that the glory of Rome is not condemned in itself but only in so far as it leads away from the sovereign will of

God. Christ is invited to accept civilized delights at the hand of Satan. It will be recalled that the Lady in Comus faced a similar dilemma. Her reply to Comus was simple:

none
But such as are good men can give good things,
And that which is not good, is not delicious
To a well-govern'd and wise appetite. (702-705)

The words of Christ to Satan when the tempter offers him food appear to follow the same line of thought. Satan asks if food were set before the Son, would he eat? Jesus' reply is "Thereafter / as I like the giver," (II, 321-322).

There is considerable evidence in the poem that the normal pleasures of human life are not to be considered evil in themselves. The Son is not unappreciative of the beauties of nature. Just before Satan's second attempt to lead him into evil, he relaxes in charming natural surroundings. He

saw a pleasant Grove,
With chant of tuneful Birds resounding loud.
Thither he bent his way, determin'd there
To rest at noon, and enter'd soon the shade
High rooft, and walks beneath, and alleys brown
That open'd in the midst a woody Scene. (II, 289-294)

Milton is furthermore careful to ensure that the final picture of the Son is not that of an ascetic. Christ is borne by angels to a valley whose natural beauty rivals that which surrounded the earlier feast of which he refused to partake. Note that it is the angels of his heavenly Father who minister to him, and that these angels are very different from the pagan goddesses of the banquet scene. Just as there was music at this earlier feast which Christ rejected so there is divine music here, now that he has overcome all his temptations.

...as he fed, Angelic Choirs
Sung Heavenly Anthems of his victory
Over temptation and the Tempter proud. (IV, 593-595)

We are reminded also of the music which the Son earlier rejected as part of the culture of Greece.

As for the civilization of Greece and Rome, there are several places in the poem where Milton's esteem for it is more than evident. To begin with, the form of the entire poem, despite its resemblances to the book of Job, is classical. The usual conventions of the epic, including the statement of theme and invocation of the muse, are apparent in the opening lines of the poem. The courts and councils of the two great leaders in the poem, God the Father, and Satan, are vividly pictured. The whole central part of the poem is a conflict between two adversaries. Finally, the concept of heroism, modified to suit Milton's own Christian standpoint, is basic to the poem. In all this we see the influence of Homer and Virgil.

More particular examples of Milton's acknowledged indebtedness to classical culture can be cited. To the Greek philosophers, Milton's Christ does attribute -- grudgingly it is true -- some insight into ethics. The wisdom of the Greek thinkers cannot be compared to that of the Bible

Unless where moral virtue is express'd
By light of Nature, not in all quite lost. (IV, 351-352)

Though Jesus says of Socrates,

The first and wisest of them all profess'd
To know this only, that he nothing knew (IV, 293-294),

he mentions him as one of those who, along with Job, attained glory

Without ambition, war, or violence;
By deeds of peace, by wisdom eminent,
By patience, temperance. (III, 90-92)

Another parallel between Biblical and classical heroes can be found in Book II. Satan has just made an offer of great riches pointing out that men of virtue, valour and wisdom have often lacked the material wealth necessary for success. Christ insists that poor men endued with these qualities have often performed the highest deeds. He cites the examples of the Old Testament leaders Gideon, Japhtha and David and then turns to the pagans:

Among the Heathen, (for throughout the World
To me is not unknown what hath been done
Worthy of Memorial) canst thou not remember
Quintius, Fabricius, Curius, Regulus? (II, 443-446)

Satan argues that the knowledge and wisdom of Greece will help Jesus win the gentiles to his kingdom. The Son's reply is in effect that these things are not necessary for salvation, and from the Christian point of view, which Milton endorsed, this can hardly be disputed. A knowledge of the classics may provide endless interest and entertainment, but to the Christian will hardly offer the fullness of the Biblical revelation of God.

