

CHATTERTON LECTURE ON AN ENGLISH POET

MILTON, LOST AND REGAINED

By JOHN BEER

Read 6 May 1964

SOONER or later, it seems, most critics of *Paradise Lost* ask themselves the oldest question about the poem: who is the hero? Dryden suggested that he was Satan. Addison felt that Messiah fulfilled the role. Landor decided in favour of Adam. Finally, Professor Saurat, not without some plausibility, declared that the real hero was Milton himself. In reading some recent studies, however, it has seemed to me that a new candidate is emerging. In our time, it might seem, the true hero of *Paradise Lost* is the reader.

The difficulties set before him are certainly formidable. Professor Empson has recently drawn attention to some of them. Milton, as he reveals himself in his pamphlets, might seem to be a prophet of twentieth-century values. His attitude to censorship contains a faith that truth is great and will prevail. His attitude to divorce proclaims his human kindness. His political writings are directed firmly against the abuse of power. Yet in *Paradise Lost*, God the Father speaks and acts in ways that sometimes seem dogmatic, cruel, and tyrannical. The reader who thinks that he will reach an ultimate centre of truth, kindness, and liberalism in the poem is baffled and thwarted. Professor Empson speaks of a Kafka-like element in the poem. If the reader is hero, then, he is like the hero in a Kafka novel.

This is a new development. In the past, when critics attacked or defended the poem, they were confident that they understood its meaning. And even now those who come to the poem after steeping themselves in seventeenth-century literature do not show this sort of bewilderment. If one reads Milton after reading his predecessors in the field of divine poetry, one's chief sense is of his sophistication and mastery: at every point, he is taking the tradition a whole stage further. It is when we approach the poem directly from the twentieth century that such feelings are aroused, and then Mr. Eliot's words might stand as epigraph to a hundred critical studies: 'While it must be admitted that

Milton is a very great poet indeed, it is something of a puzzle to decide in what his greatness consists.<sup>1</sup>

To us, Milton is an elusive figure. His work lies in a penumbra immediately behind the birthlight of the modern world. His presence, great and imposing as it is, seems now to come into focus, now to disappear. To quote Mr. Eliot again, the study of Milton is often a

fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this sense that I think of him as 'lost and regained'.

Perhaps it is because so many modern critics find Milton either elusive or alien that I have often been struck by the penetration of various comments on him at the time of the Romantic Revival. Their value is often out of all proportion to their volume; and it seems to spring from the deep involvement of the writers concerned. The eighteenth century had largely idolized Milton; but poets like Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, facing the results of the French Revolution, felt obliged to come to terms with him afresh. He too had lived through a period of social and mental change, however: and whatever criticisms they might feel impelled to raise, they saw him as a man who mattered to them. They still felt that they could use him as a touchstone. We shall return to them briefly later.

Keats was still more intricately involved. He evidently thought about Milton's work intensely, and in certain ways he saw him very clearly indeed. We might argue for a long time over the permanent value of Milton's political, theological and moral beliefs without advancing very far beyond Keats's view of the matter, thrown out with some casualness in a letter of 1818:

In his time englishmen were just emancipated from a great superstition—and Men had got hold of certain points and resting places in reasoning which were too newly born to be doubted, and too much opposed by the Mass of Europe not to be thought etherially and authentically divine—who could gainsay his ideas on virtue, vice, and Chastity in Comus, just at the time of the dismissal of Cod-pieces and a hundred other disgraces? who would not rest satisfied with his hintings at good

<sup>1</sup> 'A Note on the Verse of John Milton', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, xxi (1935), 32.

<sup>2</sup> 'East Coker', v.

and evil in *Paradise Lost*, when just free from the inquisition and burning in Smithfield? The Reformation produced such immediate and great benefits, that Protestantism was considered under the immediate eye of heaven, and its own remaining Dogmas and superstitions, then, as it were, regenerated, constituted those resting places and seeming sure points of Reasoning . . . .<sup>1</sup>

Keats's words both help to place Milton's attitudes while at the same time suggesting something of the passionate centre from which they sprang. It is still easy to pass over Milton's use of words without noticing the degree of feeling behind them. When God the Father exclaims 'Dye hee or justice must' or, of mankind,

I formd them free, and free they must remain  
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change  
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree  
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd  
Thir freedom . . . .<sup>2</sup>

the words may sound to our modern ears like special pleading, unless we recognize the charge of emotion behind the words 'justice' and 'freedom'.

Keats was also deeply involved with Milton the poet. The range of his attitudes is suggested by the fact that in August 1819 he wrote, 'Shakspeare and the paradise Lost every day become greater wonders to me', and yet a month later was saying, 'I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written but in the vein of art—I wish to devote myself to another sensation.' And about the same time, he wrote: 'Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour.'<sup>3</sup>

The point about Milton's work which had thrown Keats on his guard was the fact that it was artifice. He did not speak of Milton as being in any way dead: on the contrary, he gave full credit to the Miltonic life. But since he was not in the mood for artifice of any sort, Milton could no longer help him.

The degree of artifice in *Paradise Lost*, which Keats was right to seize on as crucially important, is evident as soon as one compares it with the restraint and sobriety of Milton's *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*. Indeed, the effect is so powerful in some

<sup>1</sup> *Letters* (ed. Rollins), Cambridge, Mass., 1958, i. 281-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradise Lost*, iii. 210 and 124-8 (ii. 85, 82). All page references to Milton's works are to the Columbia edition (New York, 1931-40).

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, ii. 139, 146, 212, 167.

passages that one is tempted to use the word 'baroque'. One needs to use the word with care, of course. It has been so over-worked in connexion with the seventeenth century that some aesthetic historians have urged that it ought never now to be used except in describing those works of art which are specifically associated with the period after the counter-reformation and the rise of the Jesuits. Yet there is a sense in which a wider usage can still be justified. The rise of baroque art was due partly to the desire of the Jesuits to bring humanist art into the service of the church: to win men to the church by an appeal to their imaginations rather than by the use of force. The art works through this acknowledged tension. The response of the spectator in a baroque church is one of admiration at the virtuosity by which apparently discordant elements have been reconciled with the main design and held within the massive conformity of the whole.

