

MILTON'S GOD



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some earlier remarks of mine about *Paradise Lost* that I was blaming a giraffe for not being a rabbit. That is, the *Extasie* of Donne is like a rabbit, the kind of poem whose form admits of our examining what it means, but when I picked on details of the epic which interested me, as evidence of the breadth of Milton's mind, this critic thought I was complaining at some lack of petty correctness, whereas the reader of an epic ought to admire the broad strokes of the brush. The theory would be hard to explain to Milton. I have tried to follow his whole account of the tragedy of Satan, and it seems to me a very large-minded one. I think that a critic who cannot follow it, because he thinks Milton wants us to pick small holes in Satan all the time, has been prevented either by a false theory or by some distressing want in his own nature from realizing the size of the giraffe.

Chapter 3

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DR JOHNSON, in his *Life of Milton*, refused to discuss the character of God in *Paradise Lost*, remarking that the topic was not proper for a slight occasion. Probably many present-day readers are in sympathy with this attitude, and as much on literary as on religious grounds. They feel: 'Milton here was trying to express the ineffable, so we cannot be very cross or surprised at having him fail; and there is not likely to be much profit in worrying over the causes of his failure, as we cannot tell what would have succeeded. It would be more sensible to make the best of the good parts, as one commonly has to do in English Literature.' I think his treatment of God so strange that it rewards inquiry. But, in any case, tactful reticence is no longer enough here, and firm treatment can at least I think counter one reaction which has become widespread. It is that of settled disgust, perhaps never more firmly expressed than by Professor Yvor Winters in *The Function of Criticism* (1957):

It requires more than a willing suspension of disbelief to read Milton; it requires a willing suspension of intelligence. A good many years ago I found Milton's procedure more nearly defensible than I find it now; I find that I grow extremely tired of the meaningless inflation, the tedious falsification of the materials by way of excessive emotion. . . . [Comparison to the gods in Homer] . . . Milton, however, is concerned with a deity and with additional supernatural agents who are conceived in extremely

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intellectual terms; our conceptions of them are the result of more than 2000 years of the most profound and complex intellectual activity in the history of the human race. Milton's form is such that he must first reduce these beings to something much nearer the form of the Homeric gods than their proper form, and then must treat his ridiculously degraded beings in heroic language.

One can quite see that, read in this way, the poem is very bad. But reading it so is merely one of the harmful effects of modern literary theory; Milton would not be 'aesthetic' about God like that. We can be sure of it, because he is willing to lecture very drily in the poem when he needs to make the theoretical position clear, for example about the digestive system of an angel (v. 410). Also, he did not share the respect of Yvor Winters for the intellectual labours of the Schoolmen, or of Aristotle either, and was fond of saying that our only sound evidence about God is the text of Holy Writ. He was thus likely to feel that he was sweeping away nonsense, insisting upon reality, when he presented God in this simplified way; it would give him a certain fighting exhilaration, so far from what Yvor Winters denounced that the critic probably felt about his own bit of writing a pale echo of what the poet had felt about his epic. Milton would also consider that even this way of writing about God, though the best, was very limited because God is ineffable; in the *De Doctrina*, he is inclined to think that no man or angel could see God, and that God could only act through the agency of the Son. The feeling of this comes out, though perhaps not the literal meaning, when Raphael says:

*Commission from above
I have receiv'd, to answer thy desire*

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*Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain
To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope
Things not reveal'd which th'invisible King
Only Omniscient bath supprest in Night,
To none communicable in Earth or Heaven. (VII. 120)*

Yet he was determined to present the whole of the relevant text of Genesis, however literally false in his own opinion; as by making God walk in the Garden, or punish the race of serpents. The surface effect is much what Yvor Winters described, but Milton had a very different purpose; the requirement made him give a grim picture of God, as he came to realize increasingly, one would think, while the work of detailed imagination went forward. Such, he considered, is the only kind of thing our minds can know about God; and the result is to give an exposure from the inside of what goes on in the minds of Christians. I think this at least saves the poem from the pompous fatuity which Yvor Winters would otherwise be very right to disapprove.

It seems to me that Milton leaves out only one major theological doctrine, and that he was right to, although the results are rather startling. The western half of the Eurasian land mass, unlike the eastern, has long regarded its supreme God or ultimate reality as a person; but has also long realized that this is a tricky belief which requires a subtle qualification. His Godhead must be mysteriously one with Goodness itself, so that he neither imposes the moral law by ukase as a tyrant nor is himself bound by it as external to him. As regards his Godhead, he is the impersonal Absolute of Hinduism; he is built into the moral structure of the universe so as to be quite unlike other persons, and his other unique powers (omnipotence, omniscience and absolute foreknowledge) are merely a

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result. If you deny that God is a person, as many people do, you will not agree with Yvor Winters that the western intellectual activity has been profounder than the eastern; but you have to agree that the western theologians were trying to handle a real difficulty. Milton in his poem, apart from a few bare assertions perhaps, does not handle it at all. This was partly because he thought that the profound intellectual activity had often cheated; but, in any case, if God is to be shown acting in a story, we have something better to do than take his status for granted. The fundamental purpose of putting elaborate detail into a story is to enable us to use our judgement about the characters; often both their situation and their moral convictions, or their scales of value, are very unlike our own, but we use the detail to imagine how they feel when they act as they do, so that we 'know what to make of them'. Understanding that other people are different is one of the bases of civilization, and this use for a story is as much a culture-conquest as the idea of God. Milton therefore could not have made God automatically good in the epic; God is on trial, as Professor Dickhoff well remarked; and the reason is that all the characters are on trial in any civilized narrative.

You may still say, even after accepting this argument, that Milton does not make God come out of the trial as well as he should; and the poet could answer that it was not his immediate business to invent a new theology. That a third of the angels reject the claims of God was inherent in the story; Abdiel tells them that God should be obeyed because he is good, and they deny that he is good; so it would be no use for Abdiel to tell them about the refinements of Aquinas.* We are bound to be impressed by the weight of their testimony. Thus Sir Herbert Grierson soberly remarked (*Milton and Words-*

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worth, 1937; p. 116) 'if the third part of a school or college or nation broke into rebellion we should be driven, or strongly disposed, to suspect some mismanagement by the supreme powers'; he does not discuss how Milton could have avoided this effect, but I think one must agree that Milton's treatment draws attention to it, and that it is what is fundamentally wrong about the behaviour of his God. The initial error of Satan is that he doubts the credentials of God, and I, like Grierson, naturally think of a Professor doubting the credentials of his Vice-Chancellor; such a man would not be pursued with infinite malignity into eternal torture, but given evidence which put the credentials beyond doubt. To be sure, there could be no such placid solution when Milton doubted the credentials of Charles I, but the poem assumes that the cases were quite different, because God really had got credentials. We know that he could have convinced Satan, because he actually does it when he reduces Satan to despair on Niphates' top. God need not have shown his credentials in the manner calculated to produce the greatest suffering and moral corruption for both the malcontent angels and ourselves; it is in this sense, to recall an objection of C. S. Lewis, that Shelley could reasonably call Satan's wrongs 'beyond measure'. Regarding *Paradise Lost* as written to justify God for creating a world so full of sin and misery, it surely deserves the astonishment with which so many critics have regarded it; and critics who argue otherwise, whether out of piety or not, seem to me to preach an immoral moral.

Part of the explanation has to be that Milton wanted us to imagine the temptation which made Satan fall, to realize how Satan might reasonably come to believe that God is a usurper, or at least what the belief would feel like. Surely this must have been his purpose in writing

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the very queer words of the Father to the Son at the beginning of the revolt:

*Nearly it now concerns us to be sure
Of our Omnipotence, and with what Arms
We mean to hold what anciently we claim
Of Deity or Empire . . .
Let us advise, and to this hazard draw
With speed what force is left, and all employ
In our defence, lest unawares we lose
This our high place, our Sanctuary, our Hill. (v. 720)*

Here we are actually shown God 'doubting his empire', which is what Satan began the poem by telling us God had done. Many a Christian reader must have been sufficiently unnerved here to wonder whether Milton's theology was going very wrong, till a few lines later the reply of the Son reassured him that this is merely one of God's jokes. The Son regards the strategy as a plan to restore his own badly shaken prestige:

*Mighty Father, thou thy foes
Justly hast in derision, and secure
Laughst at their vain designs and tumults vain,
Matter to mee of Glory, whom their hate
Illustrates, when they see all Regal Power
Giv'n me to quell their pride, and in th'event
Know whether I be dextrous to subdue
Thy Rebels, or be found the worst in Heav'n.*

It is an interesting point about our feelings, I think, that we feel no objection to this answer. One might point out that the Son can only be pretending to face a test, because the magic he is being given is all-powerful; so that really his jeering is as coarse as his Father's. The same kind of hole has been picked in the courage of the divinely

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equipped heroes of Homer, and feels off the point there too; perhaps because we need not expect the Bronze Age chieftains to believe quite completely in the magic of their weapons. Even if we call the Son simple-minded here, we don't feel that is to his discredit; the youth is eager to win his spurs. At this minor point, we can be content to read the poem like Yvor Winters as an imitation of Homer. But we cannot feel the same about the joke of the Father, and as Yvor Winters said the reason is a metaphysical one; though far short of the full horror of the story. The joke becomes appallingly malignant if you realize that God has a second purpose in remaining passive; to give the rebels false evidence that he is a usurper, and thus drive them into real evil. Milton himself necessarily understood that this was part of the meaning, but he did not care to thrust it upon all readers; he wanted, without yielding on his own convictions, to make the tremendous piece of engineering as broad in its appeal as he could, acceptable to all Protestant sects. Most readers, of course, have found no such horrible implication in God's joke; they have found it pretty flat, but thereby all the more jovial in an Old Testament manner. Even so, they have felt that such a joke, while natural enough from simple omnipotence, does not suggest a transcendent God whose Godhead is mysteriously identical with Goodness. Without quite noticing it, they are already regarding Milton's God rather as Satan does.