At the same time the Son's rejection of a knowledge of classical literature as a means of winning men's hearts must not be taken to imply that he lacks an aesthetic appreciation of literature itself. This appreciation finds ample satisfaction in Hebrew literature.

...if I would delight my private hours
With Music or with Poem, where so soon
As in our native Language can I find
That solace? All our Law and Story strew'd
With Hymns, our Psalms with artful terms inscrib'd
Our Hebrew Songs and Harps in Babylon,
That pleas'd so well our Victors' ear, declare
That rather Greece from us these Arts deriv'd,
Ill imitated.... (IV, 331-339)

The Son furthermore does not outrightly deny that he has knowledge of

literature outside the Bible. He asserts, however, that man must approach all his reading with a critical intelligence.

...who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A spirit and judgment equal or superior
(And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek)
Uncertain and unsettl'd still remains,
Deep verst in books and shallow in himself
Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys,
And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge. (IV, 322-329)

All reading then, must be subject to sound Christian judgment before it is taken as truth. And, as a self-evident means of establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth, the Son rejects the resources of the Classical world, material and intellectual.

Does Milton, in Paradise Regained, weight the balance between man and God unduly towards God? There might seem more justification for this criticism here than in any of Milton's other poems. Yet, as we have seen, the concerns of man are evil only then they lead away from God. The salvation of mankind requires the divine power of God, the dedicated will of the Son as the perfect man and the response of those who would follow Christ. Finally, in so far as the poem itself is concerned, the final book ends not with the rejoicing of the angels over the victory of the Son, but with the more human note of Jesus returning to his mother's house.

In Paradise Regained as a whole, the conflicts between dualities are not so intense as in most of the other poems. There is less suspense and tension. Good is easily triumphant over evil and there is no doubt that the claims of God override merely human desires for pleasure and fulfillment. The supremacy of God in the final outcome is thus absolute. The whole poem has a tone of quietness and assurance which results from the poet's trust that in God all oppositions are reconciled.

Chapter Six: Samson Agonistes

The theological framework of *Samson Agonistes* differs from that of most of Milton's other works since this last poem is set in Old Testament times. The God of the Old Testament of course represents good. Samson and the Israelites, the chosen people of God, stand for aspiring mankind. The representation of evil, however, is a much more complex matter. Moral evil is associated with the Philistines and their god Dagon who oppose the will and purposes of God and his people. It is also found in the weakness of Samson's own nature--his inability to balance his extreme physical strength with equal strength of character. Finally evil is to some extent embodied in the three tempters who each try in some way to turn Samson away from his eventual reconciliation with God. In addition, as in *Lycidas*, the problem of the evil of suffering is of central significance in this poem. The Israelites suffer in their cruel bondage to the Philistines, but most important, Samson himself suffers greatly: he endures the miseries of physical blindness and imprisonment, and of guilt and isolation and, worst of all, apparent desertion by God. The poem ends with the violent death of this man who from his earliest days had devoted himself to the service of God.

By no means all the conflicts to be found in earlier poems recur in *Samson Agonistes*. The problem of the relation of body and soul is of negligible importance. There is no mention of possible conflict between faith and knowledge or between the arts and religion as in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. The poem instead revolves around the struggle of a man to overcome moral evil inside and outside himself and to reconcile human

suffering with divine goodness and justice. The further problem must be considered as to whether the resolution of these various manifestations of evil is by human initiative or by divine grace.

Here, as in many of Milton's other poems, the problem of evil is of central importance. Moral evil or sin appears in Samson Agonistes in many forms, but can be described basically as a turning away from God and his purposes. The conflict between good and evil takes place on many levels and in each case the basic sin of turning away from God is involved. On one level is the conflict between the God of Israel whose champion is Samson, and the heathen God Dagon. The worship of the latter is evil, because it involves service to an idol, a false god, instead of devotion to the only true God. On another level is the struggle between the chosen people of God, the Israelites, and their hero Samson on the one hand, and their bitter enemies, the Philistines on the other. The Philistines are evil because they worship a false god and oppose those who serve the true God. Finally there is the conflict within Samson between what is good in his nature and in accordance with the will of God and what is evil and opposed to the will of God. This conflict finds its outward expression, to some extent in the encounter between Samson and his three visitors who lay before him temptations which he must reject.

