

# Chapter Two :

## *Paradise Lost* in the Horizon of Salvation

This chapter is divided into four parts—the loss of paradise, the central theme manifested in the first 26 lines in Book One, and the central theme discussed in terms of structure building and imagery.

### I. The loss of Paradise

Milton's sympathetic portrait of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* ends in a humanly bearable legacy. Though the poem's account of the Fall itself in Book Nine often seems to offer circumstances which incline our sympathies toward the first parents, the last three books recoil stingingly upon Adam and Eve. While we learn briefly in Book Eleven of Christ's forgiveness of the two and his gesture of help, this hint of heavenly generosity and tolerance gradually gives way before an almost endless rehearsal of punishments extended to Adam and Eve and all their children, from the revelation of the entrance of Sin and Death into the world to the gloomy tale of fallen man's murders, diseases, and wars.

However, having observed all this, we still must admit the force of the poem's conclusion, that Adam and Eve's ejection from the Garden seems not the resolution of a tragedy, but instead a moving and powerful affirmation of the human spirit, as Adam and Eve look only briefly back to "Paradise, so late their happy seat" and then turn to face the "World...before them" (Book Twelve, 642, 646).<sup>1</sup> Despite Milton's

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<sup>1</sup> In her "Eve Unparadised: Milton's Expulsion and Iconographic Tradition," *Milton Quarterly*, 15 (1981), Pecorino comments on how this final scene suggests the quality of guilt and responsibility shared by Adam and Eve in the Fall (p.9).

painful and severe portrait of the unrelenting consequences of Adam and Eve's sinful choice, the ending of Eden and the wide-ranging destruction of Sin and Death are somehow made bearable.<sup>2</sup>

The line of course is finely drawn: so much loss weighs heavily against the gain. Adam and Eve lose their innocence, their direct communication with the heavenly world, their home, and their pleasant life in the Garden. And yet, in the end, the first parents also appear to have achieved a rich and enduring legacy as they leave Paradise: that measure of strength which allows them to dry their tears though they must weep (Book Twelve, 645); the measure of vision which allows them to look ahead before them, with hope, though they cast a final glance back (641-46); and, perhaps most important, that measure of love which allows them to take their "solitary way" as one, "hand in hand" (641-49) out of the Garden and into the world together.

## II. The central theme manifested in the first 26 lines in Book One

Actually, as mentioned in the Introduction, when applying the conception of fore-structure to interpret the epic, we cannot neglect the whole picture provided by the first twenty-six lines, which prompt a pre-understanding to connect and interpret the description of the individual parts of the epic.

Milton begins his poem by announcing its theme: the story of how Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In doing so, they brought sorrow and death into the world and lost their place in Paradise, a place which was regained only through Christ, the "greater Man" of line four. Milton, like the ancient writers of epics, asks the Heavenly Muse for help. He shows that his

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<sup>2</sup> Despite much of the bleakness pervading the conclusion of *Paradise Lost*, there are a number of elements in the final books which have long been recognized as supporting an anti-tragic reading of the epic.

prayer is really directed to the Christian God because the Muse turns out to be the one who inspired Moses, the author of the first five books of the Bible, to explain to the Jews, the chosen people of God, how God created the universe. Milton needs the inspiration of God Himself, because he has chosen to sing of the highest possible subject, the providence of God. If he really is to make clear the “ways of God to men,” he will need God’s help to understand his theme and express it thoroughly.

There is a unifying power and united structure in *Paradise Lost*. The central facts of God’s redemption and man’s fall construct the central meaning of the long epic.

Man was created of matter; pure, noble, but curiously fallible, having freedom of will. His mental levity and gregariousness expose him to the assaults of passion, which robs him of liberty and subjects him to slavery both within and without; but by the operation of Christ he may establish reason once again in his mind and reach a higher state than that from which he fell.<sup>3</sup>

(Tillyard 195)

### III. The central theme

#### A. In structure building

The first significant criticism of *Paradise Lost* was Joseph Addison’s study in the 1712 editions of the *Spectator*, its significance being attested to by the fact that it was reprinted thirty times in the eighteenth century. In the *Spectator* he finally offered his opinion concerning the meaning of the poem and, reducing this meaning to its simplest formula, he said that that the “great moral” of the poem is that “obedience to the will of God makes men happy, and that disobedience makes them

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<sup>3</sup> Some critics, like Tillyard, divide the central meaning into so-called conscious meaning and unconscious meaning. As to the unconscious meaning, the character of Satan expresses, as no other character or act or feature of the poem does, something in which Milton believed very strongly: heroic energy.

miserable” (322). In an age when the general reading public was still strictly orthodox, though the intellectuals were rationalistic and deistic, this moral purpose was a noble and worthwhile idea for a poem to propound.