The force with which Satan's rhetoric hits the reader derives partly from the fact that the story makes him seem evidently right. Going through the first two books for the first time, a Christian is likely to feel that the Devil is merely trying to seduce his judgement in a striking manner; but as he goes on with the poem and encounters God he is almost bound, if at all instructed in his

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theology, to feel a secret resistance—"This can't be God." Satan was intended to strike terror into the reader, not to be a figure of farce, and such a reaction would add to the terror, or indeed be the real basis for it—"Satan is so subtle that he is actually liable to seduce you while you read about him." Milton would presumably become aware of this dramatic effect, but it would not be his reason for telling the story as he did. Even if he remained unaware I am not proposing a new way to read the poem, because I claim to point out what often went on in the minds of pious readers who were deeply impressed by it.

It is hard to make this claim about any view of the words by which God is made to start the whole action of the poem. All angels must henceforth obey the Christ, he says, on pain of eternal expulsion, because

*This day have I begot whom I declare
My only Son* (v. 600)

One would expect the readers to be shocked for several reasons. Mr Grant McColley is rather too smooth at this stage of his proof that the material of the poem was standard tradition:

During Milton's era, the belief that the Exaltation (and Incarnation) occasioned Satan's rebellion enjoyed appreciable literary prestige. (p. 33)

On page 257 he admits that making the Exaltation the only cause is "unique among works closely related to *Paradise Lost*". Still, the Latin *Battle of the Angels* by Valamarana (1623) had made Satan revolt because God prophesied the Incarnation, before he created man. The poet was using a reputable theory; Calvin, of all people, rejected it because the Incarnation could not be necessary till the Fall had occurred, so he maintained that Christ

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had always been King of the Angels (A. H. Gilbert, *The Composition of Paradise Lost*, 1947). Thus the theory would be well known among fit readers, and it would take them over the first jolt of accepting Milton's story. Both Mr McColley and Mr Gilbert explain the shocking part, so far as they recognize it, as due to the gradual growth of the epic from a drama; thus Mr McColley feels he is winning his case when he emphasizes

the impropriety of describing God as twice exalting the Son, and commanding the angels to bow before him. Such a Divine Decree as the Exaltation was as irrevocable as it was eternal. (p. 316)

Books III and V, on this view, must report the same scene in Heaven, and different aspects of it were merely separated for the literary requirements of epic construction. This view lets you off attending to the story, and anything which does that ends by making you feel the poetry is bad. The poem exalts the Son a third time when he ends the war, and Milton might well think that the purposes of the Father though eternal were realized gradually in time. I am grateful to Mr McColley for showing that Milton did not decide on the order of the poem till he had composed a good deal of it; for example, I have long wondered why Beelzebub is not named as Satan's 'next subordinate' at v. 670, but now agree that Milton when he composed the lines thought he was giving the character a lead-in at the beginning of the story. But I do not believe that this idea of gradual development is enough to explain any important crux in the final version. Delighted by achieving the perfect order, Milton would have the whole text as far as it had got read over to him to make sure that the details clicked into place; the detail about Beelzebub would not need correcting, and of course to correct it

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might involve changing a lot of lines for their musical value. Raphael may just as well never name Beelzebub. But we are not to think that Milton was careless about revision, like a collaborator in an Elizabethan play; he would only behave like that if he came to think that an accident due to his method of composition had been inspired. When he separates these councils in Heaven, he takes for granted that God foreknew the effects of the first exaltation of the Son, and indeed exalted the Son because he foreknew that the Son would choose the Incarnation. Hence the order of events in Milton could be seen as reconciling the opposed theories; it makes God look artful, but maybe only because Milton was trying to act as chairman. We should agree, I think, that the poem was written piecemeal and fitted together gradually, but not that this makes it 'merely episodic'; it records a prolonged effort to justify God.

Masson found that the Rev. T. Tomkins, then aged twenty-eight, was the official who licensed the poem for publication, and supposed with Victorian gaiety that he could not stand more than the first Book. But this was a time when the Anglicans really did persecute, and the poem must have been scrutinized. It is an effort to realize that Milton was fairly safe about this beginning to his story, because it used a familiar text which had always needed explaining away. "This day I have begot" comes in Psalms ii. 7, apparently as part of a prophecy that the Kings of the Jews will rule the uttermost parts of the earth, and St Paul reasonably supposes (Hebrews i. 5-8) that the passage had best be regarded as foretelling the Christ. At least, he recalls it to the Hebrews among other Old Testament quotations, but he may have believed that this one had been applied to Jesus directly. A Pelican Book *Beyond the Gospels* by Roderic Dunkerley (1957)

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gives the rather complicated textual background, much of which was available to Milton. When Jesus is baptized, explains Mr Dunkerley, the voice from Heaven is naturally enough made to complete the quotation: "Thou art my (beloved) Son; this day I have begotten thee" in a variety of the surviving records—

in 'Bezae' and also in some early Church writers, including . . . the Ebionite Gospel. . . . Canon Streeter, a great authority on the Gospels, believed that this was the correct reading in Luke, because the tendency was for the scribes to bring the Gospels into harmony with each other.

Thus there is evidence of disagreement or embarrassment about the use of the phrase at the Baptism, which Milton would find interesting. Mr Robert Graves (*The Nazarene Gospel Restored*, 1953) gives authority for regarding the use in Psalm ii as a coronation formula (viii. a), but as one based on an older ceremony of adoption (vii. d). To regard it as an adoption formula seems enough; the literal absurdity of "This day I have begotten this man" drove home a specific meaning—"from now on, he is to count as my son in every way". This fits the use in the Psalm, and the Synoptists would wish to fulfil the Scriptures; but, on second thoughts, you couldn't say it to a person who was already your son, so for God to say it to Jesus might be misunderstood. Milton in the *De Doctrina* (Chapter V) gives a rather lengthy analysis of the extended sense of *beget*, including the idea of giving a special honour, as in the final glorification of the Son. He accepts the Son as begotten before all worlds and as the Father's instrument for creating the angels, though not as equal or identical to him, and of course does not think that the Father begot the Son in a human manner. His Arianism must have been

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knocking about in his mind when he boldly transferred the phrase to the occasion of the fall of Satan, but the text was already so abstruse that the orthodox could hardly complain. I imagine that this gave him a certain sense of glee; but, in any case, it is hard to see what other device would have given him the necessary start at a point of time for his epic narrative. The technical difficulty had been in his mind, because he expressed it through the voice of Adam:

*what cause
Mov'd the creator in his holy Rest
Through all Eternity so late to build . . . (VII. 90)*

But, however necessary the device may have been, it makes the case for Satan's revolt look much stronger. If the Son had inherently held this position from before the creation of all angels, why has it been officially withheld from him till this day, and still more, why have the angels not previously been told that he was the agent of their creation? Unless he had always deserved the position, as Milton at least believed when writing the relevant passages of the *De Doctrina*, the case as put by C. S. Lewis, for example, falls to the ground. Thirdly, to give no reason at all for the Exaltation makes it appear a challenge, intended to outrage a growing intellectual dissatisfaction among the angels with the claims of God. Whether or not a reader feels dissatisfied by this slight jolt in the narrative, Satan and his troops object to it so much that they find it sufficient ground for revolt. Even granting that Milton wanted to give Satan a real temptation, he was not wholly concentrated at the time on trying to justify God. But there is no need to regard this as a mistake; he would probably answer that he was telling us a deep truth about the nature of God, whose apparently arbitrary

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harshness is intended to test us with baffling moral problems. To give us this warning is clearly more important than simply to whitewash God; indeed that would be a very irresponsible thing to do. Such is the real defence; and one may also suspect that, in a more casual but more impulsive part of his mind, he was angry with the people of England for rejecting the Rule of the Saints, and would not have minded punishing them a bit himself; so far as that went, he could feel himself on the same side as his punishing God.

His God has in any case an authoritarian character, just what one would expect from a usurping angel, which can be felt all the time in Heaven, even in the relations of the angels with one another. Probably most readers recognize the trouble about him only in this diffused way, and the effect is that they merely blame the literary treatment. But why do the angels have to be organized into an elaborate hierarchy at all? Are they organized to do something, or is it merely what is called a 'pecking order' among hens? C. S. Lewis quotes some fine passages from Milton in both prose and verse to show that he had long loved the idea of a social order which can act perfectly because certain of loyal co-operation; he connects this with Milton's love of formal dignity in both life and art; indeed the idea that discipline secures freedom, he says, is 'perhaps the central paradox of his vision'. I cannot remember which critic extracted a mystical vision, surprisingly but I think justly, from the harsh words with which God begins all the trouble by promoting his Son:

*Under his great Vice-regent Reign abide
United as one individual Soul
For ever happy; him who disobeys
Mee disobeys, breaks union, and that day*

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*Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place
Ordain'd without redemption, without end.* (v. 160)

The second line feels oddly like Wordsworth, and Milton did I believe envisage here something like the biological co-operation of innumerable cells to make a man. The eternal curses which follow make the idea very remote; indeed, for most of the time Milton rather labours, with firm good sense one would think, to make the angels very like men and evidently not parts of a universal soul. I agree that he loved the order and unity of Heaven, though the poetry about it never strikes me as haunting, but he also clearly found the idea hard to combine with the traditional story he was to tell. After all, the only leader in the poem who expresses affection for his subordinates is Satan, when he weeps before his troops to win their "firm accord, more than can be in Heaven".