The contest between Dagon, false and evil god of the Philistines, and the true God of Israel continues throughout the poem. All the action of the play takes place on a day set aside for the honour of Dagon. Throughout the story the outcome of the contest between Dagon and God and the question of Samson's place in this contest give rise to considerable suspense. Which

of the two deities has real power? Which will ultimately vindicate himself?

There are repeated reminders all along that Dagon and the worship that he receives is depraved. Thus Samson early in the poem refers to the religion of Dagon as "superstition" (15) and continually refuses to be present at ceremonies honouring Dagon, for fear of being defiled. On learning that Dalila justifies her perfidity to him on the grounds not only of civic obligation but also of religious duty, Samson insists that her gods must be utterly unworthy to demand such an action.

To please thy gods thou didst it; gods unable
To acquit themselves and prosecute their foes
But by ungodly deeds, the contradiction
Of thir own deity, Gods cannot be:
Less therefore to be pleas'd, obey'd or fear'd. (896-900)

The reader is led to expect that the God of Israel will somehow vindicate himself over the heathen gods of the Philistines but is not sure when or how this vindication will be carried out.

Samson's own role in the expected triumph of God over Dagon is also ambiguous in much of the poem. We are several times reminded that Samson has, from his earliest years, been dedicated to God and his service. He has been the champion of God and has received from him many marks of his grace and favour. As the poem begins, however, Samson feels that he is in disgrace since, by his own action, he has brought dishonour to his God. To his father he admits

...I this honor, I this pomp have brought
To Dagon, and advanc'd his praises high
Among the Heathen round, to God have brought
Dishonor, obloquy, and op't the mouths
Of Idolists, and Atheists; have brought scandal
To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
In feeble hearts, propense enough before
To waver, or fall off and join with Idols. (449-456)

He feels that he no longer plays a prominent part as God's champion in the struggle with Dagon. He hopes God himself will now enter the struggle and overthrow the god of the Philistines.

This only hope relives me, that the strife
With mee hath end, all the contest is now
'Twixt God and Dagon; Dagon hath presum'd,
Mee overthrown, to enter lists with God,
His Deity comparing and preferring
Before the God of Abraham. He, be sure,
Will not connive, or linger, thus provok'd,
But will arise and his great name assert:
Dagon must stoop, and shall ere long receive
Such a discomfit, as shall quite despoil him
Of all these boasted Trophies won on me,
And with confusion blank his Worshippers. (460-471)

Manoa, is, of course, right in taking these words as a prophecy but almost to the end of the story we are unsure what part Samson will play in the suppression of Dagon. It is only at the last moment that he consents to be present at the ceremonies honouring Dagon.

The catastrophic event at the end of the poem makes clear once and for all the relationship between God and Dagon and between God and Samson. The God of Israel shows his power to act against his enemies and to destroy utterly the worship of Dagon, and he accomplishes this task through Samson who regains his position as the champion of the God of Israel.

Parallel to the struggle between God and Dagon is that between the Israelites and the Philistines. In this conflict Samson again figures prominently. Samson in the past has been the champion not only of God but also of his own people. Several times in the poem his mighty feats against the Philistines are recounted. He is called the "glory late of Israel" (179) by Manoa. The reader is also reminded early in the poem of the prophecy that Samson shall deliver his people from their enemies. As before,

there is suspense as to how this victory of the forces of good over the forces of evil will be carried out. Again the resolution of the conflict comes only at the end of the poem where Samson performs his final heroic act as champion of the Israelites, utterly crushing the Philistines and freeing his people from bondage to them. He

on his enemies
Fully reveng'd hath left them years of mourning,
And lamentation to the Sons of Caphtor
Through all Philistian bounds. To Israel
Honour hath left, and freedom....
To himself and his Father's house eternal fame. (1711-1715, 1717)

