

Into this wild abyss . . .

Into this wild abyss the wavy fiend
Stood on the brink of hell and looked awhile,
Pondering his voyage . . .

(ii 910, 917-19)

Such effects are usually too delicate for rewarding analysis; although interesting exceptions will be found in Ricks (1963) 27ff, 78ff. It is no exaggeration to say that similar syntactic effects are to be enjoyed in almost any passage of the poem.

Equally elusive, but for different reasons, is the rhetorical organization. This was once a chief glory; but rhetoric is so alien to the ways of modern education that an attempt to cultivate appreciation of it would be uphill work. Perhaps the most to be hoped for is a vague recognition of its operation in token instances. Identifying all the figures would be not only pedantic but ignorant: at its best, rhetoric aimed at a response far more discriminating than mere recognition. How is one now to appreciate the significantly unusual frequency of this figure, or the topical apness of that? An example of which one can be fairly sure comes in Bk vi, where figures like puns, considered low and liable to excess, are concentrated. The 'indecorum' here, paradoxically, is appropriate to the subject, the 'wild work' of the angelic war (vi 498n, 566n, 578-94n, 698-9n). So, too, the description of the artillery at vi 572-84 is viciously inflated (bombphilologia), while immediately afterwards the firing goes to the other extreme, with diction as rhetorically low as *belched*, *embowelled*, *entrails*, *disgorging*, and *glut*.

A contrasting example is Eve's love song:

Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the sun
When first on this delightful land he spreads
His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flower,
Glistering with dew; fragrant the fertile earth
After soft showers; and sweet the coming on
Of grateful evening mild, then silent night
With this her solemn bird and this fair moon,
And these the gems of heaven, her starry train:

(iv 641-9)

The main scheme here, a large-scale repetition (epanalepsis or enumeratio) mimes Eve's responsiveness. Its intricate magic circle excludes all schemes but those of completion and varied repetition; this expansive repose depending, semantically at least and by implication

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morally, on sustained rejection of the world of separation from Adam. The smooth returning flow of epanalepsis and epianodos, the copiousness of merisms within merismus, and the exquisite poising of similarity against variety in the poignantly negative reprise (iv 650-6), put this among the most satisfyingly eloquent of all elegies.

The song's patterning is carried to extraordinary lengths. Never content merely to list names or items, Milton invariably orders them, making the array significant. Here, Eve considers Paradise in six phases (number of perfection), arranging them *setina*-wise in answering pairs: *breath of morn* and *her rising; sun* and *showers; evening* and *night*. This array is repeated in the predicated epithets, but with a variation: 1 *sweet* 2 *sweet* 3 *pleasant* 4 *fragrant* 5 *sweet*. Of the five epithets (number of sovereignty), *pleasant* dignifies the sun in the central place. And in the reprise, the dependent word-groups are subject to further variations suggesting narrative decorums. Thus, 'herb, tree, fruit, and flower' (iv 644) becomes 'herb, fruit, flower' (652). 'The sun has ceased to shine on the darkened tree.

Throughout PL such topomorphic or spatial patterns may be found, often implying symbolism of sovereignty – not of course to dignify human monarchy, but rather to affirm Christ's kingship and the moral hierarchy of creation. In the 'roll-call' of eastern empires at xi 388-96, for example, the names do more than sound out exotic grandeur: they honour the centrally placed Chersonese (Ophir), symbol of Messianic sovereignty – 'I will make a man more precious than . . . the golden wedge of Ophir' (Isa. 13:12). The vista of African principalities at xi 396-407n repeats the pattern, with 'Sofala thought Ophir' at its sovereign centre. Even brief landscape descriptions are similarly structured; for example 'Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains' (vii 275), where the virtuous rivers of Paradise are dignified.

Metrical structure

Seventeenth-century epics were mostly rhymed, whether in stanzas, like Fairfax's *Goffey of Balloigne* (1600); Daveman's *Gondibert* (1651); and Fanshawe's *The Lusitads* (1655); or in couplets, like May's *Civil War* (1627); Cowley's *Davidels* (1656) and *Civil War* (1679). But Milton rejected rhyme, the 'invention of a barbarous age'. As his Note on the Verse explains, he chose to follow the example of some both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note in preferring blank verse (probably Trissino, Alamanni, and the Tasso of *Mondo Creato* (1607)). This may be seen as a political decision: rhyme was compromised for Milton by its chivalric associations, particularly its use in monarchic epics. He looked beyond 'modern bondage' and the barbarous age of feudal or imperial oppression to the 'ancient liberty' of classical republicanism. On the strength of Milton's

citing the precedent of 'our best English tragedies', some have thought him canonizing the popular dramatic form. Shumaker (1967) 138f comments on his poem's oral character; and Mackail (1938) 20 traces its parentheticals to the example of Massinger and other dramatists. But this is not the whole story. In its weightiness Milton's blank verse differs considerably from that of drama. The individual line in *PL* is an unusually stable rhythmic unit, strongly braced against the pell-mell possibilities of repeated enjambement. Most lines end in a long, or stressed, syllable; and most are separated by distinct interlinear pauses. This is by no means to consider Milton's blank verse as endstopped heroic couplets with the rhyme removed. Indeed, its fluency has much of Shakespeare's flow. But there is an even closer analogy, at times, to the monumentality of Tasso or of English sacred paraphrases like Sandys.