It is convenient to bring in here, at the cost of a slight digression, another aspect of the lives of the angels, again best approached through the penetrating treatment of C. S. Lewis. Discussing why Eve should blush at the approach of love in the state of innocence (VIII. 510), he says splendidly that even an angel may feel a noble sense of doubt whether he is perfect enough for the scrutiny of the beloved. Her modesty can thus be welcomed, but Milton has got something else a bit wrong:

His Eve exhibits modesty too exclusively in sexual contexts, and his Adam does not exhibit it at all. There is even a strong and (in the circumstances) a most offensive suggestion of female bodily shame as an incentive to male desire. (p. 120)

Still, if it is an essential duty for a man to keep control

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over his woman, he must also hide from her any doubts he may feel that he is superior; indeed, he can hardly be permitted to love her unless she is showing consciousness of her inferiority. What Lewis rightly finds coarse here in practice seems to be merely the doctrine of Degree which he has been recommending in theory. Poor Adam does feel such modesty, though he manfully hides it from Eve; he confesses it to Raphael, who scolds him for feeling it at all, so it is hard to have Lewis scolding him for not exhibiting it. To be sure, Adam does not feel shame about sex, which the text of Genesis would be enough to forbid; but he feels the nobler shame described by Lewis, because he tells the angel that Eve can make him feel in the wrong when he disagrees with her. On being upbraided for this breach of hierarchy, and told that "Love hath his seat in Reason, and is judicious," he says in effect 'Come now, what do you know about this? Have you got any sex?' and Milton to his eternal credit makes the angel blush. Raphael explains that the angelic act of love is by total interpenetration (VIII. 620), a thing which human authors have regretted that they cannot achieve. Lewis decides that the idea is 'certainly not filthy' (p. 109), but does not explain why the angel blushes at a mere reference to the topic; it cannot be for the noble reason he has given.

Mr Robert H. West in *Milton and the Angels* (1955) shows that some modest conjectures by the Platonist Henry More (*Immortality of the Soul*, 1659), could have been so understood, against his wishes in later life. Probably Milton would have answered that he had plenty of authority, except that his authorities had been too timid to understand their own meaning; to describe the bliss of Heaven in terms of human love is very ancient. But I agree that some recent author had probably impressed him before he took

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the bit between his teeth and re-interpreted the tradition about the loves of Heaven in a startling manner. So well-read a poet had certainly read the English poets who were prominent when he was young; I think his real 'authority' had been the love-poetry of Donne, published after Donne's death when Milton was aged twenty-four but famous and accessible beforehand, which frequently claims that the ideal human lovers make one soul by interpenetrating completely. As to the idea that Milton betrays homosexuality by letting angels love each other, which Robert Graves used as an accusation, and C. S. Lewis felt to need earnest rebuttal, I think that a sensitive man who took Milton's attitude to women, especially a classical scholar, would be bound to toy in fancy at least with the happiness of having an understanding partner who need not be continually snubbed. There is not much evidence that Milton felt so, but if he did it is to his credit. We know from the Divorce Pamphlets that he considered an understanding partner as the basic requirement for the ennobling of a physical act of love. Donne of course was not made homosexual by this high conception of love, because he believed he knew at least one woman who was adequate for the purpose; to present the belief as firmly as he did in *The Extasie* was inherently a blow at the doctrine of the inferiority of women. Milton would perhaps consider such love forbidden to our fallen condition, as to the devils, but he would find nothing in it to make an angel blush. The messenger may well feel that he has been caught out talking nonsense about love and the hierarchy of Degree, in obedience to his instructions; this is why the incident is found welcome nowadays, but Milton would need another explanation. He may simply have had unexpected feelings about blushes. While at school I was made to read *Ecce Homo* by Sir John

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Seeley (1866), a life of Jesus which explains that, when he was confronted with the woman taken in adultery and wrote with his finger in the sand, he was merely doodling to hide his blushes; then the book makes some arch comments on his sexual innocence, as if by Barrie about Peter Pan. I thought this in such bad taste as to be positively blasphemous, which rather surprised me as I did not believe in the religion. Milton says in the poem that the rosy red of the angel is love's proper hue, so perhaps he did, in a Victorian manner, regard other people's blushes as a source of keen though blameless sexual pleasure. I am not sure whether this is the same as what Lewis calls offensive; Lewis may have confused it with the masculine sense of power through mastering an unwilling partner, though Milton roundly insists that Eve was willing (VIII. 485).

The question is thus rather muddling, and one would expect Milton to have a firm justification ready. I am now to offer a sublime one, which fits in with other important doctrines of the poem. The angels feel that their act of love, being a unification of only two divine natures, is a step away from making 'one individual soul' with God. God might be expected to be 'jealous', as he is ambiguously called in the Bible, but the poem makes him noticeably jovial about the matter. Thus, after prophesying a 'Union without end' which must include even the blessed among mankind, he dismisses the angelic regiment for a bit of comfort:

Meanwhile inhabit lax, ye powers of Heav'n. (VII. 160)

They need not watch him creating the world, which they are expected to resent, but can go off and have some cosy interpenetration. Some of them take an interest in the return of the unsuccessful guard after the Fall (X. 25), but

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they are again at leisure when God summons them to hear his next proposal:

*Tb' Angelic blast
Filld all the Regions: from their blissful Bowers
Of Aramantine shade, Fountain or Spring,
By the waters of life, where-ere they sat
In fellowships of joy; the Sons of Light
Hasted . . .* (XI. 80)

Milton gives the same haunting moan here as in his descriptions of the nuptial bower of Adam and Eve, though not nearly so well; then the first line of God's announcement of their Fall is:

O Sons, like one of us Man is become . . .

M. Saurat considered this one of God's eerie jokes, and it certainly has a mysterious tone of connivance; though it was a safe enough thing for Milton to use, being simply quoted from Genesis iii 22.

Apart from this private act of love, which Raphael blushes even to mention, the good angels never have any fulfilment at all; that is, never feel they have carried through something they had undertaken. The sympathetic intelligence of C. S. Lewis was quite right to dive to the basis of any social structure, but there is nothing here for him to find. In human experience, we feel this pride in an organization when there is some purpose to be served, which all the subordinates want to help forward; as in a hospital, or an army at war, or even a farm getting in the harvest, where it commonly does not need a very elaborate hierarchy. If the angels have nothing to do, their aristocrats are not even ex-aristocrats, as in Proust. The crowds who go to the seaside on a public holiday would be annoyed if someone tried to organize them,

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because they want to sit around and let the kids make sand-castles; but in a Butlin camp or a ski-ing hotel people will put up with a surprising amount of being organized, because they see some point in it, such as learning a new trick. Heaven, surely, is not usually visualized as like a Butlin camp, let alone a hospital; a variety of mystical writers have said, always with beauty I think, that it is like being at the seaside. It is that immortal sea where the children sport upon the shore. Thus to describe the God of Milton as 'legalistic' is too charitable; what we are offered is a parody of legalistic behaviour, a thing in itself often necessary and reassuring, but also often suspected of being employed to gratify the privileged few; and it is evidently used in Heaven for that purpose alone. Such a Heaven was a forcing-house to develop the pride of Satan, which is described as his fundamental sin. C. S. Lewis jeers at him, in the course of the sustained proof that he is ridiculous, because though fighting for liberty against hierarchy he hedges by saying:

*Orders and Degrees
Far not with liberty, but well consist. (v. 790)*

I have tried to show that this would not seem very shocking anyhow, but also Satan has a war on his hands, a situation in which everyone agrees that subordination is necessary. The only person who has imposed it where it is not necessary is God. As so often in C. S. Lewis's treatment, the accusation aimed at Satan comes smack in the face of God.

A member of the Welfare State need not feel puzzled by the mind of Milton here, let alone contemptuous of it; to love the idea of an ordered society, and then feel repelled on being confronted with the details of working it out, is an experience familiar to our age. Milton some-

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times realized that he was describing the situation of the good angels as a miserable one, but he felt this through an immediate social judgement of what he had imagined, not as part of the structure of his argument. Thus Raphael remarks sociably to Adam that he would like to hear about Adam's first experiences, because he wasn't there "that day" (we need not deduce, like some critics, that he wasn't present at the Creation during the previous week). God had sent him with a troop to guard the gates of Hell:

*Squar'd in full Legion (such command we had)
To see that none thence issu'd forth a spy,
Or enemy, while God was at his work,
Lest he incensed at such irruption bold
Destruction with Creation might have mixt.
Not that they durst without his leave attempt,
But us he sends upon his high behests
For state, as Sovran King, and to enure
Our prompt obedience.* (VIII. 230)

They knew, and they knew that God knew that they knew, that this tiresome chore was completely useless. Apparently most of them did not want to see Adam emerge into consciousness, but Raphael says that he did, and also that he assumes God gave him a job at the time merely to disappoint him. I grant that Milton is on strong ground so far as the situation is a military one, because an army does get disciplined like this; but then, consider the morale of this army. They know that they failed to defeat the rebels, and that God need never have ordered them to try, indeed must have intended to humiliate them, because as soon as he chose he removed the rebels with contemptuous omnipotence. Similarly, when he chooses to let Satan out of Hell, he simply orders his troops out

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of the way. Raphael knows that Satan could not get out unless God let him out, but he cannot imagine the courage of Satan, so he presumes that Satan would not dare to come without knowledge that God had let him. Incidentally, Raphael also takes for granted that God hasn't enough control of his temper to carry through a plan if anybody happens to irritate him while he is working on it; a theologian might suspect that God only pretends to lose his temper on such occasions (God endorses this view at x. 625). It is a timid slavish mind that we get shown to us here, such as the conditions of service must be expected to breed. Milton imagines the type very clearly, however much against his overall intention, in a quaint bit of spite expressed by the less amiable Gabriel after Satan has been captured in Paradise:

*thou sly hypocrite, who now would'st seem
Patron of liberty, who more than thou
Once fawn'd, and cring'd, and servilely ador'd
Heavn's awful Monarch? Wherefore but in hope
To dispossess him, and thyself to reign?* (IV. 960)

When I was a little boy, about eight I think, I read a story in my sister's *Girls' Own Paper* about a catty girl who accused another girl of tightlacing, whereas the truth was, the story explained, that all these girls, including the catty one, were ill and in pain because they had to tightlace. I crept away sweating with horror, but feeling I had learned an important truth about the way people behave. This quotation seems to me quite enough to prove that God had already produced a very unattractive Heaven before Satan fell.