Finally we come to the conflict of good and evil as it related solely to Samson as an individual. The sin which led to Samson's downfall before the poem begins has many aspects. Samson himself variously sees it as deficiency in wisdom, as a result of which he was unable to direct and control his great physical strength in a proper manner, garrulity, in giving away the secret that God had entrusted to him alone; hubris, an excessive pride in his strength; and finally effeminacy and uxoriousness, in his subjection to Dalila. These are all sins because they lead to a disruption in the relationship between Samson and God. It is not easy to fit the three temptations which Samson undergoes into a simple pattern such as the sins of the world, the flesh and devil, but each temptation if succumbed to would involve a turning away of Samson from God. Manoa, who presents the first temptation, offers to ransom Samson from the Philistines. Samson would thus be able to return to the comforts of home. This course of action would involve a refusal on the part of Samson to accept the punishment which God had meted out to him. Dalila urges him to resume his relationship with her and to accept all the solace that she could bring. Acceptance of this

temptation would, of course, involve a repetition of Samson's first sin, subjection to a woman. Finally Harapha attempts to force him to give way to fear, and in addition, to believe that God has deserted him. The temptation here is to lose faith in God. In addition to these specific temptations, two more general temptations confront Samson at various points in the poem: the temptation to give way to despair and the temptation to shift the blame for his downfall on someone else. The process by which Samson overcomes all these temptations will be discussed a little later in this chapter.

The question as to how the suffering of Samson and of the Israelites is to be reconciled with the goodness and justice of God is extremely urgent in the poem, and several different answers are suggested on several different levels. An attempt is made, first of all, to put forward a rational explanation of the fact that God appears to choose certain individuals for his service and to endow them with special graces and yet at a later time to permit these same persons to undergo all sorts of torments. The chorus, considering God's justice, insists that God is not bound by human conceptions of consistency in his distribution of rewards and punishments. Those who doubt the justice of God

...would confine th' interminable,
And tie him to his own prescript,
Who made our Laws to bind us, not himself.... (307-309)

This answer, however, is not a conclusive one. Another rational solution offered in the poem to the problem of evil is the assertion that suffering comes as a just punishment for sin. There is some truth in this statement as it applies to Samson Agonistes. The Israelites' suffering under the

yoke of Philistine rule is caused by their unfaithfulness to Samson. Samson's own suffering is brought about by his unfaithfulness to God. Yet the misery of the blind hero is too acute to be explained away simply in terms of just punishment for sin. Repentance and resultant reconciliation with God can, however, remove some of Samson's mental suffering. From this reconciliation furthermore comes acceptance of his plight and courage and patience in his misery. The chorus recalls the heroism by which Samson overcame his enemies in feats of physical strength and implies that the courage which he brings to his present suffering equals if not exceeds his earlier bravery.

...Patience is more oft the exercise
Of Saints, the trial of thir fortitude,
Making them each his own Deliverer,
And Victor over all
That tyranny or fortune can inflict. (1287-1291)

Just as Samson's heroism against the Philistines was armed with "celestial vigor" (1280), so his courage in the face of his suffering clearly comes from divine sources. We recall how, earlier in the poem, the chorus comments on the futility of mere stoicism. With the afflicted it

Little prevails, or rather seems a tune,
Harsh, and of dissonant mood from his complaint,
Unless he feels within
Some source of consolation from above;
Secret refreshings, that repair his strength,
And fainting spirits uphold. (661-666)

We do not doubt that in the course of the poem Samson receives this consolation from above.