Dr. Samuel Johnson was interested in the theme of *Paradise Lost*, and even if he did follow Addison in speaking of it as the “moral” of the poem and in regarding *Paradise Lost* as an exemplum of the reasonableness of Reason, he did praise Milton for following the dictum that a poet should “find a moral, which his fable is afterwards to illustrate and establish” (454). In fact, Johnson says, Milton seems to be the only poet who has done this because in his epic the moral is essential and intrinsic. Johnson sees the theme as being synonymous with the purpose of the poem, and this purpose is “...to vindicate the ways of God to man; to show the reasonableness of religion, and the necessity of obedience to the Divine Law” (454).

The general tenor of eighteenth century criticism can be gleaned from the criticism of Addison, Richardson and Johnson. All three interpretations follow the Aristotelian percept that a fable or story should be the vehicle for a moral which should be ostensibly and perhaps superficially didactic. These three critics speak of the epic structure as being only the framework of Milton’s theme, which is, in essence, “obey God’s laws and happiness will be the reward.”

Twentieth century criticism has been marked by a vital interest in the meaning of *Paradise Lost*.<sup>4</sup> Douglas Bush interpreted Milton’s life and works on the basis of the precepts of the English Renaissance and Humanism. He says that, like other humanists, Milton believed in human reason and freedom. The most deadly of the sins is pride which ruins Adam, Eve, and Satan. Because of this emphasis on the dangers of pride in the epic, Bush believes that “irreligious pride and religious

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<sup>4</sup> In nineteenth century criticism of *Paradise Lost*, Coleridge uses the terms “subject” and “object” rather than “moral” or “theme.” In addition, interpreting the poem in light of Milton’s life and seeing his life as an uninterrupted fight against tyranny, Byron and Shelly regarded Satan as the hero of the poem.

humility are indeed the one great theme of his major poems” (Bush 397). Bush believes that the total scheme of *Paradise Lost* is a divine comedy, “and all along he has been reminding us that greater good is to come out of evil” (86).

A type of criticism running concurrent with and often tangential to humanistic interpretations is John Erskine’s “The Theme of Death in *Paradise Lost*.” In this article he states that if the theme of *Paradise Lost* is man’s first disobedience which brought sin into the world, then the inevitable result of sin should be death (Erskine 573). “Yet in the last two books of the epic Milton apparently contradicts himself; he tells us that death is not a curse but a comforter, not the gift of Satan but the gift of God” (573). He says that although the idea that sin may serve a good purpose by allowing the employment of divine mercy was “unfortunately not unknown to Milton’s theology,” Milton apparently meant more than this “ugly paradox” (574). What he probably meant as a poet was that death was a “heaven-sent release” after a “long and exhausting life.” This was Milton’s true opinion as a poet because “if he had remained a theologian, he would have terminated the poem in a decent melancholy...” (581). Instead, after the sin is committed, “the epic becomes appreciably livelier, more liberal, more sympathetic, more hopeful...” (574).

Those critics who answered Erskine’s criticism of the contradiction involved in the theme of death in *Paradise Lost* demonstrated that this contradiction was an integral part of that “ugly paradox” of good coming out of evil. There are two aspects to the paradox of the fortunate fall. The theological concept of *felix culpa* is the belief that God, in his divine omnipotence, is able to turn all evil into good, and the good which he brings from the evil of Adam’s fall is the incarnation and atonement of the Son. The humanistic concept of the paradox of the fortunate fall<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Denis Saurat holds that the expression of the paradox of the fortunate fall by Adam in Book XII is one of the most important passages in *Paradise Lost*. In fact, he says that this is the “answer to the first problem: to justify the ways of God to men.” See Denis Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker* (New York: 1925), p. 131.

is the belief that good came from the evil of Adam's fall because he reached a higher ethical state after the fall than he achieved before the fall.