The standard line in *PL* has ten syllables, with stresses on those of even number: 'United thoughts and counsels, equal hope' (i 88). Naturally, a great many lines depart from this norm; but the departures are subject to certain restrictions. While the number of heavy speech accents in a line varies, the number of theoretical syllables remains the same. 'Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived' (i 35) has only four strong accents, while 'Fall'n cherub, to be weak is miserable' (i 157) may only have three. The syllables *and*, *to*, and *-able*, however, carry subsidiary stresses. As for the number of syllables, that will often seem greater than ten. But it has to be reducible to the theoretical ten by one or other of the customary procedures taken over from Italian prosody – elision, synaloepha, and contraction. Thus, in 'Fall'n cherub', *Fall'n* is contracted to a monosyllable. In the line 'Till, as a signal giv'n, the uplifted spear' (i 347), *giv'n* is contracted to a monosyllable while *the uplifted* is run together by synaloepha to *th'uplifted*; so the twelve syllables again yield a net total of ten. If synaloepha involves complete loss of a vowel, it is often called elision; this can occur within a word (i 1, 'disobedience') and even when the vowels are separated by *h*. Very occasionally Milton allows himself the licence of a final eleventh syllable – perhaps with mimetic intention. It happens most frequently at the end of Bk ix, where Adam is 'estranged in look and altered style'. See Sprout (1953) 58f; Prince (1954).

Many other 'rules' governing Milton's metrical freedom have been prescribed. But they are all trivial, or merely statistical, or irrelevant to the critic. Who but a prosodist cares how often an *nh* foot is inverted? The fourth syllable is usually stressed; but this may only be the result of compensating for the inverted opening foot Milton was fond of (Sprout (1953) 102). Robert Bridges' *Milton's Prosody* (rev. 1921) is still worth reading but has effectively been replaced by Sprout. Both shy away from the vexed topic of quantity. Yet Alexander Gill (Milton's headmaster at St

Paul's) deals with the matter at some length in his poetics, *Logonomia Anglica* (1619). He discusses how vowel length, internal accent, and position all affect syllable length; and how these considerations are overridden by 'rhetorical' (grammatical) accent; see Gill (1972) ii 132ff. If the poem's opening line follows Gill's system (in which prefixes like *dis-* are short where position allows), its scansion will be: 'Of mán's first disobedience, and the fruit' – unless, that is, the grammatical accent enforced by the subsequent context decides otherwise. This neglected topic calls for enquiry; until more is known about syllable length, it is hard to solve the delicate problems of scansion *PL* occasionally presents.

Not that we need to be shut out from appreciating all its metrical effects. Fortunately the grammatical accent is usually unambiguous. And even where this is not so, the stresses are often clear nevertheless. In 'O'er bog or steep, through straight, rough, dense, or rare' (ii 948), most will agree that the stress gradients from *or* to *steep* and from *rough* to *dense* are different, and that this mimes the roughness of the rough patch. Sprout puts the effect down to the length of *rough* 'because of the labial spirant'. Perhaps. But to be certain, one would have to know more about what Milton meant by 'fit quantity of syllables', and be able to allow for other features, like the unusually smooth liaison in *or rare* (contracting with that in *rough, dense*), or the momentary difficulty occasioned by the ambiguous previous word (*stait* or *straight*? noun or adjective?). Nevertheless the brilliance of the effect itself is beyond doubt.

Numerical composition

Postwar criticism of *PL* has decisively enlarged our knowledge about its structure, largely through rediscovering Renaissance theories of proportion and compositional practices. The latter were often linked with a memory-art that ordered the contents of works for recall by assigning them to a numerical grid; see Doob (1990); Yates (1966). Both writers and readers were interested in the numerical proportions of literature, which they ordered according to number symbols drawn from biblical, Pythagorean, or musical sources; see Fowler (1970a); MacQueen (1985); Heninger (1994); Rastvrg (1994). The pioneering work of Whaler (1956), based on debatable units and arbitrary meanings, has found little acceptance. But the analyses of speeches and paragraphs in Qvarnström (1961) and (1967) have proved of lasting value. Qvarnström draws attention to Messiah's speeches at vi 723–45 and 801–23, between which he ascends his chariot to expel the rebel angels. Both speeches are of twenty-three lines, a number that signified vengeance on the heathen (Num. 25:9 Vulg.; Bongo, *Mysteria* (1591) 441f). This approach has been taken further by Dennis Danielson, whose instructive examinations of

paragraph architecture find (perhaps rather too often) golden sections at sentence divisions. Others have explored the larger ordonnance of speeches, finding, for example, seven speeches in both Bk i and Bk ii (E. Miner, *MilHs*, 17 (1983) 3–25).