This feature of the baroque is evident also in *Paradise Lost*. Against the general order of the biblical narrative, Milton employs every device of ornamentation. Single biblical images are developed to take their part in the full pattern, long incidents are developed from casual scriptural references. The sweeping effects of rhetoric, the unexpected use of naturalistic comparisons, the willingness to give powerful utterance to arguments directed against the central doctrines of the work, all these effects make it not entirely fanciful to describe the poetry as concentrating upon 'curved and sinuous plans, contrasting contours of surface, flowing forms, dramatic lighting effects and the merging of naturalistic sculpture and realistic painting with the structure'.<sup>1</sup> The description is taken from a recent study of baroque architecture in Europe, but the relevance to Milton is striking.

To speak of *Paradise Lost* as a work of 'biblical baroque' is to offer one way of approaching the poem. It tells us something about its superstructure, and it suggests something of the essential poise in Milton's own attitude: his readiness to take a point of stability, the biblical record, and then to allow himself considerable mobility in writing about it. On the other hand, it must immediately be acknowledged that the biblical baroque is a more precarious mode than the Roman Catholic baroque. The one is rooted in a body, the Church, with which all its members can identify themselves, the other is rooted in a document

<sup>1</sup> James Lees Milne, *Baroque Europe* (ed. Busch and Lohse), London, 1962, p. iii.

which is open to individual interpretation. When we look at a baroque church we are not particularly conscious of the separate identity of the architect, but in reading Milton's work we are immediately conscious of the identity of the poet. Coleridge once remarked that Milton himself is in every line of *Paradise Lost*.<sup>1</sup> To read that poem or any other of his is, in an unexpectedly literal sense, to 'read Milton'. So closely indeed is his identity woven into the text that a full reading demands something of a leap of sympathy on the part of the reader, a temporary projection of himself into the mind of the poet. To some critics this might seem an illegitimate activity; if I differ from them, I am perhaps confessing a personal predisposition in favour of any mental activity under which a work of art may grow in complexity, richness and unity.

When we speak of Milton's identity, a distinction is immediately necessary. Milton's nature included a large measure of humility, which emerges both in his awareness of his own limitations in youth and in his readiness to accept the physical infirmities of his later life. It also included a pugnacity which came out in the pamphlets. But from the beginning, his humility and pugnacity were combined with another character, a poetic identity which aspired to the achievement of the sublime.

This poetic identity was not a simple urge towards a state of glory, moreover; it was both complex and subtly organized. Various intertwining strains in it corresponded to the artistic, political, moral, and religious life of the times.

The first strand one notices in the Miltonic identity is his strong musical sense. To speak of it is, of course, to risk a host of misconceptions. Tennyson's description of Milton as 'God-gifted organ voice of England' has helped to foster the idea that Milton's musicality could be more or less identified with his sonority. It is as though the whole of Milton's musical power were concentrated in the lines, 'He call'd so loud, that all the hollow Deep / Of Hell resounded'. The fact that Milton himself played the organ seems only to assist this limited conception, though it ought to be dispelled as soon as we recall the nature of seventeenth-century organs and the sort of music that was played on them in Milton's time.

Milton, brought up by a father who was intensely musical, was surrounded from his early years by all the riches of early seventeenth-century music. But there is more to his musicianship

<sup>1</sup> *Table Talk*, 12 May 1830 (cf. 18 Aug. 1833).

than that. The world into which he was born still shared something of the Elizabethan belief that music was a key to the nature of the universe. For Renaissance man, music revealed the nature of the everlasting order of things: he was excited by the idea of Pythagoras that the proportions of music would provide a key to all relationships in the universe. In this early scientific age, therefore, the musician and artist held a peculiarly central place in the intellectual scheme of things.

Milton shared this sense. For a time, at least, he also seems to have been captivated by the dream of the Florentine Academicians that it might be possible, by comparing the wisdom of the ancients, the Jewish Cabbala and recent discoveries about the world, to harmonize all mythologies and universalize all knowledge until a single, unified religion emerged. In this respect, the divine musicians of antiquity exercised a particular fascination. Orpheus with his lute was no mere musician, but a divine being, who revealed nature in the act of entrancing it. His power to make animals, trees, and stones move to his music expressed man's potential capability of overcoming the bestial in his nature and of understanding the inanimate in the universe.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of the universe there existed the same struggle as at the heart of man's nature, the struggle between the angelic and the bestial: the struggle could only be resolved by an orphic power.

The ultimate relationship between music and wisdom is a dream that haunts many of Milton's early poems. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, for example, two poems superficially in opposition to one another, are reconciled by this bond. In *L'Allegro*, the musical note pervades the poem and culminates in the visualization of a supreme form of music,

Untwisting all the chains that ty  
The hidden soul of harmony.

In *Il Penseroso* the musical note is more subdued. The theme of the poem is the pursuit of wisdom, but wisdom is always conceived imaginatively: it is to be sought through mythology, ancient philosophy, and romance. The pursuit of wisdom concludes, moreover, in a harmony which mingles religious adoration with knowledge of 'every Star that Heav'n doth shew, / And every Herb that sips the dew' and endows its possessor with 'something like Prophetic strain'.

<sup>1</sup> See Caroline Mayerson, 'The Orpheus Image in *Lycidas*', *PMLA*, lxiv (1949), 189-207. I am indebted to this article for several references.

In both poems appears the image of Orpheus, discovering the supreme music that would cause Pluto to restore to him his Eurydice. In the first poem it provides the climax:

That *Orpheus* self may heave his head  
From golden slumber on a bed  
Of heapt *Elysian* flowres, and hear  
Such streins as would have won the ear  
Of *Pluto*, to have quite set free  
His half regain'd *Eurydice*.

In the second the image is brought in more incidentally:

Or bid the soul of *Orpheus* sing  
Such notes as warbled to the string,  
Drew Iron tears down *Pluto's* cheek,  
And made Hell grant what Love did seek.

By the music of Orpheus wisdom and delight are reconciled: the inward harmony of nature is revealed and all that now appears inimical to harmony is tamed.

Milton's orphic sense sustained him throughout his career. In spite of many vicissitudes he did not lose his conviction that there was a divine order and that that order was harmonic. In *Paradise Lost* the rhetorical energy of Satan is overtopped only by the orphic assurance of the poet. But Milton's poetic identity, though grounded in the orphic, reaches out into other spheres. It embraces a whole nexus of qualities which is hard to describe simply, for they all interact with and modify each other. To equip ourselves with a general formula, however, we might enumerate the main qualities as those of light, harmony, reason, vigour, and righteousness. It is easy to keep any two of these in one's mind at the same time but harder to keep all five, and harder still to apprehend the pattern which holds them together. Yet one observes that when one of these qualities is mentioned in his work, the imagery of another will often be introduced to help extend or define its meaning.