The most significant study of the antinomy of good and evil was published in 1937, by Arthur O. Lovejoy. In this article Lovejoy calls the process by its Latin name, *felix culpa*, or fortunate fall, and traces the origins of this idea through the ages. He proves that the paradox of the fortunate fall had a "recognized and natural place" in the theology of Christianity and in this framework the redemption was the culmination of human history just as for Milton it was the culmination of his poem<sup>6</sup> (Lovejoy 179). Indeed, Arthur O. Lovejoy has made an extensive survey of the origins and usages of the *felix culpa* paradox. However, most of his examples illustrate the paradox of the fortunate fall as applied only to Adam, and they all see the fall as happy only because it brought forth the incarnation and redemption.

The paradox of the fortunate fall was a widespread, orthodox belief from at least the seventh century. The strictly theological interpretation of the *felix culpa* was expressed by church fathers, commentators on the Bible, preachers and poets. Milton's originality in expression of the idea derives from his emphasis on Adam's fall as bringing forth a positive, ethical, humanistic good, which is the wisdom and temperance acquired through trial. Milton makes the paradox the basic theme of his entire epic by reiterating the idea at crucial points in the poem, by objectifying it with the images of light and darkness, ascent and descent, and by building his structure upon the operation of the paradox in *Paradise Lost*.

Furthermore, the semantic structure of *Paradise Lost* consists of four distinct movements. Chronologically, the action of the poem moves from cosmos to chaos with Satan's fall; from chaos to cosmos with the creation of the earth; from cosmos to chaos with the fall of Adam; and from chaos to cosmos with Adam's regeneration

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<sup>6</sup> The different themes that have been proposed as being at the heart of *Paradise Lost* are extremely varied, reflecting different schools of criticism, and ranging from ideas too specific to pervade the whole body of the work or too general to give the epic any unity.

and the promise of redemption by Christ.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the four movements are caused by two falls—that of Satan and that of Adam. Each fall is attended by evil, destruction, and chaos. Through the paradox of the fortunate fall, after each fall, good comes from evil, creation from destruction, and cosmos from chaos. Thus, the paradox of the fortunate fall is not only the constantly reiterated theme throughout the epic, but it also provides the foundation for the semantic structure of the poem.

Generally speaking, in Book Five, Six, Seven, Eight, the first two movements of the poem are completed. Raphael's narration of antecedent action has moved from the cosmos and harmony that existed in Heaven before Satan's fall to the chaos and destruction that resulted from this fall. This movement is separated from the second movement by God's announcement of the *felix culpa*. This provides the structural pivot for the second movement which moves from the physical and spiritual fall of Satan to the creation of a world of order, the epitome of which is Eden, governed by Adam who is ruled by reason.

Book V, in which Raphael related Satan's spiritual fall, began with Adam and Eve's praise of the harmony of their newly created world. Book Nine, which recounts Adam and Eve's fall, also begins with high praise of the harmony of their newly created world. Since Book Nine is a book of fall and destruction, it is structurally appropriate that Satan's expression of the inversion of the *felix culpa*, which will instigate the third movement, follow this hymn to order. After his acknowledgement of God's creation, by which He has made Satan's fall fortunate, Satan vows to destroy it, and thereby reverse God's plan (Book Nine 129-32). The scene has been carefully set and the plan announced for the second fall.

Reason is obscured in both Satan and Adam after their falls. This muddling of reason is reflected in Satan's belief that he can overpower God, that can through

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<sup>7</sup> When Satan seduces Eve who seduces Adam, their spiritual fall is accompanied by the entrance of Sin and Death in the world. God makes this fall fortunate and this evil good by allowing His Son to become a man and atone His mercy.

guile, upset God's divine plan. Adam's inability to reason clearly is reflected in his rationalization of his fall. He shifts all of the blame to Eve for eating the apple and to God for creating her (Book Ten 137-143). Milton describes the actual physical combat between Satan and the powers of God in Book Nine; here in Book Ten he relates Adam's soliloquy in which he does mental battle with God. Adam says that God had no right to create him if he were going to destroy him. Moreover, Adam, falsely reasons that did not ask to be created. Why then should he be condemned to endless woes when he had nothing to do with his creation?