Gunnar Qvarnström's most striking discovery is that the centre of the entire poem by line-count comes in 1667 immediately after vi 761, where Messiah ascends his triumphal throne (*Ascendit* being the first word of vi 762). This observation has led others to notice further symmetries about the same sovereign centre; see J. R. Watson, *EG*, 14 (1964) 148–55; J. T. Shawcross, *SP*, 62 (1965) 696–718; A. Fowler, in Milton (1968); Fowler (1970a) 66f, 115–19, 131f; Crump (1975); Røstvig (1994). A typical example is the array

i–ii	iii	iv	vi	vii	ix	x	xi–xii
Effects of	Council: Satan	First temptation	Messiah's triumph	Messiah's creation	Second temptation	Council: Satan	Effects of human
angelic fall	enters world					leaves world	Fall
a	b	c	D	D	c	b	#

Such symmetries are more fully analysed in Crump (1975), a persuasive account which nevertheless carries detail to the point of diminishing returns, and in Shawcross (1982) ch. 3. Comprehensive treatment of Milton's numerology was not to come until Røstvig (1994), criticism of a distinctly higher order. It should be added that Qvarnström and Røstvig carried on their work in the face of astonishing prejudice. Serious criticism of the structure of *PL* must now begin with Røstvig's analytic schemes.

The symmetries implicitly glorify Messiah's central exaltation to the apocalyptic throne of judgment (vi 749–59). The idea of Christ delivering judgment from a central position in the cosmos had long encouraged the equation of the astrological notion, *medium caeli*, with the theological notion, *medium caeli et terrae*, presumed to be the seat of the Judge' (Panošky (1955) 262; cp. *PL* iv 30n, 1013–15n; vi 761n). As Qvarnström explains, Messiah's sacerdotal armour of 'radiant urim' was associated with the philosopher's stone; Jancke calls it 'the right, true sun itself . . . the right Urim and fiery Carbuncle'. Cowley similarly conceives Elijah's chariot alchemically – 'rich in every part, / Of essences of gems, and spirit of gold / Was its substantial mould; / Drawn forth by chemic angels' art . . . ('The Ecstasy' (1905) 205). On the throned Messiah's right hand sits Victory, 'eagle-winged' in allusion to Michael Maier's alchemic emblem of Jupiter sending eagles to determine the earth's *medium* . . . *locum* (*Alalanta Fugiens* (1618) Emblem 46; see *PL* vi 762–3n). A forgotten model may

have been Macarius Mutus, whose biblical epic *De Triumpho Christi* (1499) has at its numerological centre both Aaron's breastplate and the solar chariot of Christ's triumph.

The numerological patterns are affected by fifteen lines added in 1674, with the net result that the centre moves four and a half lines, to vi 766. (Renaissance numerology was often confined to the *editio princeps*.) But the additions – 'regular / Then most, when most irregular they seem' (v 623–4) – break one pattern to make another. For in cabalistic gematria the 15 of the addition signifies YH (Tāh), the synocopated form of the tetragrammaton or divine name; while the poem's new overall line-count, 10,565, signifies IHVH, the tetragrammaton itself; see E. Keller, *MilHs* Q 20 (1986) 23–5. As if imitating nature herself, Milton reveals the divine Signature.

Division of the poem into books was also reordered in 1674. The extreme length of 1667 Bk x (1674 xi and xii) suggests that redivision was planned from an early stage. In the view of some critics, the redivided poem is more obviously structured (MacCaffrey (1959) 57n; contrast Røstvig (1994) 469).

(1667)		(1674)	
Book	Line total	Book	Line total
i	798	i	798
ii	1055	ii	1055
iii	742	iii	742
iv	1015	iv	1015
v	904	v	907
vi	912	vi	912
vii	1290	vii	640
viii	1189	viii	653
ix	1104	ix	1189
x	1541	x	1104
		xi	901
			(3 lines added at 485–7, 1 at 551–2)
		xii	649
			(5 lines added at 1–5)

Of famous epics, Homer's were both in 24 books, Virgil's in 12, Dante's in 100 cantos, Ariosto's in 46, and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* in 20; only Camoens's was in 10 (Witreich (1975b) 132a). Book-division attracted theoretical attention; often being treated in terms of number symbolism. In the Renaissance the preferred total was 12, a number associated with

completeness and temporal fulfilment. Most critics interested in formal structure agree that 1667's ten-book division implies a Pythagorean scheme, whereas the twelve books of 1674 have the two-part structure of Virgilian epic. In Pythagorean thought, created being arises from the monad, fount of number, through the principle of the sacred *tetraktys* ($1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$). This idea had long been accommodated to Platonic Christianity; see Bongo, *Mysteria* (1591); Lieb (1981) Index, *Pythagoras*; MacQueen (1985). The book division of 1667 reflects Pythagorean doctrine unambiguously. In it, invocations or prologues (italicized) begin Bks i, iii, vii, and viii (= 1674 ix):

1667 i, ii | iii, iv, v, vi | | vii | viii, ix, x
1674 i, ii | iii, iv, v, vi | | vii, viii | ix, x, xi, xii

So, if prologues are taken as marking new structural parts, the books of 1667 form a *tetraktys* disposed 2 | 4 | 1 | 3. This array corresponds to a narrative sequence moving from the evil and rebellious dyad (Bks i–ii: hell) through a tetrad of heaven and earth (Bks iii–vi: the *tetraktys* as *vinculum* of spirit and matter) to the creative monad (Bk vii: creation), and then to the triad of mediation between God and fallen world (Bks vii–x, 1674 ix–xii).