The activity of light in dispelling darkness, for example, is made to correspond to the power of harmony in resolving chaos. Apollo and Orpheus are ultimately one. The sun is another controlling image. It is difficult for us, set firmly in our post-Newtonian universe, to feel the force of the words 'Light' and 'Sun' in Milton's day. Accustomed as we are to analysis of the behaviour of light-waves, we miss the note of mystery which

surrounded light in an age when men were less preoccupied with physics than with the correspondence between the light of nature and the light within themselves.

This sense of mystery is carried over into Milton's use of the word 'reason', which has only marginally its modern identification with analytic power. It is always used with an implication of illumination and harmony which goes well beyond the more straightforward eighteenth-century imagery of 'enlightenment'. And this correlation between reason and light enables Milton to define righteousness as something reasonable and self-evident, yet requiring at the same time an exercise of inward power for its realization. In an early prologue he writes,

. . . the home and the temple of the virtues and of uprightness is the will. Since, however, in the judgment of all, the human intellect, as head and ruler, surpasses in splendour the other faculties of the mind, it governs and illuminates with its splendour the will itself, otherwise blind and dark, that like the moon shines with another's light.<sup>1</sup>

Milton is also able to use the ambiguities of English words to extend the range of his central nexus. He constantly uses the word 'nerve' in its older sense of 'muscle', which helps to relate the intellectual power of man to his physical and to suggest a virtue which immediately reaches into action. And the very word 'virtue', with its double sense of goodness and strength, suggests a link between righteousness and vigour. One can see an unobtrusive use of the network in Book III of *Paradise Lost* where Milton, writing of the sun, describes

his Magnetic beam, that gently warms  
The Univers, and to each inward part  
With gentle penetration, though unseen,  
Shoots invisible vertue even to the deep.

An understanding of the working of this nexus of ideas within Milton's poetic identity helps, I think, to throw light on his poetry. It is because he relates righteousness to the orphic power in man, for example, that he is so confident of the power of true virtue to withstand temptation. The *Masque* of Comus depends for its total effect upon the identification of the power that protects the Lady with the orphic music of the verse. The Lady has no difficulty in refuting the arguments of Comus; the rhetorical power of his language is not outmatched by any corresponding

<sup>1</sup> Prologue vii (xii. 261). The light/harmony pattern is traced also in the *Nativity Ode* by A. Barker: *UTQ*, x (1941), 167-81.



strength in hers, however, but by the orphic power of the whole masque. When the Lady speaks of 'the Sun-clad power of Chastity', the phrase carries the whole weight of this orphic element; and when she speaks of the resources on which she can call, the imagery of the Orpheus myth enters inexorably into her argument:

Yet should I try, the uncontroled worth  
Of this pure cause would kindle my rap't spirits  
To such a flame of sacred vehemence,  
That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize,  
And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake . . . .

A similar phenomenon appears in *Lycidas*. Here again, one of the poem's important inner themes is closely related to the nature of Milton's poetic identity. I have in mind particularly the lines towards the end where Milton pictures the fate of the body of the drowned Lycidas:

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas  
Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurl'd,  
Whether beyond the stormy *Hebrides*  
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;  
Or whether thou to our moist vows deny'd,  
Sleep'st by the fable of *Bellerus* old,  
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount  
Looks towards *Namancos* and *Bayona's* hold;  
Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth,  
And, O ye *Dolphins*, waft the haples youth.

The poetic magnificence of these lines has often been commented on. So far as the sense is concerned, on the other hand, there has been little or no disagreement with the conclusion of Milton's eighteenth-century editors that Milton was indulging in a piece of elegant periphrasis in order to describe the geographical directions open to the body of the drowned man—either beyond the Hebrides into the Atlantic main or south-eastwards into the English channel. 'Bellerus' is recognized to refer to Bellerium, the Roman name for Land's End, while Thomas Warton triumphantly identified the guarded Mount as St. Michael's Mount and pointed out that the angel invoked immediately afterwards must therefore be St. Michael. More recently, also, Mr. G. S. Fraser has reminded us that in looking towards Namancos and Bayona the Angel on the Mount was

gazing at a continent which was still regarded as hostile to England's protestantism.<sup>1</sup> It was only fifty years since the Armada had sailed up the Channel, only thirty years since the Gunpowder Plot: Milton could feel that liberty and truth were still beleaguered in England, still in need of angelic guardianship.

As it stands, however, the conventional interpretation is open to the objection that it imposes a melancholy mood upon the closing lines of the poem. Whatever may be said later about Lycidas's immortality, it is hard to dismiss that image of his body carried at the mercy of the Atlantic waves.

It is possible that the lines carry more significance than this. It was long ago observed that Milton in his first writing wrote 'where thou perhaps under the humming tide' and then changed 'humming' to 'whelming', a change which led Steevens to suppose, very credibly, that some lines from Shakespeare's *Pericles* were in his mind:

the belching Whale.  
And humming Water must orewhelme thy corpse,  
Lying with simple shels . . . .

*Pericles* is about to cast the body of his wife, enclosed in a coffin, into the sea; but later the coffin is wafted to shore and she is restored to life.

The mention of wafting by dolphins seems to be based on a not dissimilar story, the story of Melicertes, whose mother, because of the father's cruelty, threw him, with herself, into the sea and prayed aloud to Venus. Venus heard her prayer and turned her son into a sea-god, Palaemon, whilst also ensuring that his dead body was wafted to the shore by dolphins.<sup>2</sup> In both *Pericles* and the myth of Palaemon the casting of a body into the water is associated with a renewal of life; and somewhere in Milton's mind there must also be the story of Jonah, cast into the sea by his shipmates but restored to dry land by a belching whale after three days—an image dear to Renaissance allegorists, since it had been used by Christ himself as an image of his own

<sup>1</sup> See *The Living Milton* (ed. J. F. Kermode), London, 1960, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> See T. O. Mabbott, 'Milton's *Lycidas*, ll. 164 and 183-5'. *The Explicator*, v, no. 26. An altar-tomb was erected to Palaemon on the beach, and he was believed to have become the patron saint of mariners. Part of the story (though not the reference to the dolphins) appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, just before the transformation of Cadmus and Harmonia into serpents—an incident on which Milton drew for *Paradise Lost*, x, 538-45. See also M. Lloyd's important article 'The Fatal Bark', *MLN*, lxxv (1960), 106-7.

resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Already in Milton's references, then, there is an implication of Lycidas's immortality.