But reason returns to Adam, and he is able to ascend from his private hell of turmoil and chaos. The third movement ends, and the fourth movement begins. The first step in Adam's regeneration is his recognition of the fallacies of his questionings of God's justice and power. After his submission, "Be it so, I submit, his doom is fair" (Book Ten 769), Adam achieves the first of the four steps which Milton in *Christian Doctrine* described as leading to regeneration: conviction of sin, contrition, confession, departure from evil and conversion to good.<sup>8</sup> Adam's conviction of the justice of God leads to his own conviction of sin (Book Ten 828-34).

Milton shows Adam's regeneration of himself in Book Ten, and how he ascended from his own private hell, which was an abyss of fears and horrors, by contrition and confession to a renewed humility and knowledge of God. He created within his mind a Heaven out of the Hell into which his fall had plunged him. Adam's last speech demonstrates the wisdom and humility he has gained as a result of his fall. Now he has attained self-knowledge, which, is based upon God's established order, upon man's knowing his proper place in that order and accepting the responsibility of his relationship upward and downward (Stein 85).

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<sup>8</sup> Theologically, man's fall is fortunate because it will show God's mercy by allowing him to permit his Son to become a man and die to save him.



The conclusion of *Paradise Lost* leaves no doubt that Adam and Eve's fall has been fortunate. The tone of ending of the epic is rather a realistic one. Good and evil now constitute the world, and Adam and Eve caused these conditions. They fell and brought sin into the world,<sup>9</sup> but they regenerated themselves and brought greater good to the entire earth.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, they should sorrow for the evil they have precipitated, they should rejoice for the good that Christ accrued despite their sin. The tragic nature of their fall is the very basis for rejoicing over the fortunate fall. Had the fall not been tragic, the fortunate fall would not have appeared glorious. Although Adam and Eve shed tears when they look back at Paradise, they wipe them soon when they look forward to the world. Although Adam must labor for his bread,<sup>11</sup> Milton says that he will find a place of rest. The first parents retain their freedom of choice; in fact, they enjoy a wider choice since now the whole world is before them instead of only Paradise. Though solitary they are united physically and spiritually. Though able to find their own place of rest and create their own paradise anywhere on earth, they are still guided by Providence.

In short, it has been shown that Book Five, Six, and Eleven are books of fall, destruction and chaos while Books Seven, Eight, Ten, Eleven and Twelve are books of creation and regeneration. Books One and Two are to be classed with Books Five, Six and Nine because they depict the deeper fall, the mental and spiritual fall of Satan. Thus the structural pivot of the four movements<sup>12</sup> and the basic structural principle of the epic is the paradox of the fortunate fall.

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<sup>9</sup> See Romans 5:12, "For this cause, even as by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

<sup>10</sup> See Romans 5:15, "But shall not the act of favor be as the offense? For if by the offense of one the many have died, much rather has the grace of God, and the free gift in grace, which is by the one man Jesus Christ." Essentially, the grace of God is given to mankind via Christ despite the sin of the first parents.

<sup>11</sup> See Genesis 3:19, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, until thou return to the ground: for out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art; and unto dust shalt thou return."

<sup>12</sup> From this analysis of *Paradise Lost* we can diagram the structure of the epic by the figure W. The two descending lines represent Satan's and Adam's falls. The first ascending line

## B. In imagery

It should be noted that the very first paragraph of the poem depends largely upon a single metaphor, that of the tree and its fruit. In fact, this metaphor actually encompasses the main argument of the epic: man's sin produced "bad fruit" whose mortal taste would have flavored posterity had not the Son restored the possibility of immortality. The central image lines one and two, the tree/fruit metaphor reappears in line eight, this time in the word seed which refers to the generations stemming from Moses. The word links artistically the reference to the Israelites to the main idea of the paragraph, and next it joins Moses' descendants to the rest of mankind their hope of salvation, a salvation made possible by the merit and mercy of the Son of God. Later in the poem the seed/tree/fruit continues to be of prime importance.<sup>13</sup> Here, the reader is supposed to notice the idea which stands co-ordinate with the metaphor: fruition may be good or evil.<sup>14</sup> Thus, when the reader first hears of Adam and Eve he is told they reap "immortal fruits of joy and love," later, he is told that the "just" shall,

after all their tribulations long  
see golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,  
with joy and love triumphing, and fair truth.