A complete vindication of the justice of God towards his people the Israelites and toward Samson, his chosen one, does not take place until the end of the poem. In Samson's final feat in the temple of Dagon, almost

the whole nation of Philistines, it seems, is wiped out. The Israelites, as we have noted, are thus freed from their enslavement and the worship of the idol, Dagon, destroyed. But Samson as an individual perishes. How is this fact to be reconciled with the goodness of God? The problem of human suffering is resolved, as Woodhouse points out both on the human and on the divine level.⁵⁶ Viewing Samson Agonistes as a tragedy we realize that like King Lear, Samson has been redeemed by suffering. Like King Oedipus, the Greek tragic hero, he has ended his life with a nobility which leaves no room for regret.

Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause: Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finish'd
A life Heroic.... (1708-1711)

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble. (1721-1724)

But there is more consolation than this for Samson's death. King Lear dies convinced that the gods are completely indifferent to man's misery. Samson perishes, however,

With God not parted from him, as was fear'd,
But favoring and assisting to the end. (1719-1720)

In the final vision, here as in Paradise Lost, all human suffering is lost in the mystery of God's eternal purpose.

All is best, thou we oft doubt,
What th' unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close. (1745-1748)

⁵⁶ Milton the Poet (Toronto-Vancouver, 1955), pp. 18-19.

The problem of salvation, as it appears in this poem, has similarities to its presentation in Paradise Lost. How is the person who has, through his own fault, fallen into sin to be reconciled again with God: through his own effort or through divine grace? In Samson Agonistes, rather more clearly than in Paradise Lost, the process of salvation begins with human initiative. Before Samson's relationship with God can be reinstated, Samson must repent, accept his full share of blame for his sin and put his whole trust in God. In the course of the story Samson acknowledges his guilt, and the consequent justness of his punishment, first to himself and then to each of his three tempters: Manoa, Dalila and Harapha. This acceptance of blame is not, however, uncritical. Samson insists that Dalila on the one hand and the Israelites on the other are also deeply at fault.

As the story progresses there is increasing evidence that Samson is regaining his faith in God. He begins to show a willingness to commit himself to the ways of the Almighty even where he does not understand them. Bewailing his "impotence of mind, in body strong" (52), he nevertheless asserts

...I must not quarrel with the will
Of highest dispensation, which herein
Haply had ends above my reach to know. (60-62)

Later in the poem he expresses his firm belief that God has not deserted him.

Mee easily indeed mine may neglect,
But God's propos'd deliverance not so. (291-292)

Finally, in the encounter with Harapha Samson shows that he is convinced that God is always gracious and ready to forgive those who repent. He does

not despair "of his final pardon / Whose ear is ever open" (1171-1172). Samson regains his belief that God is faithful not only towards Samson himself but also toward the Israelites. Without any question the God of the Israelites is the true God and will destroy the worship of Dagon, the false idol of their enemy. In his conversation with Manoa, Samson asserts of the God of Abraham that he will soon depose the false Dagon.

In order to be redeemed, Samson must not only repent and reassert his trust in God, he must also prove himself able to resist the temptation to do evil. His conversation with Dalila, in particular, shows that he is no longer the weak man who fell because of a woman's wiles.

Despite the fact that Samson's relationship with God is gradually restored as the poem progresses, his trust in the goodness of God still tends to alternate with despair and the desire for death. Not until the end does he begin to receive full divine assurance. Only by grace can he be brought again into his former state of favour with God. It is the awareness of this supernatural grace which prompts Samson to change his mind about going to the festival of the Philistines. After the chorus has expressed the fear that the Philistines may make terrible reprisals if he does not go, Samson asserts,

Be of good courage, I begin to feel
Some rousing motions in me which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts.
I with this Messenger will go along.... (1381-1383)

At the conclusion of the poem in the passage already quoted, Manoa assures us that this divine grace has accompanied Samson to the very end. For evil to be overcome, then, both human effort and divine grace are necessary.