A further theme may be traced. In Shakespeare's last plays the actions take place against a background of struggle between harmony and chaos, between music and tempest. Similarly, the story of Palaemon and the dolphins reminds us of a better-known myth: the story of Arion who, on being cast overboard by his shipmates off the sea-coast of Africa, asked to be allowed to play his lute, and so charmed the dolphins with his music that they wafted him home alive to Corinth. In both cases there is a link between music and the renewal of life. But the fate of Arion was happier than that of Orpheus, which Milton has already described in the poem:

What could the Muse her self that *Orpheus* bore,  
The Muse her self for her enchanting son  
Whom Universal nature did lament,  
When by the rout that made the hideous roar,  
His goary visage down the stream was sent,  
Down the swift *Hebrus* to the *Lesbian* shore . . . .

Lycidas, too, has suffered a better fate. Using the same image of the head, Milton proceeds to speak of his resurrection, and to compare him to the sun:

So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled Ore,  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky . . . .

Lycidas is greater than Orpheus, for he is possessed by the divine power of light as well as that of harmony. He is greater even than Apollo, the uniter of light and harmony, for his light is the true light of Christian revelation. Hence his immortality is assured and his destiny is with the angel of the guarded Mount. His body may or may not be wafted to shore, but his eternal self fulfils the myth of Arion. He is made one with the light and the music of Heaven. And this visionary implication in the lines draws their language towards a different effect. Their music may sound like

<sup>1</sup> In the original conception of the poem, the stories may further have been connected in Milton's mind by the full story of Corineus, whose daughter Gwendolen threw her husband's mistress Estrildic and daughter Sabra into a river, which was later called Sabrina after the latter. Sabrina appears in the *Masque* of Comus, and the whole story is told by Milton in his *History of Britain*, i (x. 15-16).

an elegy for the dead Lycidas, yet the very music itself speaks of his immortality.

So far I have said little about the lines in the middle of the passage:

Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;  
Or whether thou to our moist vows deny'd,  
Sleep'st by the fable of *Bellerus* old,  
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount  
Looks toward *Namancos* and *Bayona's* hold . . . .

There is an intensity about these lines, however, an emphatic quality, which suggests something more than a geographical reference. Milton speaks of the *fable* of Bellerus, the *vision* of the guarded Mount.

Why Bellerus? In the original version Milton wrote, 'sleep'st by the vision of Corineus old'. Corineus was well known—a hero who accompanied Brutus to England and slew the Cornish giant Gogmagog, but there is no equivalent reference to Bellerus. Milton's editors suggest no more than that he is a fabulous figure, possibly a Cornish giant, invented by Milton to explain the Roman name 'Bellerium'. Milton might have preferred the sonority of Bellerus, but it is difficult to see why he should have dismissed a known figure in favour of an unknown one.

There is a Bellerus in fable, moreover. He was a Corinthian monster supposedly slain by Hipponous, who then assumed the name Bellerophon and, in a more famous exploit, slew the Chimaera. Milton mentions Bellerophon in *Paradise Lost*;<sup>1</sup> and he speaks of him rather strikingly in an early prolusion. In a passage of light-hearted praise for his fellow students he writes:

. . . that illustrious Bellerophon did not conquer with more spirit the flame-belching Chimaera; nor did those valiant knights of King Arthur overpower and rout more easily the enchantments of a burning and blazing stronghold.<sup>2</sup>

The point about Bellerophon which appeared particularly to the Renaissance mind was that he was a destroyer of falsehood. And since we know that Milton was fascinated by the correspon-

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, vii. 17-18. A few lines later (32-38) Milton pleads that he may not suffer the fate of Orpheus.

<sup>2</sup> Prolusion vi. (xii. 231). Milton is talking about the heating in the College hall. This passage follows a joking reference to Tartarean hissing, which foreshadows *Paradise Lost*, x. 514-46.

dences between the myths of the ancient world,<sup>1</sup> it is not impossible that, either consciously or unconsciously, he saw in the name Bellerium a reference to the slaying of a monster. The suggestion is no more than tentative, but it links with other implications in the lines. Milton's central theme is always that of the opposition between light and darkness, between harmony and chaos, between angel and monster. And everything that happens to Lycidas now has its counterpart in eternity. If his body visits the bottom of the Atlantic with all its sea-monsters, he in his immortal form can now visit the eternal 'monstrous world' of Hell and see into its secrets. If his body drifts in the sleep of death near Land's End and St. Michael's Mount, his immortal self is meanwhile awake in that eternity where the monster of falsehood is for ever overcome by the angel of light: he is made free of that mountain paradise which in this world is a 'guarded mount' but in eternity is inviolable. That the body of Lycidas should be wafted home would be a mercy for his friends rather than for himself: and when in subsequent lines Milton describes Lycidas in Heaven, the reader who has accepted the full implications of his previous imagery may feel that the lines beginning with the invocation 'Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more' mark not a new departure but the fulfilling of a sentiment which has already been amply suggested.

The lines, then, are unusually pregnant of meaning; if they are also rather elliptical and enigmatic, there is perhaps a personal reason. When Milton thought of Lycidas visiting the bottom of the monstrous world, or drifting by shores which were emblematic of the struggle between light and darkness, between the forces of the mount of Heaven and those of the depths of Hell, he was dwelling on scenes which he already thought of as the true sphere of sublimity for the poet. In the English lines of *At a Vacation Exercise* he described his aspiration that he might in his later poetry

at Heav'ns dore  
 Look in, and see each blissful Deitie  
 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 . . . .

<sup>1</sup> Apart from the mention of such correspondences in the account of the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*, Book One, Milton often shows his interest in these matters. He refers, for example, to the fact that the British maidens Loxo (Corineus's daughter), Upis and Hecaerge were sung in Greek rites

and then, passing to the other extreme of the classical Universe,

tell at length how green-ey'd *Neptune* raves,  
In Heav'ns defiance mustering all his waves . . . .