(Book Three, 335-38)

and, close to the end of the poem, that man may come to know new heaven and new earth, ages of endless date founded in righteousness and grace and love (Book Twelve 549-51).<sup>15</sup>

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represents God's material creation of the world. The second ascending line represents Adam's creation of his inner paradise.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the woman's seed.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the seed may be referred to as Christ, Who the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). On the other hand, it can be referred as lust (James 1:14).

<sup>15</sup> With equal frequency the reader hears such recurring phrases as fruits of woe, the taste of mortality (a condition which also has an odor enabling Satan to snuff its smell), casual fruition (the result of loveless sex), fruitless hours (spent on quarreling), hapless seed (the offspring of Adam's thoughtlessness).

During the course of the epic the seed/tree/fruit image merges frequently into another which is closely related to it, that of generation. In the very first paragraph the tree/fruit metaphor gives way to one related to human reproduction:

...Thou from the first  
was present, and with mighty wings outspread  
dove-like stars brooding in the vast Abyss  
and mad'st it pregnant.

(Book One, 19-22)

In addition, in Book Seven a reverse process takes place; the animal imagery yields to one based on plant growth.

Let the Earth  
pour forth the verdant Grass, Herb yielding Seed,  
and Fruit Tree yielding Fruit after her kind;  
whose seed is in herself upon the Earth.

(Book Seven 309-12).

Furthermore, Raphael describes the Son “sowing with stars the Heaven thick as a field” and then transplanting “light” into the “Sun’s orb.” Again, in line 453 in the same Book, the Angel tells Adam that

The Earth obey'd and straight  
opening her fertile womb teem'd at a birth  
innumerable living creatures, perfect forms...

In sum, everything, however, large, however infinitesimal, belongs to the totality of things; the totality is intrinsically good, evil being simply a manifestation of the free will which God gave to all reasonable creatures so that their spontaneous obedience to his will would merit his joy.<sup>16</sup> From this all-embracing attitude towards life and creation stems also Milton’s conviction that sensuous pleasure, in

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<sup>16</sup> In Conclusion of this dissertation, I have a more detailed discussion about the “free will.” And the paradoxical dialectics can be seen in the ninth chapter of Romans.

a sense, has positive value. Constantly, the terms delicious, happy and sweet recur in description of the Garden where Adam and Eve are meant to enjoy a Paradise of sensuous delights. Again, because no rigid line separates matter and spirit, the angels themselves are able to enjoy food, digest and interpenetrate sexually in a form of love-making.<sup>17</sup> As with man, so with angels; Milton places emphasis in both contexts upon purity and pleasure—so that the unfallen Adam can speak of his mutual love with Eve as “the crown of all their bliss.”

However, the converse of the truth that pure love results in harmony and happiness, is that perverted love leads immediately to discord and self-perpetuating misery: Milton embodies this axiom in the allegorical trio Satan, Sin and Death.<sup>18</sup> Originally, Sin is the self-generated offspring of Satan, born at the moment when, reflecting the disorder and lack of harmony in himself, he first envies the position of the Son. In a manner which exactly parallels the mythical birth of Athene, goddess of wisdom, who sprang out of the right side of Zeus’s head, Sin springs from the left side of the head of the Archangel. Later, Satan’s dalliance with Sin produces Death, whose monstrous birth is characterized by nothing so much as pain and self-torture. And in the following chapter, the reverse of downfall, that Christ’s redemption will be explicated in detail.

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<sup>17</sup> Concerning the love making of the fallen angels with beauties in ancient times, see Genesis 6:1-4.

<sup>18</sup> Concerning the war between conscience and sin, please see Romans 7:18-25. In addition, concerning the trio of Satan, sin and death, please see James 1:14-15, “But every one is tempted, drawn away, and enticed by his own lust; then lust, having conceived, gives birth to sin; but sin fully completed brings forth death.”