Arthur Barker (1965) analyses the 1667 book-division as a scheme of five two-book acts; he sees 1674 as changing from a dramatic to a fully epic structure. This interesting idea finds some support in the cohesion of Bks i–ii and ix–x (1674 x–xii). But other of his 'acts' are only asserted to exist, having neither substantive nor formal coherence. Bks iii and iv, for example, do not belong together any more than iv does with v. Barker's scheme cannot be said to explain the overall structure. Another fertile structural hypothesis is Michael Fixler's, in Kranidas (1969) 131–78, proposing a structure of seven parts corresponding to the seven visions of Revelation, a principal source. To the four obvious invocations, Fixler adds three further supplications: the narrator's desideration of 'that warming voice' (iv 1); Adam's request at v 543–60; and Adam and Eve's supplication (xi 1–14). Fixler proposes seven visions – of hell; heaven; Paradise; war in heaven; Creation; the Fall; and history. The scheme is in places vague and arbitrary, but of some interest for the idea that sequence may be reversed in imitation.

In 1667, 'Half yet remains unsung' (vii 21) comes in the seventh of ten books, and can only refer to line totals. In 1674, however, it becomes a more obvious signpost to the structure. Now, the six-book halves balance one another. Each half is equally divided into parts (starting with an invocation) of two and four books. The parts in each half thus bear the diapason proportion 1:2, signifying harmony and control of passion.

Italicizing Books with prologues, one may set out the parts of 1674 as i | ii | iii | iv | v | vi | | vii | viii | ix | x | xi | xii. Superimposed on this array is an ascent in the baroque manner to an emphatic double centre (vi and vii), followed by a descent in the Fall and Expulsion. The first centre, in Bk vi, is where Messiah, *Sol iustitiae*, ascends his throne *in medio caeli*; the second is the central day of creation, when he establishes his image, the sun. Many consonances now link contents of the first half with answering contents in corresponding books of the second half. Of the outermost two books in each, i–ii portray evil consequences of the angelic fall, xi–xii mixed consequences of the Fall of mankind. In the third Book, a divine council deliberates on redemption; in the third last (x), after an answering council, Messiah descends to judge and have compassion on mankind. Similarly, Satan enters the universe in Bk iii and in x leaves it. And the first temptation, in iv, corresponds to the second, in ix. A subsidiary pattern has the chaotic war in heaven closing the first half (Bks i–vi), which began with hell and chaos. Similarly, the second half is flanked by pairs of books revealing the Mirrors of Nature (vii–viii) and of History (xi–xii). Linking the two halves, the central four books v–viii form the 'episode' of Raphael. For similar structural patterns, particularly those based on the 1:2 diapason ratio, readers may be referred to Røstvig (1994) 468ff.

1674 can also be considered as a hexameron (so to say), of six two-book parts:

i | ii | iii | iv | v | vi | | vii | viii | ix | x | xi | xii

The first, fourth and sixth parts of this array have a high degree of coherence. Indeed, Bks vii and viii actually formed a single book in 1667, as did xi and xii. Again, Bks i and ii have the same coherence as in Barker's scheme. To notice so many patterns may seem counterproductive, until they are recognized as complementary rather than competing. Milton's encyclopedic epic may include several structural types – hexameron, brief epic, Virgilian epic – just as it includes several genres. It has the overlapping, overdetermined patterns of the visual art of the time – pursuing an ideal of *multum in parvo* in order to imitate cosmic complexity.

Time-scheme

Critics used to occupy themselves in determining the exact duration of epic actions. Addison knew that those who have criticized on the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, have taken a great deal of pains to fix the number of months or days contained in the action of each of these poems' (*Spectator* No. 369 (1965) ii 543f; cp. No. 267, iii 391; probably referring to René Le Bossu, *Traité du Poème Épique* (1675) ii 5, 18; iii 12; see Fowler (1970a) 129–31). Homer's *Iliad* was estimated at forty-eight days by Dryden, and recast

consecutively as a journal in *Teller* No. 6. The notion that the epic unity of time might be about a month was not uncommon.