And in his fifth elegy, written at the age of nineteen, he described the divine frenzy which came upon him in the spring:

Now my mind is whirled up to the heavenly steeps, and, freed from my body, I move 'mid the roving clouds; through the shades I go, moving through grottoes, the penetralia of the bards; the fanes of the gods are open wide for me, wide to their innermost depths; my soul gazes intently on whatever is done in all Olympus's length and breadth, nor do the blind deeps of Tartarus escape mine eyes.<sup>1</sup>

When Milton writes of the 'monstrous world' and the 'guarded Mount', then, he is speaking not only about the eternal state of Lycidas but about his own ultimate poetic aspirations. And when he leaves Lycidas with the words,

Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,  
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good  
To all that wander in that perilous flood,

he is not simply saying that Lycidas will now protect all seafarers, but that he, being possessed of the truth, will be the guardian of those who leave the pastoral forms of poetry and venture upon the perilous flood of a poetry that dares to look into the ultimate questions of Heaven and Hell, the creation of the world and man's true destiny.

This buried note of supreme aspiration on his own behalf may well account for something which has puzzled several critics: the strong note of self-deprecation at the beginning and end of the poem. It is because he is aware of his possible presumption in proposing for himself such subjects that Milton emphasizes in the opening lines his own unreadiness for writing great poetry and at the end refers to himself as the 'uncouth swain'—one who, at the moment, has no immediate plans except for what can be accomplished on the dry land of safe literary pursuits. 'Tomorrow to fresh Woods and Pastures new': he is turning away from mourning, but it is not yet time to launch into the deep.

('Mansus', i. 291). If he was also struck by the resemblance between 'Orcus' and 'Orcades', this might well account for his tendency to think of Hell as related to the ocean, and even, perhaps, for the curious incident where Paradise is carried down in the Flood to the ocean, where it remains a mere rock, 'an Iland salt and bare, / The haunt of Seales and Orcs, and Sea-mews clang' (*Paradise Lost*, xi. 834-5).

<sup>1</sup> 'Elegia Quinta' (l. 197).

In *Lycidas*, the orphic theme is partly buried, yet it helps to reveal the shape of the poem. The same is true with *Paradise Lost*. Milton's conception of Heaven has strong orphic elements. And this means that the poem itself exists in two quite different structures. On the one hand there is the narrative sequence, which largely follows the biblical account and ornaments it; on the other there is the eternal, harmonic order of Heaven, against which all the events take place. These, as it were, constitute the 'higher baroque' in the poem: all the dramatic events and conflicts are ultimately movements and flourishes against another, unchanging pattern—a pattern of light, music, reason, vigour, and righteousness.

This pattern informs Milton's conception of the godhead. When God the Father speaks, he may express something of it, but it is more as though he were acting as spokesman for the divine harmony, which is taken for granted by every being in Heaven. Peculiar vigilance is therefore called for whenever any of the ideas or images involved in the nexus are mentioned. As we have seen, they are not merely related to one another: they are, in certain respects, interchangeable. When the sun rises and scatters the shadows of night (a frequent but unobtrusive image in the poem), it is another way of saying that harmony overcomes chaos, truth falsehood, righteousness iniquity. The easy vigour of the process is the easy vigour of God the Son riding forth in his chariot.

The twofold structure of the poem, on the other hand, is epitomized in the ambiguous nature of Satan. The name 'Satan' in Hebrew means 'the adversary'. In this role he is a dramatic figure, indispensably involved in many of the epic events of the poem. But he is also 'Lucifer', the light-bearer who fell from light: and in this role he is merely passive and static. Withdrawn from the central resources of light, harmony, and reason, he cannot be fully renewed in his angelic nature, and the remainder of his spiritual powers are therefore bent towards corruption.

By means of this complex of imagery, the existence of the Miltonic godhead is felt throughout the first book. It is already there in the description of Hell as 'no light, but rather darkness visible', in line 63; it is there, twenty lines later, in Satan's opening words:

If thou beest he; But O how fall'n! how chang'd  
From him, who in the happy Realms of Light  
Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst out-shine  
Myriads though bright . . . .

The first visual description of Satan falls into the same pattern: shorn of his beams of light, the impression he gives is that of a bulky animal or sea-monster—

*Briareos* or *Typhon*, whom the Den  
By ancient *Tarsus* held, or that Sea-beast  
*Leviathan* . . . .

The note of lost light is persistent. It accounts, I think, for some of the more surprising elements in the first book. Twice, for example, Milton uses the phrase 'a summer's day', and in each case the immediate context and surrounding rhythm suggest that he intends the phrase to carry its full normal suggestion of light, warmth, and happiness. Yet in each case the phrase is used in connexion with a fallen angel. On the first occasion it occurs during the description of Thammuz:

*Thammuz* came next behind,  
Whose annual wound in *Lebanon* allur'd  
The *Syrian* Damsels to lament his fate  
In amorous dittyes all a Summers day,  
While smooth *Adonis* from his native Rock  
Ran purple to the Sea, suppos'd with blood  
Of *Thammuz* yearly wounded . . . . (i. 446-52)

The reason for this sudden deviation into an imagery of light is probably that Thammuz is a figure after the pattern of Orpheus. He too was a god of beauty who was slain; his blood also was associated with a river. Where Orpheus was a god of music, he was a god of love, and he too, therefore, held one of the keys of Heaven. The love-tale might provoke wanton passions, but it was the corruption of a noble emotion: and the sufferings of both gods foreshadowed the sufferings of Christ. (In the seventeenth century a devotional book appeared in France with the title of *Orpheus Eucharisticus*).<sup>1</sup> Similarly with Mulciber. The fall of his creative and artistic energies is a tragic corruption of the noblest:

. . . and in *Ausonian* land  
Men called him *Mulciber*; and how he fell  
From Heav'n they fabl'd, thrown by angry *Jove*  
Sheer o're the Chrystal Battlements; from Morn  
To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,  
A Summers day; and with the setting Sun  
Dropt from the Zenith like a falling Star,  
On *Lemnos* th' *Ægæan* Ile . . . . (i. 739-46)

<sup>1</sup> Mayerson (op. cit.) cites Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw, A Study in Baroque Sensibility*, Louisiana, 1939, p. 72.



The note of nostalgia with which Milton here surrounds his fallen angels reaches its culmination at the end of the first book, when he compares them to the fairies which a countryman sees, 'or dreams he sees', 'while over-head the Moon / Sits Arbitress, and neerer to the Earth / Wheels her pale course . . . .' The light of the moon is like an unearthly reflection of the heavenly light that has been lost. It introduces a final, nostalgic, 'placing' of the angels in this book. Set against the world of light they are now insignificant. But as they retire to the new, artificially lit hall of Pandaemonium, the threat constituted by their darkness begins to grow.