But there is something much stranger than this about the activity of God in the poem. The most striking case was first pointed out I think by M. Paul Phelps Morand

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(*De Comus A Satan*, 1939); we come to it as we follow the scene of capture.

*Fly thither whence thou fledst: if from this hour
Within these hallowed limits thou appear,
Back to the infernal pit I drag thee chain'd,
And seal thee so, as henceforth not to scorn
The facile gates of hell too slightly barr'd.* (IV. 965)

Some critic has accused Gabriel of weakness here, taking him to mean "Don't you dare come again," but he might mean to grant Satan one hour for decision whether to go of his own accord or be dragged in chains; it is a statesmanlike proposal, though no use because Satan decides to fight at once. We know that the loyalist angels could not defeat Satan's army, though twice their number; but surely the entire angelic guard would have a fair chance to capture Satan alone. God however prevents them from trying, by hanging forth in Heaven the constellation of his golden scales:

*Wherein all things created first he weigh'd,
The pendulous round Earth with ballanc't Air
In counterpoise, now ponders all events,
Battles and Realms: in these he put two weights,
The sequel each of parting and of fight;
The latter quick flew up, and kickt the beam.* (IV. 1000)

Gabriel interprets this to mean that God forbids him to try, pointing out that he and Satan can only do what Heaven permits; so Satan escapes, 'murmuring', but free to continue with the Temptation. I do not see what the incident can mean except that God was determined to make man fall, and had supplied a guard only for show; as soon as the guards look like succeeding he prevents

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them. No doubt the Latin pun on *ponder* helps to emphasize that the whole incident is meant to be allegorical but no translation of it into more spiritual terms can alter the basic fact about it. (This reflection is not from Bertrand Russell but from Milton himself in *De Doctrina* Chapter II.) Satan still has to be clever; he remains in darkness by flying round the world every day for a week, and so on; but God has saved his liberty at the crucial point. Milton does not pick up Satan's story again till four books later, and then remarks that he had 'fled before the threats' of Gabriel (IX. 55), a very official account of what had happened. However, at the time Milton gave a reason for God's action: that he stopped the fight because it might have spoiled his new-made universe (IV. 990). In the age of the Cobalt Bomb, one is inclined to find this rational and sympathetic of God; but still, if he is going to send nearly all of us to Hell as a result of Adam's Fall, we cannot be expected to agree with him that it was less important than the scenery. Yvor Winters' view that the poem is just an imitation of Homer is especially plausible here, but as a rule Milton can make his learned imitations fit his purpose, and we may be sure he would have claimed that this one did too. I think we are struck by the incident, when it is pointed out, merely because we refuse to notice that similar things are going on all the time; we can swallow the general layout of 'Fate' by which God arranges what he has preordained, but it feels different when he nips in and prevents his own troops from doing what he had ordered them to do. Afterwards he forgives them for their failure, remarking with his usual grinding contempt for them that they couldn't have been the smallest use anyhow (X. 35). Milton himself has just rubbed the point home here, using the insinuating hiss which he gives his Satan

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when particularly serpent-like; God of course knew at once about the Fall, he remarks,

*for what can scape the Eye
Of God All-seeing, or deceive his Heart
Omniscient, who in all things wise and just
Hinder'd not Satan . . .* (x. 5)

M. Morand well points out that God was quite right to forgive the angelic guard; if they were punished, there would be a danger of their considering who was the real culprit.

Satan in *Paradise Regained* makes the same point, though this may be irrelevant—perhaps Milton did not try to make Satan's development consistent in both poems:

*Tis true, I am that Spirit unfortunate,
Who leagu'd with millions more in rash revolt
Kept not my happy Station, but was driv'n
With them from bliss to the bottomless deep,
Yet to that hideous place not so confin'd
By rigour unconniving, but that oft
Leaving my dolorous Prison I enjoy
Large liberty to round this Globe of Earth,
Or range in th' air, nor from the Heav'n of Heav'ns
Hath he excluded my resort sometimes.
I came among the Sons of God, when he
Gave up into my hands Uzzean Job
To prove him, and illustrate his high worth;
And when to all his Angels he propos'd
To draw the proud King Abab into fraud . . .* (I. 360)

and so forth; that God 'connives' with Satan is a rather striking accusation against him, and cannot be denied on the textual evidence which Satan quotes. We are often told nowadays that Milton's attitude to Satan must have

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been perfectly simple, but it is clear that when writing *Paradise Lost* he had plenty more evidence for God's connivance with Satan which he chose not to use. The reason why this game can be played, of course, is that the Old Testament is a rag-bag of material from very different stages of development; one would think Milton after his thorough study must have understood that, but his main allies were committed to relying on the text, to oppose the traditions of Rome. The furthest he went in writing was to conjecture that God allowed the text of his Word to become corrupt so as to force upon our attention the prior importance of our own consciences (*De Doctrina*, Chapter XXX).

No scholastic philosopher, said Sir Walter Raleigh, "could have walked into a metaphysical bramble-bush with the blind recklessness that Milton displays"; he seems to have been the first to make this very central point. But I do not think anyone who has read the *De Doctrina* will regard Milton's treatment as due to ignorance or stupidity. The effect is that of a powerful mind thrashing about in exasperation. Perhaps I should have recognized earlier a scholastic position which he would consider elementary; we are not to think that God forces the will of individuals merely because he foreknows what they will do. God's foreknowledge was universally admitted, even by believers in free will, such as Milton had become when he wrote the epic. The idea in itself is not remote from common experience; many a mother has felt with horror that she can 'see' her son is going to take to bad courses. We find a greater difficulty in the case of a Creator, as was said in lapidary form by Aquinas:

Knowledge, as knowledge, does not imply, indeed, causality; but, in so far as it is a knowledge belonging

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to the artist who forms, it stands in the relation of causality to that which is produced by his art.

This too is not beyond our experience, especially if we firmly regard the Creator as a Father; who will often fear, without even blaming Mother, a recurrence of his own bad tendencies or perhaps those of the wicked uncles. Besides, an ancient tradition allows us to say that an author may be too inspired quite to foresee what he is producing by his art. But a parent who 'foresaw' that the children would fall and then insisted upon exposing them to the temptation in view would be considered neurotic, if nothing worse; and this is what we must ascribe to Milton's God.

Waldock, I think, first remarked that he seems anxious to prove he does not cause the Fall; "indeed, never to the end of the poem does he succeed in living down this particular worry". I had perhaps better document this argument. God says in his first speech:

*So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formed them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves.* (III. 120)

All this upbraiding of them is done before they have fallen, and God again protests his innocence as soon as they have done it:

*no Decree of mine
Concurring to necessitate his Fall,
Or touch with lightest moment of impulse
His free will, to her own inclining left
In even scale.* (X. 45)

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Can it be the uneasy conscience of God or of Milton which produces this unfortunate metaphor of the scales, actually reminding us of the incident when he forced his troops to expose mankind to the tempter? Before the Creation, he gives what is perhaps a slightly different account of his power:

*Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscribed myself retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, Necessity and Chance
Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate.* (VII. 170)

This is one of the main bits used by M. Saurat to show the profundity, or the impersonality and pantheism, of Milton's God; and God's claims do feel better if we identify him with Fate and the Absolute and the primeval matter of Chaos. But surely the story we are reading inspires a simpler reflection. Chaos is also a person, and though he acts out of resentment, so that God would not need to tip him off about the situation, he does exactly what God wants of him; he lets Satan pass for the corruption of mankind. As for making Sin and Death the guardians of Hell Gate, Sir Walter Raleigh remarked with casual elegance:

No one has plausibly explained how they came by their office. It was intended to be a perfect sinecure; there was no one to be let in and no one to be let out. The single occasion that presented itself for a neglect of their duty was by them eagerly seized. (p. 108)

—though later he approves of the absurdity, because "they are the only creations of English poetry which approach the Latin in grandeur" (p. 238). Surely the explanation is very simple; God always intended them to

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let Satan out. Critics somehow cannot bring themselves to recognize that Milton does this steadily and consistently, after announcing that he will at the start. As a believer in the providence of God, Milton could not possibly have believed in the huge success-story of Satan fighting his way to Paradise. The chains of Hell, Sin, Death, Chaos and an army of good angels hold Satan back, but all this stage machinery is arranged by God to collapse as soon as he advances upon it, just as the fire cannot harm Siegfried when he has courage enough to walk through it to Brunhild. Chaos makes little of the heroic piece of space-travel when he directs Satan to the newly created world:

If that way be your walk, you have not far. (II. 1010)

(By the way, Yvor Winters could not have called this line 'meaningless inflation'.) We have thus no reason to doubt that Milton also intended the final paradox of the series, after Satan has reached Eden, when God cheats his own troops to make certain that the Fall occurs. As to what God means by saying that none of his busy activity affects their free will, I suppose he means that he does not actually hypnotize them, as Svengali did Trilby; though he lets Satan do to Eve as much as a hypnotist really can do.

A particularly impressive example of this poetic technique is given by a detail about the chains, which I think must have made Mr T. S. Eliot decide that the treatment of the chains is not sufficiently imagist. The first words of God in the poem insist that he cannot control Satan, and mention these chains as among the things that Satan has escaped from. We might indeed suppose that Milton has 'made a slip', forgotten his story and his theology, whether from lack of imaging or not. The reason why this will not do, I think, is that he is writing so frightfully

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well; his feelings are so deeply involved that the sound effects become wonderful. *Wide interrupt can hold* is like the cry of sea-mews upon rocks; it has what I think is meant by the term 'plangency'. We have to suppose it meant something important to him.