Yet Thomas Newton's judgement that Milton was 'not very exact in the computation of time' (annotating xi 135n) has dissuaded modern critics from examining the poem's time-scheme. Newton was probably swayed by apparent discontinuities, as when x 103, 119 refer to indeterminate but extensive durations. But one may exclude duration referred to but not represented or quantified (e.g. iii 499, Satan 'long . . . wandered'). In Renaissance realism, there was no necessary continuity between vague durations (implied by words like 'often') and definite poem time. The latter fulfilled a time-scheme defined by specific temporal indications. Ricks (1963) 19, speaking of 'characteristic pedantry about the passage of time', is nearer the mark than Newton. For Milton takes pains to arrange precise indications of time, dwelling fondly on elaborate chronologies of sunset, sunrise, noon, midnight, and nightfall (iv 352-633, etc.). Such temporal indications do not, indeed, suggest the superfluous detail of novelistic realism. But neither are they mere clocking-in, to obey the Unity of Time. The time-scheme of *PL* sets out thematic ideas.

According to Addison, 'from Adam's first appearance in the fourth book, to his expulsion from Paradise in the twelfth, the author reckons ten days' (*Spectator* No. 369 (1965) iii 391). But Milton counted in the older manner, inclusively: what Addison reckons ten days, Milton would reckon eleven. 'As for that part of the action which is described in the three first books, as it does not pass within the regions of nature . . . it is not subject to any calculations of time.' This tells one that Addison has not been able to follow his author. Raphael's narration surely has to be included, on Le Bossu's principles. Indeed, Milton himself hints broadly enough that extra-terrestrial 'days' are to be counted — 'as we compute the days of heaven' (vi 685).

Milton's time-scheme used also to be uncertain because of confusion about 'day'. Some have assumed a 24-hour period beginning at midnight. Milton's audience, however, were familiar with several other reckonings of a day, beginning at sunrise, noon, or sunset; see Riccioli (1651) i 31f. And Raphael's narrative follows the Bible in reckoning from evening to evening (v 227; vi 260, 338). Biblical 'evening' was itself a departed term (e.g. Willet, *Hexapla* (1608) 4 on Gen. 1:4); but Milton clearly followed Jerome in reckoning from sunset — 'Evening arose in Eden, for the sun / Was set' (vii 582f). As Zachary Grey puts it, 'we may trace our heroes, morning and night: This particular is always essential in poetry, to avoid confusion, and disputes among the critics. How would they have calculated the number of days taken up in the *Iliad*, *Aeneid*, and *PL*; if the poets had not been careful to lead them into the momentous discovery?'

(Butler, *Hadrianus* (1744) III iii 67). *PL* divides calendrically into biblical days consisting each of an evening followed by a morning. Its duration may also, however, be divided into 24-hour days beginning any time. A consequent potential ambiguity of reckoning is exploited when Adam waits for his sentence to be carried out on 'the day' he disobeyed (x 773n). The main lines of the time-scheme are as follows:

DAY	EVENT	TEXT
1	Messiah's generation	v 582f, 618, 664
2-4	war in heaven	v 642; vi 406, 524, 684-6, 748
4-13	rebel angels' 9-day pursuit	vi 715f, 866, 871
13-22	rebel angels' 9-day stupor	i 50-3
14-20	week of creation	vii 131f
17	sun and moon created:	vii 386
	fourth day of creation	
	crowned	
19	mankind created:	ii 348; vii 550; viii 229-44
	sixth day of creation:	
	hell gate barred	
22	Pandemonium built in	i 697-798
	an hour; council	
23	Satan's cosmic prospect	iii 555-61; iv 564
	(midnight); conversation	
	with Uriel (noon)	
24	Satan at Eve's ear; his expulsion	iv 800, 1015
	(midnight);	
	Raphael's visit (noon to sunset)	v 311; viii 630-2
24-31	week of uncreation	ix 48-67
	(midnight to midnight)	
32	Satan's reentry;	ix 67, 739
	the Fall (noon)	
	Messiah's judgment	x 92-9
	(before sunset)	
33	Michael's visit (sunrise to	xi 184; xii 589
	noon); Expulsion (noon)	

For a fuller account of the time-scheme of Days 32-3, see x 49-53n, 92-102n, 328-9n, 342n, 773n, and 1050n.

From the time-scheme, several patterns emerge. (Number symbolism in the sequence of days of creation had long been a topic of hexameral speculation.) In 1667, terrestrial action occupies Bks iv-x, in all, seven books — number of the world and of creation. Of these seven, the central is

Bk vii (1674 vii–viii), recounting creation and discussing the system of seven planets. Thus the central, fourth, day of creation, Day 17, the central day also of the poem's 33-day action, occupies in 1667 the central book. On that day is created the sun, whose central place is suggested by Raphael at the centre (viii 123) of a long paragraph. These sovereign centralities are explicitly announced when the day is said to be 'crowned' (vii 386). To summarize:

HEAVENLY AND HELLISH ACTION	CREATION	TERRRESTRIAL ACTION
	7 days	13 days
	13 days	

The duration of *directly represented* terrestrial action, however, is only eleven days (Days 23–33) – a striking symbolism, since 11 signified sin, transgressing the 10 of the decalogue (see Augustine, *City of God* XV xx; Quarrström (1967) 90; Fowler (1964) 54; Frost (1990) 125). Further, the ratio of represented to narrated action is 11:22 or 1:2. This ratio, which figures also in the universe's spatial disposition (173–4n) and the structure of book-division (Røstvig (1994) 466 and ch. 9 *passim*), signified the harmony of reason controlling concupiscence (see Pico (1572) 179; Fowler (1964) 281 n 2). The form of the poem's action, like that of its structure, seems designed to repair mankind's Fall.