In Book Two there is little reference to the heavenly order. Hell is seen as it sees itself. Satan, in command of the scene, shows his tremendous power and even his nobility. He retains the basis of his heavenly nature—and if by his fall he has automatically cut himself off from the nexus that links light, reason, and righteousness, the effects are not yet evident. They are, however, hinted at. He can act magnificently but not rightly, he can reason but not hit the truth, he can express himself elegantly but not beautifully, he can lead cleverly but not achieve the effortless sovereignty by which light dispels darkness.

In Book Three, on the other hand, Light is the all-embracing theme. As Milton invokes it, he mentions that until now he has been forced to write 'with other notes than to th'Orphean Lyre'. At every point in the description of Heaven, he dwells on imagery of light and harmony. As Satan flies into the human universe, so re-entering the precincts of light, he becomes aware for the first time of the extent of his loss. When he asks Uriel for information, for example, the answer stings, for every word of it speaks of the splendour of the universe and the glory of its creator.

By the beginning of Book Four, therefore, he is in a quite different situation. Throughout Books One and Two he was gaining confidence from the overwhelming support of the fallen angels and from their ready acknowledgement of his leadership. Now, exposed to the full majesty of the light that he has lost, he is forced to avow the truth which he has hitherto been hiding even from himself. The avowal is made, fittingly, in an address to the sun. During the rest of the book, his glimpses of paradise and of the happiness of Adam and Eve constantly exacerbate his sense of loss. The book concludes with a scene which contains some of the most powerful moments in the poem. Satan, discovered by Ithuriel in the form of a toad whispering in the ear of Eve, is brought before Gabriel. At the moment of discovery,

when he starts up like a fiend, he is abashed to discover that Ithuriel and his fellow cherub do not even recognize him, so changed is he into a 'grieslie King'. Just when he has been 'pining his loss' he is reminded yet again that his lustre is irreparably impaired. He is then called upon to confront Gabriel, who orders him back to Hell under threat of dire violence if he does not obey:

So threatn'd hee, but *Satan* to no threats  
Gave heed, but waxing more in rage repli'd.

Then when I am thy captive talk of chaines,  
Proud limitarie Cherube, but ere then  
Farr heavier load thy self expect to feel  
From my prevailing arme, though Heavens King  
Ride on thy wings, and thou with thy Compeers,  
Us'd to the yoak, draw'st his triumphant wheels  
In progress through the rode of Heav'n Star-pav'd.

While thus he spake, th'Angelic Squadron bright  
Turnd fierie red, sharpning in mooned hornes  
Thir Phalanx, and began to hemm him round  
With ported Spears, as thick as when a field  
Of *Ceres* ripe for harvest waving bends  
Her bearded Grove of ears, which way the wind  
Swayes them; the careful Plowman doubting stands  
Least on the threshing floore his hopeful sheaves  
Prove chaff. On th'other side *Satan* allarm'd  
Collecting all his might dilated stood,  
Like *Teneriffe* or *Atlas* unremov'd:  
His stature reach'd the Skie, and on his Crest  
Sat horror Plum'd; nor wanted in his graspe  
What seemd both Spear and Shield: now dreadful deeds  
Might have ensu'd, nor onely Paradise  
In this commotion, but the Starrie Cope  
Of Heav'n perhaps, or all the Elements  
At least had gon to rack, disturbed and torne  
With violence of this conflict, had not soon  
Th'Eternal to prevent such horrid fray  
Hung forth in Heav'n his golden Scales, yet seen  
Betwixt *Astrea* and the *Scorpion* signe,  
Wherein all things created first he weighd,  
The pendulous round Earth with ballanc't Aire  
In counterpoise, now ponders all events,  
Battels and Realms: in these he put two weights  
The sequel each of parting and of fight;  
The latter quick up flew, and kickt the beam;  
Which *Gabriel* spying, thus bespake the Fiend.

*Satan*, I know thy strength, and thou knowst mine,  
 Neither our own but giv'n; what follie then  
 To boast what Arms can doe, since thine no more  
 Then Heav'n permits, nor mine, though doubl'd now  
 To trample thee as mire: for proof look up,  
 And read thy Lot in yon celestial Sign  
 Where thou art weigh'd, and shown how light, how weak,  
 If thou resist. The Fiend lookt up and knew  
 His mounted scale aloft: nor more; but fled  
 Murmuring, and with him fled the shades of night.

Several points in this passage have attracted the attention of critics. The first is the metaphor of the husbandman and the sheaves. It has been argued that the imagery of fertility, with Satan as a simple ploughman, does not consort well with the atmosphere of tension in the scene or with Satan's terribleness: even so skilled a defender of Milton's imagery as Mr. Christopher Ricks falls back on the idea that this is perhaps an example of the digressive epic simile, such as the lengthy pastoral similes which sometimes interrupt a battle sequence and afford a period of respite from the descriptions of violence.<sup>1</sup> Here, however, the battle has hardly begun, and the description is rather short for such a digression. The purposes of the image, I should say, are rather vivid and ironic. The images of the waving corn suggest the essential innocence of the angels, with the waving ears accurately portraying their ported swords. Satan has no immediate fear of them. He possesses the assurance of a labourer about to begin the harvest. Milton may be remembering some lines from Phineas Fletcher's *The Apollyonists*, where the devil Apollyon, proclaiming his confidence in victory, says,

Follow'd by these brave spirits, I nothing feare  
 To conquer Earth, or Heaven itselſe assayle,  
 To shake the starres, as thick from fixed ſpheare,  
 As when a ruſtick arme with ſtubborne flayle,  
 Beats out his harveſt from the ſwelling eare,  
 T'eclipse the moone, and ſun himſelf injayle.<sup>2</sup>

Satan's presumption is about to be thwarted. But Milton's irony goes deeper. His labourer, who seems to be in complete command of the situation, is in fact full of care—wondering at

<sup>1</sup> C. Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 129–30.

<sup>2</sup> Phineas Fletcher, *Poems* (ed. A. Grosart), p.p., 1869, ii. 100.

the very moment of harvest whether the harvest will prove to be worth while. The description of him as the 'ploughman' might indeed suggest that he has been anxious about the harvest for a very long time. And this, of course, corresponds to what we know about Satan. He has no physical fear, but we have been shown throughout the book that he is pining inwardly. When he is shown the scales in the sky, it is this inward, doubting self who responds.