*Only begotten Son, seest thou what rage
Transports our adversary, whom no bounds
Prescrib'd, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains
Heapt on him there, nor yet the main Abyss
Wide interrupt can hold; so bent he seems
On desperate revenge, that shall redound
Upon his own rebellious head. And now
Through all restraint broke loose he wings his way
Nor far off Heav'n, in the Precincts of Light,
Directly towards the new created World,
And man there plac'd . . .* (III. 80)

The only consistent view, after the firm statement at I. 210 for example, is that this is the first of God's grisly jokes. The passage, I think, is the strongest bit of evidence for the view of C. S. Lewis, that Milton intended Satan to be ridiculous; but even so it does not feel very like a joke. Milton might have some wish to confuse his simpler readers, and God to confuse the loyalist angels, who have been summoned to hear him; one might think God could not want to look weak, but he may be wanting to justify his revenge. Nobody says that it is a joke, as the Son does after God expresses fear of losing his throne; but there is no opportunity, because what God goes on to say is so lengthy and appalling. His settled plan for punishment comes steadily out, and the verse rhythm becomes totally unlike the thrilling energy of this first sentence. In his first reply to the Son, we find him talking in rocking-horse couplets, using the off-rhymes which were re-invented

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by Wilfred Owen to describe the First World War, with the same purpose of setting a reader's teeth on edge:

*This my long sufferance and my day of grace
They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;
But hard be hardened, blind be blinded more,
That they may stumble on, and deeper fall.* (III. 200)

This is also where we get the stage-villain's hiss of "Die he or Justice must". God is much at his worst here, in his first appearance; but he needs to be, to make the offer of the Son produce a dramatic change. I do not know what to make of his expressing the Calvinist doctrine that the elect are chosen by his will alone, which Milton had appeared to reject (185); it has a peculiar impact here, when God has not yet even secured the Fall of Adam and Eve. One might argue that he was in no mood to make jokes; and besides, the effect here is not a sardonic mockery of Satan, which can be felt in the military joke readily enough, but a mysterious and deeply rooted sense of glory. A simple explanation may be put forward; Milton felt that this was such a tricky bit to put over his audience, because the inherent contradictions were coming so very near the surface, that he needed with a secret delight to call on the whole of his power. This is almost what Shelley took to be his frame of mind; and it is hard to accept, with the *De Doctrina* before us, without talking about Milton's Unconsciousness. But we may be sure that there is a mediating factor; if he had been challenged about the passage, he would have said that he was following the Old Testament scrupulously, and allowing God to mock his foes.

This has often been said about the jokes of Milton's God, or at least about the one which can't be ignored because it is explained as a joke (v. 720); and you can

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make a rough check from the Concordance at the end of a Bible. The only important case is from Psalm ii; here again we meet the ancient document in which the King of Zion is adopted as the son of God:

Why do the heathen rage . . . ? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. . . . He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision.

This is echoed in Psalms xxxvii. 13 and lix. 8, and perhaps in Proverbs i. 26, where Wisdom and not God mocks the worldly rather than a powerful aggressor; but after trying to look under all the relevant words I do not find that the Concordance ever ascribes the sentiment to the Prophets. It was thus an ancient tradition but one treated with reserve, as Milton would understand. Naturally his intention in putting so much weight on it has been found especially hard to grasp.

The views of M. Morand about the divine characters have been neglected and seem to me illuminating. In the same year as *De Comus A Satan* he published a pamphlet in English, *The Effects of his Political Life on John Milton*, concerned to show that a certain worldly-mindedness entered Milton's poetry after his experience of government, politics, and propaganda. He thus accepted, as typical of the sordidness of such work, the story that Milton himself arranged the presence in the *Eikon Basilike* of the prayer, altered from one in Sidney's *Arcadia*, for which he then denounced the King in *Eikonoclastes*. Much of this, though lively, has been made out of date by an important book which claims to refute the story, F. F. Madan's *New Bibliography of the Eikon* (1950). He tries to refute it so hard that he becomes absurd.* But his information does I think

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prove that any foisting, whether by Milton or not, must have been done before Milton got the official appointment. Sad and funny though it is for the denouncer of censorship to become a propaganda chief, Milton deserves respect, as Morand points out, for rejecting brutal methods in favour of guile (not only here). So I don't feel that the action is too bad for Milton; he would think the divine purpose behind the Civil War justified propaganda tricks, and need not have thought this a particularly bad one. The King was dead, and the purpose of the cheat was merely to prevent the people from thinking him a martyr. Also he hadn't written much of the book, and Milton suspected that at the time, so it was only a matter of answering one cheat with another. Milton must in any case have been insincere in pretending to be shocked at the use of a prayer by Sidney, given in the story as that of a pagan, but so Christian in feeling as to be out of period (it assumes that God may be sending us evil as a test or tonic for our characters, which even if to be found in Aeschylus or Marcus Aurelius is not standard for Arcadia). Milton might comfort himself with the reflection that he wasn't even damaging the man's character in the eyes of fit judges, only making use of a popular superstition—as Shelley expected on another occasion. However, M. Morand finds that this kind of activity brought about a Fallen condition, as one might say, in the mind of the poet, and such is what *De Comus A Satan* examines throughout the later poetry.

There is an assumption here that to do Government propaganda can only have a bad effect upon a poet's mind, and I feel able to speak on the point as I was employed at such work myself in the Second World War, indeed once had the honour of being named in rebuttal by Fritzsche himself and called a curly-headed Jew. I

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wasn't in on any of the splendid tricks, such as Milton is accused of, but the cooked-up argufying I have experienced. To work at it forces you to imagine all the time what the enemy will reply; you are trying to get him into a corner. Such a training cannot narrow a man's understanding of other people's opinions, though it may well narrow his own opinions. I should say that Milton's experience of propaganda is what makes his later poetry so very dramatic; that is, though he is a furious partisan, he can always imagine with all its force exactly what the reply of the opponent would be. As to his integrity, he was such an inconvenient propagandist that the Government deserve credit for having the nerve to appoint and retain him. He had already published the *Divorce Pamphlets* before he got the job; well now, if you are setting out to be severe and revolutionary on the basis of literal acceptance of the Old Testament, the most embarrassing thing you can be confronted with is detailed evidence about the sexual habits of the patriarchs; it is the one point where the plain man feels he can laugh. Milton always remained liable to defend his side by an argument which would strike his employers as damaging; his style of attack is savagely whole-hearted, but his depth of historical knowledge and imaginative sympathy keep having unexpected effects. He was not at all likely to feel that he had forfeited his independence of mind by such work. M. Morand therefore strikes me as rather innocent in assuming that he was corrupted by it, but I warmly agree that it made his mind very political. Professor Wilson Knight has also remarked that Milton wrote a political allegory under the appearance of a religious poem, though he did not draw such drastic consequences from the epigram.

On the Morand view, God is simply a dynastic ruler

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like those Milton had had to deal with; Cromwell had wanted hisson to inherit, no less than Charles. M. Morand does not seem to realize it, but the effect is to make Milton's God much better. His intrigues and lies to bolster his power are now comparatively unselfish, being only meant to transfer it unimpaired to his Son, and above all he feels no malignity towards his victims. His method of impressing the loyalist angels will doom almost all mankind to misery, but he takes no pleasure in that; it simply does not bother him. The hypocrisy which the jovial old ruffian feels to be required of him in public has not poisoned his own mind, as we realize when he permits himself his leering jokes. This does, I should say, correspond to the impression usually made by the poem on a person not brought up as a Christian, such as my Chinese and Japanese students. The next step is to regard the debate in Heaven, where the Son, but no angel, offers to die for man, as a political trick rigged up to impress the surviving angels; the Son is free to remark (III. 245) that he knows the Father won't let him stay dead, so that the incantatory repetition of the word *death* comes to seem blatantly artificial. (We find in the *De Doctrina* Chapter XII that Milton includes "under the head of death, in Scripture, all evils whatsoever" . . .). Nobody is surprised at the absence of volunteers among the good angels, whereas Satan, during the parallel scene in Hell (II. 470), has to close the debate hurriedly for fear a less competent rebel put himself forward. Otherwise the two scenes are deliberately made alike, and the reason is simply that both are political:

Ce qui frappe, c'est le parallélisme des moyens employées, conseils, discours. Même souci de garder pour soi tout gloire. (p. 145)

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On reaching *Paradise Regained*, M. Morand is interested to learn how the Son grew up. In *Paradise Lost* he often seems half ashamed of the autocratic behaviour of his Father, because his role is to induce the subject angels to endure it; but when he is alone on the earth-visit which has been arranged for him we find he has merely the cold calculating pride which we would expect from his training. However, we already find this trait, decides M. Morand, at the early public moment when he offers his Sacrifice; he is unable to avoid presenting himself as solely interested in his own career (p. 169). As the Creation for which he was the instrument has already happened, he might at least speak as if he could tell a man apart from a cow, but he says that his Father's grace visits "all his creatures" (III. 230). Satan, on the parallel occasion, was at least genuinely concerned to get the job done, whoever did it; and M. Morand decides that the ringing repetition of ME in the speech of sacrifice of the Son is a little too grotesque, however perfectly in character. Milton

n'eût pas pensé à ce que peut contenir de ridicule ce martellement du moi.

De personnages extra-terrestres, le moins éloigné de la modestie est encore Satan. (p. 171)

This is at least a splendid reply to the argument that pride is the basic fault of all the characters who fall.