A similar symbolism underlies the arrangement of directly represented action. Satan's week of miscreation (ix 48–66) is framed by the four remaining days, Days 23–24 and 32–33. Thus, the 7 of mutability is contained (framed or structured) by a virtuous tetrad, the divine *teratky*.

Some of the ordinal day numbers are also significant. Day 1, a unique 'undivided' day without a preceding evening, is aptly denoted by the monad. Its sole event is the generation of Messiah, under whose reign the angels are to abide 'united as one individual soul'. By contrast, the angelic fall begins on the day denoted by the evil rebellious dyad. Mankind's judgment is on Day 32, symbolic of justice (Bongo, *Mysteria* (1591) 486). And the last day, when Adam hears the redemptive history and leaves Paradise with Eve to enter it, is Day 33, the same number underlying the compositional pattern of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. The overall duration of *PL* exceeds a month by two transgressive (dyadic) days – only to reach at last the total of 33, number of years in Christ's life, a familiar symbol of human suffering and redemption.

The prominence given to the succession of days and nights is amply justified, it seems, by its thematic content. For the patterns of the time-scheme are those of God's covenant, which must be as sure 'as the days of heaven' (xii 344–7n). Adam discovers in the peripeteias of Bks x–xii that divine judgment is as sure as mathematics, and learns to say with the Psalmist 'teach us to number our days'. The poem's form leads, as it were,

to the cave within the 'mount of God', where light and darkness alternate naturally (vi 4–12), imaging divine transcendence over time as over good and evil. This imagery relates to the seventeenth-century vogue of philosophical optics and astronomical mysticism. Yet it would have been specially charged for Milton himself. He must painfully have regretted that 'grateful vision, even as he confessed faith in the just God who had made darkness replace light for him unnaturally.

Astronomy

If Milton's God contains yet transcends both light and dark with the time they divide, the same is true of his relation to space. He is 'high throned above all height' (iii 58), while the spatial universe is mysteriously imagined as his Son's vehicle. The poem's central image is that of a triumphal cherubic chariot forming Messiah's throne (vi 749–59n). About this centre are ten thousand stellar beings acknowledging his sovereignty. For the stars are associated – sometimes figuratively, sometimes literally – with angels (iii 622ff; v 700–16; Fowler (1996) ch. 2). Their revolutions perform the sacred *choreis* or 'starry dance' (iii 580) that 'resembles nearest' the 'mystical dance' of the angels 'about the sacred hill' (v 619–22). Thus Milton's astronomical world represents the terrific idea of a material *machina mundi* that exalts Christ. Like the universe in Plato's *Timaeus* it is alive: animate throughout, it moves, engages in metabolic exchanges (v 414f), and exhales, transpiring fragrant spirit to God in prayer. The fabric of this world is not cut out of whole cloth – it is patched, rather, from Neoplatonic pieces and worn canonicals handed down from medieval Christian Platonism. But Milton's passionately engaged vision of it seems original in its fullness of detail. And his cosmos, however orderly, has the capacity to surprise, as if instinct with life.

The surprise is nowhere more amazing than in the poem's panoramic vistas. When one scans one of these, or follows out the angels' trajectories through space, or traces the chartings of heavenly bodies, Milton's power of sustained spatial realization, whereby he imagines phenomena more fully than ever before, continually astonishes. He was probably the first English poet, for example, to describe a sunset in detail. Everything we see in *PL* tells us that Mahood (1950) 199–201 is right and T. S. Eliot, *E&S*, 21 (1936) 32–40 wrong. Milton had a strong spatial imagination. The first surprise, then, is at the strangeness of perspective. He opens up space that has not only the amplitude of Poussin but the dramatic viewpoint of a mannerist like Joachim Wreweal. The fascination of astronomy, which Milton shared with his contemporaries, colours everything; it is as if the heavens are being viewed *de novo*.