The incident of the scales has also prompted discussion. Critics from Doctor Johnson to Professor Empson have drawn attention to the fact that at this point, when Satan is at the mercy of the angels, he is allowed to escape. It seems to Professor Empson like wanton vindictiveness of the part of God the Father, a rugged determination that man shall fall and Satan be punished further.<sup>1</sup> Answers may be suggested: God the Father wishes to prevent the destruction which would be involved, whereas he is not concerned to prevent the temptation of man, since this is both an exercise of his freedom and a test of his virtue. Yet we may still ask why the incident was introduced at all, and in such a prominent place. It would have been easy enough for Ithuriel to drive Satan away—why this deliberate encounter, with the questions that it raises?

The main reason, I think, is that it brings to a climax the theme of Satan's twofold nature. Mr. John Peter feels that Satan's ignominious flight is a serious change of character, since it is unlike anything that we have seen from him before.<sup>2</sup> What we are witnessing, however, is not a change in Satan's character but a transformation of its economy. There has been a rapid change from the dramatic mode to the eternal. So long as he is facing Gabriel, Satan is the Adversary and can match him in dramatic power, but when he sees the scales in heaven his other self, the Lucifer who fell from the precincts of Heaven and who has been pining inwardly ever since his return, becomes dominant. The relation between Gabriel and Satan is the relationship between two dramatic characters; the relationship between Satan and God is that between darkness and light, between an evil principle and a good principle: it is subject to different laws. Milton confirms the change of mode with his final image: Satan

fled

Murmuring, and with him fled the shades of night.

<sup>1</sup> W. Empson, *Milton's God*, London, 1961, pp. 112-14.

<sup>2</sup> J. Peter, *A Critique of Paradise Lost*, London, 1960, p. 55.

The presentation of Satan in these two modes involves an extremely complex effect, which relies on the reader responding with some agility. In Milton's day, however, when men were more accustomed to see human events against both an immediate pattern and an eternal order, they were more experienced in making this sort of jump.

Although Satan's degradation through the poem is implicit in his alienation from the sources of light, he possesses the other attributes of an angel, and until he has degraded himself by his own actions, his power is extremely attractive. This attractiveness has its counterpart in another of Milton's heroes. In youth he was fascinated by the figures of Orpheus and of Apollo, but he never completely identified himself with either. Orpheus might be a possessor of the divine music, but as a pagan he was automatically doomed to the destruction which overcame him. Apollo's powers were essentially pre-Christian: at the advent of Christ they were dimmed. Milton made this clear by calling him 'unshorn Apollo' in his poem *At a Vacation Exercise*.<sup>1</sup> His true hero would need to combine the righteousness of the Hebrew order with the music and beauty of the Greek. Milton therefore found his model of heroism in Samson. His strength he took to be symbolic of his righteousness, while the hair in which his secret lay was, like the hair of Apollo, a radiant adornment to the rest of his body. His strength and his grace were inseparably united.

Samson perhaps inspired Milton from an early age. It may be that when he wore his hair long and was called the 'Lady of Christ's', he was deliberately assuming the part of the bardic prophet in a way which was then uncommon. Certainly when the image of Samson occurs in his prose works, the language is always heightened. In writing of monarchy, for example, he describes the good monarch as a Samson-like figure who at first

grows up to a noble strength and perfection with those his illustrious and sunny locks the laws waving and curling about his godlike shoulders . . . . But laying down his head among the strumpet flatteries of Prelats, while he sleeps and thinks no harme, they wickedly shaving off all those bright and waighty tresses of his laws, and just prerogatives which were his ornament and strength, deliver him over to indirect and violent counsels . . . . Till he knowing his prelatical razor to have bereft him of his wonted might, nourish again his puissant hair, the golden beames of Law and Right; and they sternly shook, thunder with ruin

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, ll. 175-7.

upon the heads of those his evil counsellors, but not without great affliction to himself.<sup>1</sup>

One notices the sun-imagery at work in these lines, giving Samson the radiance of Apollo. And when, in *Areopagitica*, he uses the figure of Samson to express his idea of England awakening, he follows it immediately with similar imagery:

Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: Methinks I see her as an Eagle muing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazl'd eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long abused sight at the fountain it self of heav'nly radiance . . .

When we set the fallen Satan against this image of an Apollonian Samson, we see the standard by which Milton is judging him. If we imagine a spirit possessing Samson's physical strength without his righteousness and sun-like radiance, we have a fair picture of Satan after the fall.

When, later in his life, Milton came to write a drama about Samson, he presented him differently. In his unhappy first marriage and his subsequent blindness, Milton had himself fulfilled the biblical account in a way that he could hardly have foreseen. In his final drama, therefore, he depicts the Samson who has been shorn of his locks, but who, by remaining faithful to himself and to his God while his hair grows again, is enabled to win a final resounding victory. There is a personal reference just below the surface throughout, and this gives the work a unity and consistency which makes it readily coherent to the reader. It is as though Milton has gathered his strength together to affirm himself for the last time. When Manoah cries, at the end,

*Samson hath quit himself  
Like Samson . . . .*

it is like a final assertion of Milton's own poetic identity.

It was this firm note of defensive power in Milton that appealed most to Wordsworth. Like Milton, Wordsworth found great difficulty in committing himself to any organized religious body, yet he also felt the need of defending certain human and superhuman values which seemed to be threatened in his day. To him, the essential Milton was the poet who had combined

<sup>1</sup> *The Reason of Church Government*, conclusion (III. 276-7). Cf. the *First Defence*, ch. iv (VII. 219).

his assertions of faith with a personal humility and capacity for service to his fellows. He liked best the sonnets where Milton wrote on his blindness, or on the nature of liberty, or on his late wife; he also admired *Samson Agonistes*. He found the true Miltonic note in these poems and, in spite of a deep admiration, felt no call to imitate *Paradise Lost*. 'Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir / of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—/ I pass them unalarmed . . .' he wrote in the preface to his own projected epic poem.