The Morand line of argument can be taken an extra step, to argue that the Son too is being cheated by the Father; and this excites a suspicion that there is something inadequate about it. He says nothing of the means of his death, and speaks as if he is going to remain on earth till the Last Day:

*Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life
I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;*

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*Account mee man; I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
Freely put off, and for him lastly die
Well pleas'd, on me let Death wreck all his rage;
Under his gloomy power I shall not long
Lie vanquisht; thou hast giv'n me to possess
Life in my self for ever, by thee I live,
Though now to Death I yield, and am his due
All of me that can die, yet that debt paid,
Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave
His prey, nor suffer my unspotted Soul
For ever with corruption there to dwell;
But I shall rise Victorious, and subdue
My Vanquisht, spoild of his vaunted spoil;
Death his death's wound shall then receive, and stoop
Inglorious, of his mortal sting disarm'd.
I through the ample Air in Triumph high
Shall lead Hell Captive maugre Hell, and show
The Powers of darkness bound. Thou at the sight
Pleas'd, out of Heaven shalt look down and smile,
While by thee rais'd I ruin all my Foes,
Death last, and with his Carcass glut the Grave:
Then with the multitude of my redeem'd
Shall enter Heaven long absent, and return,
Father, to see thy face, wherein no cloud
Of anger shall remain, but peace assur'd,
And reconcilment; wrath shall be no more
Thenceforth, but in thy presence Joy entire. (III. 240)*

Our chief impression here, surely, is not that he is too little interested in mankind but that he does not know what is going to happen, except for a triumph at which he can rejoice. If the Jews had not chosen to kill him, he would presumably have remained on earth till the Last

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Day, making history less bad than the poem describes it as being; and what they will choose can be foreknown by the Father only. The Son expects to find no frown upon the face of God on Judgement Day, the *Dies Irae* itself, so we can hardly doubt that he expects things to turn out better than they do. His prophecy appears to be a continuous narrative: "not long lie . . . rise victorious . . . then . . . then", as if he will lead the blessed to Heaven very soon after the Resurrection. Among human speakers 'lastly die' is a natural way to express pathos, though a tautology; but a meaning which would make it a correct description of the career of the Son is hard to invent. It may be possible to interpret the whole speech as a true forecast, and Milton may have planned to leave this alternative open; but it is a more natural reading to suppose the Son ignorant, and Milton denies him foreknowledge in *De Doctrina* Chap. V.

We must compare the speech to what Michael tells Adam at XII. 410, not long after hearing it. The angel has now been told of the Crucifixion, and explains that soon after it, while ascending to Heaven, Christ will surprise Satan in the air and drag him in chains, then resume his seat at God's right hand till the Second Coming. This clears up part of the Son's narrative; and if he is to remain on earth after the Second Coming for the Millennium, finally returning with his Saints, that explains 'long absent'. Milton seems rather doubtful about this doctrine, as Michael says that Christ will receive the faithful into bliss 'whether in Heaven or Earth'. *De Doctrina* Chapter XXXIII says that the glorious reign of Christ on earth will begin at the start of the Last Judgement and 'extend a little beyond its conclusion'; then the chapter goes on to name the thousand years, then it gives a still grander interpretation. Only the blessed will be revived

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for the Millennium (Revelation xx. 5), which might explain why the Son expects no frown when he leads them to Heaven after a thousand years. At any rate, if he expects to labour so long for mankind, we can hardly agree with M. Morand that he betrays lack of interest in them.

It often happens with a formative piece of criticism that one needs to consider why it seemed so true, after apparently refuting it. The mere repetition of *me* when offering oneself for sacrifice cannot be enough to prove self-centredness, even in the style of Milton, because Eve does it in a speech of splendid generosity. Surely the reason why Milton's treatment here seems cold, compared to a Good Friday service which is the natural comparison, is that no one throughout the long 'scene in Heaven' ever mentions that the Son is to die by torture. Even Michael does not describe the Cross to Adam as painful, only as 'shameful and accurst'. Death for a day and a half any of us might proffer, but we would find slow torture worth mentioning even given a doctor in attendance who guaranteed recovery after unconsciousness had finally supervened. I do not know whether there is a standard explanation for this lack in the poem, and do not remember to have seen it noticed. The reason for it, surely, is that Milton would not dirty his fingers with the bodily horror so prominent in the religion. We need not be surprised, because all his heroes fiercely refuse to let the prospect of pain so much as enter their minds while deciding what they ought to do; his devils are so superior to pain that we actually cannot remember they are all the time in bodily agony. This steady blaze of moral splendour must I am afraid be called unreal but at least makes the religion feel a good deal cleaner. The son regularly talks like a young medieval aristocrat eager to win his spurs, and like him is not expected to mention pain. No

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doubt the singing angels (III. 375) would mention the Crucifixion if they had been told of it, but it could mean little to them as they have never experienced pain; God has only just invented it, and only applied it to rebels. Clearly God has given at least Michael further information before he speaks to Adam. But there is no dignified enough procedure by which God could tell the angels that he has made a huge increase in his demand upon the Son after accepting the Son's offer. To cheat his own Son into death by torture would be too bad even for the God of M. Morand; it would be bad propaganda. Thus I think we should apply here too the principle of Mr Rajan, that the correct interpretation is always the sublimest one: Milton considered death by torture such a trivial sacrifice that he thought the Son must have offered a longer mission than the Father decided to require of him. Even if the Son does not know about the Crucifixion, he knows a good deal about the consequences of his offer; if we suppose the Father to have told him this beforehand we must still picture them, as M. Morand does, hammering out in private the scene of propaganda dialogue which they will present to the assembled angels. But their background is impossible for us to envisage, and the Father may simply put into the mind of the Son as much foreknowledge as he chooses on the instant, so that the Son acts, as we would call it, spontaneously. The process might let the Son presume the happier alternative for mankind, out of a bold confidence in his power to convert them; but, even so, he must be above feeling wronged when he finds that the Crucifixion has been incurred. We need not after that join M. Morand in blaming him for hoping to deserve praise. Milton if he intended this high detail would have to regard it as visible only to very fit readers, such as could cross-question his text like M.

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Morand; the broad literary effect is rather one of tactfulness in keeping the Crucifixion out of sight. The motive of the Father in crucifying the Son is of course left in even deeper obscurity.

Milton did however I think mean to adumbrate a kind of motive by his picture of the Last Things. Professor C. S. Lewis once kindly came to a lecture I was giving on the half-finished material of this book; and at question time, after a sentence of charitable compunction, recognizing that the speaker wasn't responsible for this bit, he said "Does Phelps Morand think God is going to abdicate, then?" I tried to explain that M. Morand regarded this as the way Milton's dramatic imagination worked, after it had been corrupted by his patriotic labours, not as part of his theological system. The answer felt weak, and soon afterwards another difficulty drove me back to the book of M. Saurat, which I had probably not read since I was an undergraduate; I thus suddenly realized, what M. Saurat was not intending to prove, that Milton did expect God to abdicate. At least, that is the most direct way to express the idea; you may also say that he is an emergent or evolutionary deity, as has been believed at times by many other thinkers, for example Aeschylus and H. G. Wells.

There has been such a campaign to prove that only the coarsely worldly Victorians would even want the world to get better that I had better digress about that, or I may be thought to be laughing at Milton. We are often told that *In Memoriam* is bad because Tennyson tries to palm off progress in this world as a substitute for Heaven. But he says in the poem that he would stop being good, or would kill himself, if he stopped believing he would go to Heaven; it is wilful to argue that he treats the progress of the human race as an adequate alternative. Indeed, he

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seems rather too petulant about his demand for Heaven, considering that *Titbonus*, written about the same time (according to Stopford Brooke) though kept from publication till later, appreciates so nobly the hunger of mankind for the peace of oblivion. But the underlying logic of *In Memoriam* is firm. The signs that God is working out a vast plan of evolution are treated as evidence that he is good, and therefore that he will provide Heaven for Tennyson. To believe that God's Providence can be seen at work in the world, and that this is evidence for his existence and goodness, is what is called Natural Theology; it is very traditional, and the inability of neo-Christians to understand it casts an odd light on their pretensions. Tennyson has also been accused of insincerity about progress because in another poem he expressed alarm at the prospect of war in the air; but he realized the time-scale very clearly; while maintaining that the process of the suns will eventually reach a good end, it is only sensible to warn mankind that we are likely to go through some bad periods beforehand. At present, as mankind looks almost certain to destroy itself quite soon, we cannot help wincing at a belief that progress is inevitable; but this qualification seems all that is needed. I think that reverence *ought* to be aroused by the thought that so long and large a process has recently produced ourselves who can describe it, and other-worldly persons who boast of not feeling that seem to me merely to have cauterized themselves against genuine religious feeling. The seventeenth century too would have thought that so much contempt for Providence verged upon the Manichean. Milton claimed to get his conception of progress from the Bible; but he would have found corroboration, one would think, in the *Prometheus*, which was well known. There is only one reference to the myth in the epic, and it is

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twisted into a complaint against women (IV. 720); but Mr R. J. Z. Werblowsky, in his broad and philosophical *Lucifer and Prometheus* (1952), may well be right to think that Milton tried to avoid direct comparison between Prometheus and his Satan.*

At the point which seemed to me illuminating, M. Saurat was calling Milton 'the old incorrigible dreamer' (p. 165, 1944 edition), apparently just for believing in the Millennium on earth, though that only requires literal acceptance of Revelation xx; but he was quoting part of Milton's commentary in Chapter XXXIII of the *De Doctrina*, "Of Perfect Glorification", and no doubt recognized that Milton was somehow going rather further. Milton says:

It may be asked, if Christ is to deliver up the kingdom to God and the Father, what becomes of the declarations [quotations from Heb. i. 8, Dan. vii. 14, and Luke i. 33] "of his kingdom there shall be no end". I reply, there shall be no end of his kingdom . . . till time itself shall be no longer, Rev. x. 6, until everything which his kingdom was intended to effect shall be accomplished . . . it will not be destroyed, nor will its period be a period of dissolution, but rather of perfection and consummation, like the end of the law, Matt. v. 18.

The last clause seems to recall the precedent of an earlier evolutionary step, whereby the New Dispensation of Jesus made the Mosaic Law unnecessary; it is clear that the final one, which makes even the Millennium unnecessary, must be of an extremely radical character. The Father, I submit, has to turn into the God of the Cambridge Platonists and suchlike mystical characters; at present he is still the very disagreeable God of the Old

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Testament, but eventually he will dissolve into the landscape and become immanent only. The difficulty of fitting in this extremely grand climax was perhaps what made Milton uncertain about the controverted time-scheme of the Millennium. The doctrine of the end of time, if one takes it seriously, is already enough to make anything but Total Union (or else Total Separateness from God) hard to conceive.