And then a further surprise comes, when one notices how far Milton's

perspectives are 'legitimate constructions' from unique points of view – exact representations, correct in every detail, of prospects that might actually be viewed in the real world. This goes beyond literary decorum, although there is plenty of that. Always the details of Milton's astronomy are significant. Thus, when Satan leaves earth after the Fall, 'Betwixt the Centaur and the Scorpion steering / His zenith, while the sun in Arics rose' (x 328–9), one may at first see no more than a magnificent visual image – Sagittarius and Scorpio, with between them a starry serpent, the constellation Angus. But then the details assert themselves as a chronographia. A point between Sagittarius and Scorpio will be 120°–150° from Arics; if the zenith at Paradise is such a point, the time there must be between 2.00 and 4.00 am. This is crucial information for keeping track of the day of judgment after the Fall, a day whose end is repeatedly postponed (x 773n). Indeed, representation so detailed may easily arouse false expectations of continuous novelistic realism. One has to make an effort to recognize that Milton's is a Renaissance realism – discontinuous, local, exemplary. The point here is the dramatic irony that the sun will not rise always in Arics. Poignantly, the sun's position in the *thema caeli* of creation is uniquely stated – only for it to be almost immediately displaced, as a result of the Fall (x 668ff).

It would be inappropriate to attempt here an account of the many planetary systems available to Milton. For that the reader may be referred to Dreyer (1953); Heninger (1977); North (1988) and (1994). On Milton's own astronomy, see A. H. Gilbert, *SP*, 19 (1922) 152–85; *SP*, 20 (1923) 444–7; *PMLA*, 38 (1923) 297–307; G. McCollery, *MLN*, 47 (1932) 319–25; *SP*, 34 (1937) 209–47; *PMLA*, 52 (1937) 728–62 (arguing for Ross and Wilkins as sources); M. Nicolson, *ELH*, 2 (1935) 1–32; *SP*, 32 (1935) 428–62; *MP*, 32 (1935) 233–60; Nicolson (1950); Nicolson (1956) ch. 4; Svendsen (1956); Margara (1992). The old idea that Milton rejected the new astronomy of his day (A. O. Lovjoy, in Mazzeo (1962) 129–42), like the idea that he was a Copernican cynically using the Ptolemaic universe for poetic purposes, has been generally abandoned. The universe of *PL* is too subtly considered for it to have been constructed to persuade belief in the absolute truth of the Ptolemaic, Copernican, or Tychoenic model. Not only does it combine elements of several systems but it even sometimes contrives to be geocentric and heliocentric at the same time (iv 592–7; viii 83n, 114–18n). And Milton always avoids resolving such uncertainties as the order of proximity of the inner planets.

This is not just disincantation to back a theory soon perhaps to be invalidated by some new Galileo; although that was a real consideration at a time when astronomical discoveries followed hard on one another's heels – 'every silly fellow can square a circle, make perpetual motions, find

the philosopher's stone, interpret *Apocalypsis*, make new theoricis, a new system of the world' (Burton, 'Democritus to the Reader' (1989–) i 60). It is rather that Milton uses astronomical controversy to symbolize enquiry in general, into all 'secret' knowledge beyond the verge of human capacities or imposed limitations. It was a time when new cosmological theories might be forbidden on penalty of death, yet when a fruitful field of enquiry was nature's 'secrets'; see Schultz (1955); Eamon (1994); J. M. Walker, *Milis*, 26 (1990) 109–24 on Milton canonizing Galileo as a martyr in the cause of intellectual freedom. Milton keeps open heliocentric and geocentric alternatives, so that his modern Adam may be just at the point of recognizing the Ptolemaic system's inadequacies. In this way, he relates the Fall to contemporary cultural developments, actual exchanges of new knowledge for simpler happiness. At such junctures, moral awareness may matter as much as ability to choose the better scientific hypothesis. But one suspects a further reason for his sustaining uncertainty about the order of the planets. Perhaps he is trying to render the elusiveness of nature, which will not be enclosed within the grinding circles of Ptolemy or Copernicus or Brahe. New and old systems alike are faulty, devised as they are to describe a fallen world.

The universe of *PL* is by contrast a visionary, perfected one. With striking originality, Milton has constructed an entire fictive astronomy, based on a premise untrue for the present world. His premise, that the ecliptic and equatorial planes coincide, has not been true since the Fall. So he has to work out its implications with ingenuity reminiscent of science fiction (e.g. iii 555–61; iv 209–16, 354ff; v 18–25; x 328f). Like Plato and Augustine, Milton believes creation is by number and measure – 'this grand book, the universe . . . is written in the language of mathematics' (Galileo (1957) 237f). The geometry of Milton's invented unfallen world is elegantly simple – and exhilaratingly easy to visualize. Its day and night are always equal, its sun remains constantly in the same sign, and the positions of its constellations are easily determined without astrolabe or planisphere. There are no variations in solar declination, no equinoctial points, no precession, no difference between sidereal, natural and civil days. This lucid, rational world can be seen as figuring a simple innocence now lost. In consequence of the Fall, the prelapsarian, Golden Age stasis changes to crooked movements: the sun begins its oblique seasonal journey and the stars their precession. A Platonic Great Year, a cycle of decay sets in (v 583; x 651–706).