When Blake read these lines, he wrote an angry note of protest in the margin.<sup>1</sup> His own view of Milton was different. Where Wordsworth saw a steadfast defender, Blake saw a poetic visionary. He might be a failed visionary in some ways—Blake felt that he had not had the courage of his own convictions—but he was still a great imaginative poet. Blake particularly approved of the passage in which Milton denounced the so-called inspiration of 'Dame Memory and her Siren Daughters' and called for 'devout prayer to that eternall Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge';<sup>2</sup> yet he felt that Milton had not yielded himself enough to the forces of inspiration. Milton, he said, had been wrong to say that Adam and Eve received any sort of new pleasure after the Fall: the Fall could not produce any pleasure.<sup>3</sup> In his own poem, *Milton*, he reworked the story of *Paradise Lost* to a climax where the sombre and silent Puritan in Milton finally learned to annihilate his own Selfhood and release into full liberty the eternal visionary poet.

Reading *Paradise Lost*, Blake came to the conclusion that Milton had not understood his own poem. He thought that the speeches of God the Father in the poem marked him as an embodiment of human reason in the Newtonian tradition, while Satan was the embodiment of energy. In other words, when Satan had fallen, God the Father had fallen too. Deprived of Satan's energy, Heaven had become a void of abstract reasonings.<sup>4</sup>

Blake's interpretation of the events of the poem turned it completely into a psychological drama; and in so far as the poem can be read that way, he has won the sympathy of many readers. But he missed the other element in Milton's struggle—the effort to relate the psychological allegory of the poem to the traditional

<sup>1</sup> Blake, *Complete Writings*, London, 1957, p. 784; cf. pp. 782–3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457.

<sup>3</sup> See Mona Wilson, *Life of William Blake*, London, 1948, pp. 358–9.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 150.

order of things. The romantic poet who saw most clearly this Milton was Coleridge. In his early writing he was perhaps more obsessed by Milton than any other poet has been: Miltonic turns of phrase can be traced through many of his poems, culminating in the extraordinary complex of Miltonic reference in *Kubla Khan*.<sup>1</sup> One reason for his fascination was that he shared Milton's central aspiration—the desire to bring together all human experience, scientific, aesthetic, and religious into a single interpretative pattern.

In Milton's time the enterprise was extremely hazardous; by Coleridge's, success was becoming almost impossible. Human learning had passed the point where it could be gathered together in this way. The record of Coleridge's quest is valuable, but it is to be found in notebooks and letters and criticisms as well as in his poems. Milton had been more successful in compassing a body of achieved poetry.

To survey that poetry over its fullest range is to see something of what Professor Kermode means when he describes Milton as a man who 'exhibits life in a great symbolic attitude'.<sup>2</sup> For Milton's poetry begins with the orphic and ends with the human. In the early poems, such as *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, Milton perceives the principle of music in all things; and when he writes *Lycidas*, he can still place at the heart of it his vision of the poet as divine harmonist. In *Samson Agonistes*, on the other hand, it is the defensive posture that is paramount: Samson, shorn and blinded, displays the renewal of his strength by refusing to abandon his vision.

*Paradise Lost* is the epitome of that development. It too begins with the orphic and ends with the human. Some readers maintain that the best part of the poem comes after the Fall, for then, they say, Adam and Eve, who have hitherto been living in an artificial situation, turn into 'real people'. Some eighteenth-century critics would have agreed with them. Johnson, for example, wrote a novel which began with the presupposition that if we were in a paradise like Milton's we should probably want to leave it, while Bentley emended the last lines to read:

Then hand in hand with social steps their way  
Through Eden took, with Heavenly Comfort cheer'd.

<sup>1</sup> See e.g., J. L. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, London, 1927, pp. 374–6 etc., and my *Coleridge the Visionary*, London, 1959, pp. 216–17, 233–7, and index, s.v. Milton.

<sup>2</sup> 'Adam Unparadis'd', in *The Living Milton* (ed. J. F. Kermode), London, 1960, pp. 86, 123. The phrase itself is Lascelles Abercrombie's.



Milton, on the other hand, was concerned to show that, though the life of Adam and Eve after the Fall could still be a good life, it must necessarily be a second best. Unlike his eighteenth-century critics, he had begun life in an age when the Elizabethan vision still lingered and when English culture from the church and village green to the court and university was dominated, physically and intellectually, by music. In his early youth it had been possible to believe, as the Florentines had done, that the whole of knowledge was about to be revealed and to be shown as harmonious; and when he was still young it had seemed that a just and harmonious republic might be established in England which would later spread to embrace the whole earth.

In *Paradise Lost*, therefore, Milton was writing the spiritual history of his century, a century in which he had seen possibilities of happiness and how they could be lost through pride, self-seeking and the fear of death. His poem ends, as it were, at the beginning of the Augustan era, and Adam's later speeches show something of his attitude to the new order. To Bentley, a child of the eighteenth century, Milton's final picture was so convincing that Adam's condition seemed not unenviable, and he altered the end of the poem to conform with his view. But to Milton, who had glimpsed other possibilities, the steps of Adam and Eve into the new age could not be anything but wandering and slow.

Even while Milton was writing his poetry, Newton and Leibnitz were working on the discoveries which were to transform the century. Because of their work, we do not normally see light as Milton saw it, and we customarily separate the laws of science from those of music. And what we now know of the human nervous system makes it difficult for us to think of reason in the way that Milton conceived it. A massive adjustment of our terms of thought is necessary before we can re-enter the Miltonic identity and view the world from inside it. The reward of such an adjustment, however, is that the poetry is liberated: we can respond to its complexity without being oppressed by a sense of contradiction. As we begin to apprehend the Miltonic identity, we are likely to share Wordsworth's respect for its great defensive posture and Blake's enthusiasm for its visionary assertion; we may also see, with Coleridge, a poet unable to rest in his conviction that the external universe must correspond to the inner man, that the truth of things must somehow involve a harmony which reconciles the mathematical stringency of the

scientist with the visionary enthusiasm of the artist, and that only so far as such a link is established can man be liberated from his enslavement to the past or future and achieve true freedom.

The progress of our civilization has led us in another direction. Like Keats, we feel that we ought to explore the world of thought and sensation without previous commitment. Yet such a course involves its own hazards: as Keats discovered, the price of a completely unlimited exploration may be a corresponding loss of personal identity. For him, the course was inevitable: poetic artifice must necessarily have meant falsification. But in Milton's time, poetic artifice could still be a means of expressing a strong human and imaginative identity in all its complexity and in its individualistic relation to its age. By the time that Blake and Keats were writing, this sense of correspondence between man, society, and heavenly order had become so tenuous that an epic expression of it, even through artifice, had become impossible. Milton's poetry, with its strength and ornamentation, was the last to achieve that sort of success, and it is in that that a part of its idiosyncratic greatness consists.