The question which Milton answers here is at least one which he makes extremely prominent in the speech of rejoicing by the Father after the speech of sacrifice by the Son (III. 320). The Father first says he *will* give the Son all power, then in the present tense "I give thee"; yet he had given it already, or at least enough to cause Satan and his followers to revolt. Without so much as a full stop, the Father next says that the time when he will give it is the Day of Judgement, and the climax of the whole speech is to say that immediately after that "God shall be All in All". The eternal gift of the Father is thus to be received only on the Last Day, and handed back the day after. This has not been found disturbing, because the paradox is so clear that we assume it to be deliberate; nor are interpretations of it hard to come by. But Milton would see it in the light of the passage in the *De Doctrina*; there "God shall be All in All" ends the Biblical quotation which comes just before Milton's mystical "reply":

Then cometh the end . . . but when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted which did put all things under him; and when all things are subdued unto him, then shall the Son himself also be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. (I Corinthians xv. 24-28)

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St Paul is grappling with earlier texts here in much the same scholarly way that Milton did, which would give Milton a certain confidence about re-interpreting his results even though they were inspired because Biblical. After hearing so much from M. Morand about the political corruption of Milton's mind, one is pleased to find it less corrupt than St Paul's; Milton decided that God was telling the truth, and that he would keep his promise literally. At the end of the speech of the Father, Milton turns into poetry the decision he had reached in prose:

*The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring
New Heav'n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell . . .
Then thou thy regal Sceptre shalt lay by,
For regal Sceptre then no more shall need,
God shall be All in All. But all ye Gods
Adore him, who to compass all this dies,
Adore the Son, and honour him as me.* (III. 340)

I grant that the language is obscure, as is fitting because it is oracular; and, besides, Milton wanted the poem to be universal, so did not want to thrust a special doctrine upon the reader. But the doctrine is implied decisively if the language is examined with care. St Paul presumably had in mind a literal autocracy, but Milton contrives to make the text imply pantheism. The O.E.D. records that the intransitive use of the verb *need* had become slightly archaic except for a few set phrases; the general intransitive use required here belongs to the previous century—e.g. "stopping of heads with lead shall not need now" 1545. But a reader who noticed the change of grammar from *shalt* to *shall* could only impute the old construction: "Authority will then no longer be needed"—not, therefore, from the Father, any more than from the Son. There is much more point in the last two lines quoted if the

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Father has just proposed, though in an even more remote sense than the Son, that he too shall die. *All* is rather a pet word in Milton's poetry but I think he never gives it a capital letter anywhere else, and one would expect that by writing "All in All" he meant to imply a special doctrine, as we do by writing "the Absolute". Then again, this is the only time God calls the angels Gods, with or without a capital letter. He does it here meaning that they will in effect become so after he has abdicated. The reference has justly been used as a partial defence of Satan for calling his rebels Gods, but we are meant to understand that his claim for them is a subtle misuse of the deeper truth adumbrated here. Taking all the details together, I think it is clear that Milton wanted to suggest a high mystery at this culminating point.*

There was a more urgent and practical angle to the question; it was not only one of the status of the Son, but of mankind. You cannot think it merely whimsical of M. Morand to call God dynastic if you look up the words *heir* and *inherit* in the concordance usually given at the end of a Bible. Milton was of course merely quoting the text when he made the Father call the Son his heir (as in VI. 705); but the blessed among mankind are also regularly called 'heirs of God's kingdom' and suchlike. The word *heir* specifically means one who will inherit; it would be comical to talk as if M. Morand was the first to wonder what the Bible might mean by it. The blessed among mankind are heirs of God through their union with Christ; Milton's Chapter XXIV is 'Of Union and Fellowship with Christ and the Saints, wherein is considered the Mystical or Invisible Church', and he says it is 'not confined to place or time, inasmuch as it is composed of individuals of widely separated countries, and of all ages from the foundation of the world'. He would regard this

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as a blow at all priesthoods, but also regard the invisible union as a prefiguring of the far distant real one. We can now see that it is already offered in the otherwise harsh words by which the Father appointed the Son:

*Under his great Vice-regent reign abide
United as one individual Soul
For ever happy* (V. 610)

As a means of achieving such unity the speech is a remarkable failure; but God already knew that men would be needed as well as angels before the alchemy could be done. When the unity is complete, neither the loyal angels nor the blessed among mankind will require even the vice-regency of the Son, still less the rule of the Father; and only so can they become 'heirs and inheritors of God's Kingdom'.

The texts prove, I submit, that Milton envisaged the idea, as indeed so informed a man could hardly help doing; but the poetry must decide whether it meant a great deal to him, and the bits so far quoted are not very good. Milton however also ascribes it to God in the one really splendid passage allotted to him. This is merely an earlier part of the same speech, but the sequence III. 80-345 is full of startling changes of tone. The end of the speech happens to let us see Milton's mind at work, because we can relate it to the *De Doctrina*, but the main feeling there is just immense pride; Milton could never let the Father appear soft, and his deepest yielding must be almost hidden by a blaze of glory. Just before advancing upon thirty lines of glory, he has rejoiced that his Son:

*though thron'd in highest bliss,
Equal to God, and equally enjoying
God-like fruition, quitted all to save*

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*A world from utter loss, and hast been found
By Merit more than Birthright Son of God,
Found worthiest to be so by being Good,
Far more than Great or High; because in thee
Love hath abounded more than Glory abounds,
Therefore thy Humiliation shall exalt
With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne;
Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign
Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man,
Anointed universal King; all Power
I give thee, reign for ever, and assume
Thy Merits; under thee as Head Supreme
Thrones, Princedoms, Powers, Dominions I reduce : (III. 305)*

It is a tremendous moral cleansing for Milton's God, after the greed for power which can be felt in him everywhere else, to say that he will give his throne to Incarnate Man, and the rhythm around the word *humiliation* is like taking off in an aeroplane. I had long felt that this is much the best moment of God in the poem, morally as well as poetically, without having any idea why it came there. It comes there because he is envisaging his abdication, and the democratic appeal of the prophecy of God is what makes the whole picture of him just tolerable.

I may be told that I am simply misreading; the Father is not giving Man his own throne, but the Son's, and Milton has made this clear just previously by recalling that the Son too is throned; indeed I think this is the only place in the poem where he is said to be 'throned' at the right hand of God. (When the Father tells the Son to rise and drive out the rebels, Milton mysteriously says that he addresses 'The Assessor of his Throne' VI. 680; but I can deduce nothing from that.) But the grandeur of the position of the Son needed emphasizing here in any case,

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and Milton is inclined to 'plant' a word in this way soon before it is used especially sublimely. The effect of repeating the word *throne* is not so obtrusive as to exclude the more tremendous meaning. Besides, the Father could not say that the Son will be exalted as a reward to the throne which the Son already occupies; and the sequence is "this throne . . . here . . . here . . . Head Supreme", very empty rhetoric if it does not refer to the supreme throne. I grant that the meaning is not obvious unless one realizes how much support it is given later in the speech.

Wondering where to stop my quotation, I was struck by how immediately the passage turns from generosity to pride of power. The distinction is perhaps an unreal one; all the lines are *about* pride. God is generous to give his throne, but Milton exults in the dignity given to Man. The last line of my quotation, except that it omits the Virtues for convenience, gives the same roll-call of the titles of the angels as Satan does in his rabble-rousing speech; no doubt this was the standard form in Heaven, but the effect is to make the reader compare the two offers. One must agree with M. Morand that it is all weirdly political; temporary acceptance of lower-class status is what the Son is being praised for, a severe thing in his mind, just as it is beneath Satan's class to become incarnate as a snake. As to torture, that might come your way in any class, and would only be a minor thing to boast about afterwards. But one dare not call this mode of thought contemptible, if it elevates, or makes proud enough to act well, all classes of the society in which it operates.

I can claim that this account gives the thought of the epic a much needed consistency. Thus it may be objected that Milton's own temperament, because of the pride so evident in his style, would be quite unattracted by an

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ideal of total union. But certainly; he presents it as very unattractive even to the good angels. Abdiel can only translate it into terms exasperating for Satan; and the blushing of Raphael now acquires considerable point, which after all one would expect so bizarre a detail to have. Though capable of re-uniting themselves with God the angels do not want to, especially because this capacity lets them enjoy occasional acts of love among themselves. It is fundamental to Milton's system that angels, like all the rest of the universe, are parts of God from which God willingly removed his will; these highest forms of life, he finds it natural to suppose, have an approximation to the divine power among themselves, so that they can love by total interpenetration. Presumably God can gobble them up as soon as look at them, which would make him an alarming employer, and perhaps they are relieved that he never expresses any affection for them—though even interpenetration with God would not actually mean death; the Son, like Satan, doubts whether any life can be totally destroyed, III. 165; so does Milton, *De Doctrina* Chapter VII. Thus they put up a timidly evasive but none the less stubborn resistance to dissolving themselves into God, like a peasantry under Communism trying to delay collectivization; and here too the state has the high claim that it has promised eventually to wither away. God must abdicate, in the sense of becoming totally immanent or invisible, before the plan of Total Union can seem tolerable to them; and it is bitter for them that this transcendence cannot be achieved without stirring into the brew the blessed among mankind. Exactly why the angels are so inadequate that God's programme is necessary remains obscure; Milton quotes in *De Doctrina* Chapter VII from Job iv. 18 "he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with

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folly", which perhaps he felt to give authority to his picture. But it is intelligible that a stern period of training may be required before transcendence, and at any rate the story is a great boast for ourselves; we are not inclined to blame God for deciding that he needed us before he could abdicate conscientiously.