The original coincidence of ecliptic and equatorial is more than prolepsis to the Fall, more than a reminder of the present world's defects, more than an explanation of bad weather. Milton envisions a purified, pristine world constituting a fit macrocosm for his righteous Adam and

Eve. To rectify the zodiac – like removing hell outside the universe – is to revile nature and appreciate its former (and potential) beauty. Milton's golden world is just, in its division of light and darkness, as our present world is not: it remains constant while ours decays: it keeps clockwork regularity (emblem of temperance) while ours changes inordinately. Yet, with all this, the *mise en scène* of *PL* is perhaps the most naturalistic in the entire epic tradition.

Milton was the last great epicist to take for granted a Christian world-picture and to interpret nature as inscribed with the 'signatures' of divine meaning. In the next age, the intellectual reach (or the piety) for such imagining of nature no longer seemed possible. And when, after a century, it was partially recovered, the literary expression of such vision had taken very different forms. Nevertheless it is right to think of Milton as a nature poet, and to attend to the tradition that extends from him through James Thomson to Wordsworth and Keats.

Theology

When Dr Johnson writes that in *PL* 'the want of human interest is always felt', he overlooks the allegory whereby angels, devils, Sin, Death – even the divine persons – convey human insights and experiences. As for Adam and Eve themselves, they are far from portraying before the Fall all that is perfect, after it all that is not. Such passages as viii 530ff and 588ff disprove Johnson's view that 'human passions did not enter the world before the Fall'. Milton is well able to render stages of transition from innocence to experience. Indeed, during the last half-century the poem's psychology has greatly interested critics. Many have enquired, for example, just when temptation begins, and when the Fall becomes inevitable. This line of enquiry, from M. Bell, *PMLA*, 68 (1953) 863–83 onward, has been pursued so energetically that prelapsarian experience has come to look pretty much like the passionate dynamics of ordinary life since the Fall. This is so much taken for granted, and the stages of Adam and Eve's corruption so blurred, that their actual 'first disobedience' has become almost unimportant. It is as if the Fall that matters already occurred at their separation, say, or in Eve's dream – or for that matter, at the moment of Satan's generation of Sin, or his whisper to his 'mate'. This is not a ridiculous view. The idea of a gradual Fall had venerable proponents: Burden (1967) 79 cites Ames, *Sacred Divinity* (1642) 56 ('man was a sinner, before he had finished that outward act of eating'); Broadbent (1960) 197 cites Augustine, *City of God* XIV xiii ('our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted'). But this view is not Milton's. Central to his moral theology was the Arminian doctrine that human will contributes decisively to individual destiny (Corrins (1994)

81–4; Quint (1993) 299 and ch. 7 *passim*). Will is free, determined neither by divine predestination nor by subliminal psychodynamics. Virtue is not cloistered innocence untroubled by passions, in Milton's view, but rather the difficult experience of rationality, of perpetual rational choices between seductively deceptive alternatives.

True, he was interested in causes of evil – but as 'cause' was understood in his time. He pushes his enquiry as far back as may be, carrying the action from the fallen society of devils sunk in darkness; up through confusion, to heaven's clarity foreseeing the worst; then through a universe with Satan already subverting it; back to the angels' fall; back to creation of a pristine universe. In Bk iii the action takes in an ultimate point of origin, the mind of God, who sees evil's possibility as inevitably bound up with the freedom of created spirits – foresees, even, that evil will be chosen. Yet God avoids doing anything to curtail that freedom. For Milton, like his Arminian God, is obsessed with creaturely freedom. Consequently, he locates choice (and therefore evil *in potentia*) at the earliest, most fundamental stage imaginable. He puts the possibility of evil not only in Adam as created but in chaos before creation, even in the origin of matter in God himself. Hence, perhaps, Milton's complex triple imagining of chaos – as void, as uncreated matter, as God-filled and God-retracted (Magrara (1992) 96). Yet a divine source of chaos raises no insuperable problem of theodicy, when evil *in potentia* is not evil (Gallagher (1990) 85). However dangerous the ground Milton's enquiry invades, its end is always justification: 'Evil into the mind of God . . . / May come and go, so unapproved, and leave / No spot or blame behind . . .' (v 117–19). As for causation in our sense, Milton was never preoccupied by it – far less with setting out a single series of cause-effect relations leading up to and 'explaining' the Fall.

Issues of theodicy have naturally been raised in connection with the motives of Adam and Eve at the Fall. Waldock (1947, 1961) and Empson (1961, 1965) both exonerate Eve and blame Adam (or Raphael, or God). Why did Raphael not warn Adam more specifically? Why did God not prevent the temptation? These seem shallow responses to a profound dilemma. Milton presents Bk ix as tragic: so tragic action, and tragic predicaments, are what we should expect to find. Adam makes himself responsible by allowing Eve to work on her own – allowing it (in hindsight) too liberally, or too permissively, or too weakly. Yet to keep her against her will might have compromised her independence. This tragic conflict of virtues and good aims (freedom, obedience) at once disantly echoes and contrasts with the debate in the mind of God when he makes his supertitular choice (iii 236). True, Eve's motives, even in her fall, are sometimes lofty. It would hardly have justified God, to show only his