In his representation of the relationship between man and God in the

poem, we find Milton taking his familiar position. The concerns of man are good in themselves but evil if not set within the framework of God's will. This is true of Samson's enormous strength. This strength is good when used against the Philistines, the enemies of the Israelites, and against their God, Dagon. But it must be accompanied by wisdom and reserved solely for God's service, not foolishly lost because of the deception of woman. Samson becomes acutely aware of this fact as he imagines passers-by seeing his misery and mocking his weakness.

Immeasurable strength they might behold
In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean;
This with the other should, at least, have pair'd
These two proportion'd ill drove me transverse. (206-209)

The same can be said of the marriage relationship. Man's relationship with the opposite sex must be strictly subordinated to his relationship to God. Samson's first marriage with a Philistine was made against the laws of his people but in accordance with the will of God. His second marriage was undertaken, not, apparently, by direct divine order but under the assumption that one marriage with a Philistine justified another.

She [his first wife] proving false, the next I took to Wife
(O that I never had! fond wish too late)
Was in the Vale of Sorec, Dalila,
That specious Monster, my accomplish snare. (227-230)

In this second marriage Samson sees himself guilty of uxoriousness, the sin which led to Adam's fall in Paradise Lost. He calls her a snake, as Adam does Eve, and speaks of her charms as an enchanted cup (which reminds us of the cup, representing sensuality, which Comus offered the Lady). Samson's rejection of Dalila is the rejection of the kind of human love which leads to betrayal of God.

Even the expression of a human father's natural love must be rejected if it seems to lead away from God. Though Manoa offers to ransom him and return him to the comforts of home, Samson must insist on enduring his suffering so that he may find himself again in a right relationship with God.

Spare that proposal, Father, spare the trouble
Of that solicitation; let me here,
As I deserve, pay on my punishment,
And expiate, if possible, my crime.... (487-490)

The human and the divine are combined, as we have seen, in the conclusion of the poem. Yet this conclusion is carefully handled within the limits of the form of tragedy. The final vision is of the goodness of the divine will. There is no apotheosis of the hero as in Lycidas. The concluding note is a human one. The last lines of the poem bring us back to the on going life of those who have survived Samson.

His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dæsmist,
And calm of mind, all passion spent. (1755-1758)

Milton's general resolution of dualities in Samson Agonistes has similarities and differences to his treatment of them in other poems. Milton, in the poem at hand, as well as in Paradise Lost, achieves a balance between man and God. Ultimately the human is not suppressed but always seen, not in itself, but in a larger relationship with the divine. It is interesting to contrast Milton's handling of the problem of evil in this poem with his treatment of it in Paradise Regained. In the latter the Son manifested his heroism by an essential passivity, even though this passivity was only a preparation for purposeful activity soon to take place (his death and

resurrection). Samson, in contrast, is heroic both in an active and in a passive sense. His previous career has involved much violent activity. For most of the poem, however, Samson is pictured as patiently and bravely suffering the affliction that has been visited upon him. Nevertheless the poem ends with a glorious burst of activity, and Samson's final deed, we are told, is more splendid than all the achievements of his career up to this point. For in his death Samson killed more Philistines than in the whole of his life. The active and the passive are thus combined, though in a different manner than in Paradise Regained. Finally, as in Paradise Lost, the resolution of the problem of evil and of all dualities is complete because it rests ultimately not on rational argument or on the results of mere human effort but rather on a glorious and all-embracing vision which lifts the reader above all conflict.

Surveying Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes as a group, we must concede that these three poems are as full of dichotomies as are Comus and Lycidas. The oppositions are also as deeply felt as in the earlier two poems but by vast expenditures of energy are triumphantly resolved and held in dynamic balance. The resolution achieved in these three poems is complete and is attained in direct and predictable ways.

The total body of Milton's English poetry thus reveals three distinct stages in the poet's treatment of dualities. There is an early period where dualities are harmoniously and easily related, a later period where these dichotomies clash markedly and where resolution is only partial and a final stage in which opposites are still deeply felt but which are totally

and comprehensively resolved.

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