Thus, by combining the views of M. Saurat and M. Morand, the one attributing to Milton thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls and the other a harsh worldliness, we can I think partly solve the central problem about the poem, which is how Milton can have thought it to justify God. I think the 'internal' evidence of Milton's own writing enough to decide that he meant what I have tried to describe, because it makes our impression of the poem and indeed of the author much more satisfactory; but, even so, external evidence is needed to answer the objection that Milton could not have meant that, or could not have thought of it. I had best begin by saying what I learned from M. Saurat and where I thought his view inadequate. His chief interest, as I understand, was to show that the European Renaissance could not have occurred without an underground influence from Jewish mystics beginning two or three centuries before Milton; the main reason for supposing that Milton had read the *Zohar*, even after textual evidence had been found, was that he was a man who habitually went to the sources of the ideas which he had already found floating about. The doctrine that matter was not created from nothing but was part of God M. Saurat considered fundamental to the Renaissance, because it allowed enough trust in the flesh, the sciences, the arts, the future before man in this world. Milton undoubtedly does express this doctrine, but it does not strike me as prominent in other poets of the time, except for the paradoxes of Donne's love-poetry.

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However, I want to answer a rebuttal of the Saurat position which I happened to come across in an informative and strictly philological work by G. N. Conklin, *Biblical Criticism and Heresy in Milton*, 1949. He says that Milton could not have been influenced by the *Zohar*, or by the mystics around him in the Commonwealth such as Fludd either, because he was "a Puritan, a logician, and, whatever else, assuredly no theosophist", and furthermore that it is mere justice to admit that Milton extracted his beliefs from the ancient texts of Holy Writ by scientific philological techniques, as he steadily claimed to do. Thus his crucial decision that matter was not created from nothing turned simply on an analysis of the Biblical words for *create*, chiefly but not only in Hebrew. Admittedly, this is what Milton claims in Chapter VII of *De Doctrina*, but he was accustomed to defend a position rhetorically, so as to convince other people, after arriving at it himself by a conscientious assessment of the evidence. The philological argument here is only, and could only be, that previous uses of the word had not meant this unique concept before the attempt at expressing it was allegedly made; thus the word in the Bible does not have to mean what theologians say, and is never re-defined by the Bible in a phrase or sentence as meaning that. Milton goes on to give other reasons for his conclusion that 'create' in the Bible does not mean 'from nothing', and by doing so he has in effect enough sense to admit that his negative argument does not make a positive one. These problems about sources are often very subtle, because a powerful mind grabs at a hint of what it needs; admittedly, the *Zohar* was not the only possible source of these large mystical ideas; and one could explain the verbal correspondences found by M. Saurat by supposing that Milton got some other learned man to answer

his questions about the *Zohar*, and read some crucial bits out to him, after he had become blind.

All the same, such ideas undoubtedly were floating about. The trouble with M. Saurat's position, I think, is that he welcomes the liquefaction of God the Father, making him wholly immanent in his creation, and argues that Milton intended that in his epic, without realizing that Milton and his learned contemporaries would think the liquefaction of all the rest of us a prior condition. The idea of the re-absorption of the soul into the Absolute does get hinted at a good deal in the literature, if only in the form of complete self-abandonment to God; whereas the idea that God himself is wholly immanent in his creation belonged mainly to the high specialized output of the Cambridge Platonists. Marlowe's Faustus, in his final speech, desires to return his soul like a rain-drop to the sea rather than remain eternally as an individual in Hell, and this is a crucial image for grasping the Far-Eastern position; the same idea is quite noisy in the supposedly orthodox peroration of *Urn-Burial*: "if any have been so happy as truly to understand Christian annihilation . . . liquefaction . . . ingression into the divine shadow". When Lovewit at the end of *The Alchemist* rebuffs a superstitious fool by saying "Away, you Harry Nicholas" (the founder of the mystical Family of Love which maintained that any man can become Christ), the now remote figure is presumed to be familiar to a popular audience. The ideas which Milton hinted at in the bits of his epic which I have picked out were therefore not nearly so learned and unusual as they seem now; indeed, he probably treated them with caution because they might suggest a more Levelling, more economic-revolutionary, political stand than he in fact took. But the Cambridge Platonists were not dangerous for property-owners in this

way; they were a strand of recent advanced thought which deserved recognition in his epic; also they allowed of a welcome contrast to the picture of God which the Bible forced him to present, and gave a bit more body to the mysterious climax of the Fortunate Fall. The abdication of the Father was thus quite an important part of his delicately balanced structure, and not at all a secret heresy; and of course not 'unconscious' if it needed tact. At bottom, indeed, a quaintly political mind is what we find engaged on the enormous synthesis. Milton knows by experience that God is at present the grindingly harsh figure described in the Old Testament; after all, Milton had long been printing the conviction that his political side had been proved right because God had made it win, so its eventual defeat was a difficult thing to justify God for. But it was essential to retain the faith that God has a good eventual plan; well then, the Cambridge Platonists can be allowed to be right about God, but only as he will become in the remote future. It seems to me one of the likeable sides of Milton that he would regard this as a practical and statesmanlike proposal.

M. Saurat, on the other hand, wanted Milton to use the *Zohar* to drive the last remnants of Manichaeism out of Christianity, and therefore argued that God in the epic is already an ineffable Absolute or World-Soul dissolved into the formative matter of the universe. After a timid peep into one volume of a translation of the *Zohar*, I am sure that Milton would not find it as opposite from the Gnostics as black from white, which is what the eloquence and selection of M. Saurat lead us to suppose. Milton would regard it as further evidence that the Fathers had slandered the Gnostics, as he had been sure when he was young, just as Rome had behaved very wickedly to the Cathars; all these heretics probably had something to be

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said for them, though of course one must expect most of their stuff to be dead wood. And the Gnostics are reported as believing, no less than the Cabbalists of the *Zohar*, in an eventual reunion of the many with the One. The Saurat interpretation of the epic makes nonsense of most of its narrative, but that is better than giving it an evil sense; the point where one ought to revolt comes when the interpretation drives poor M. Saurat into uneasy brief expressions of bad feeling. He praises God's jokes (p. 192, 1944 edition) because the only relation of the Absolute to its creation which a poet can present is 'irony', and here the protean word has to mean mean-minded jeering. M. Saurat deserves to be released from this position; the idea of God as the Absolute is genuinely present in the poem, but only when God is adumbrating the Last Things.

The well-argued view of M. Morand, that the purblind Milton described God from his experience of Cromwell, also allows of an unexpectedly sublime conclusion. Milton's own political record, as I understand, cannot be found contemptible; he backed Cromwell and his Independents in the army against the Presbyterians in Parliament because he wanted religious freedom, but always remained capable of saying where he thought Cromwell had gone wrong; for example, in refusing to disestablish the Church. However, on one point Cromwell was impeccable, and appears to be unique among dictators; his admitted and genuine bother, for a number of years, was to find some way of establishing a Parliament under which he could feel himself justified in stopping being dictator. When Milton made God the Father plan for his eventual abdication, he ascribed to him in the high tradition of Plutarch the noblest sentiment that could be found in an absolute ruler; and could reflect with pride that he had

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himself seen it in operation, though with a tragic end. Milton's God is thus to be regarded as like King Lear and Prospero, turbulent and masterful characters who are struggling to become able to renounce their power and enter peace; the story makes him behave much worse than they do, but the author allows him the same purifying aspiration. Even the lie of God "Die he or Justice must", we may now charitably reflect, is partly covered when Milton says that Satan

with necessity

The Tyrant's plea, excused his devilish deeds. (IV. 395)

It must be added at once that we cannot find enough necessity; the poem, to be completely four-square, ought to explain why God had to procure all these falls for his eventual high purpose. Such is the basic question as it stood long before Milton handled it; but he puts the mystery in a place evidently beyond human knowledge, and he makes tolerably decent, though salty and rough, what is within our reach.

This I think answers the fundamental objection of Yvor Winters, with which it seemed right to begin the chapter; Milton's poetical formula for God is not simply to copy Zeus in Homer but, much more dramatically, to cut out everything between the two ends of the large body of Western thought about God, and stick to Moses except at the high points which anticipate Spinoza. The procedure is bound to make God interesting; take the case of his announcing to the loyal angels that he will create mankind to spite the devil. God must be supposed to intend his words to suggest to the angels what they do to us, but any angel instructed in theology will realize that God has intended throughout all eternity to spite Satan, so that when he presents this plan as new he

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is telling a lie, which he has also intended to tell throughout all eternity. No wonder it will be 'far happier days' after he has abdicated (XII. 465). Milton was well able to understand these contradictions, and naturally he would want to leave room for an eventual solution of them.

Perhaps I find him like Kafka merely because both seem to have had a kind of foreknowledge of the Totalitarian State, whether or not this was what C. S. Lewis praised as his beautiful sense of the idea of social order. The picture of God in the poem, including perhaps even the high moments when he speaks of the end, is astonishingly like Uncle Joe Stalin; the same patience under an appearance of roughness, the same flashes of joviality, the same thorough unscrupulousness, the same real bad temper. It seems little use to puzzle ourselves whether Milton realized he was producing this effect, because it would follow in any case from what he had set himself to do.

Chapter 4

EVE

A POST-GRADUATE student at Peking National University, when I went back there shortly after the war, was examining the Fall of Eve with growing indignation on her behalf, and seemed to me to have made an important discovery; I took his essay to the Summer School at Kenyon College, Ohio, in 1948, but failed to place it with a magazine, and he was unlikely to follow it up in later years. So when I at last got round to reading M. Morand I was relieved from an old sense of guilt; Mr King Fa-Shui would in any case not have had the priority. Rather little of this book is my own invention. These two critics are very unlike, except in their sense of justice and a certain independence of current critical fashion; and what occurred to both of them, not to me, was that Adam and Eve would not have fallen unless God had sent Raphael to talk to them, supposedly to strengthen their resistance to temptation. Merely cheating his own troops to get Satan into Paradise would not have been enough.

They are both hard to tempt; Eve at least wants to get to Heaven, and this is the point which is exploited, but Adam is so free from ambition as to be almost impenetrable. Even so, when Satan first tempts Eve, whispering ill dreams disguised as a toad, she wakes up determined to resist. I cannot sympathize with the view of Dr Tillyard, that her flushing and her anxiety show her already not quite innocent before her Fall; if it is lack of innocence to want to go to Heaven, and to find a need to distinguish