

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Milton's *aevum*: The Time Structure of Grace in *Paradise Lost*

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Two thirds of *Paradise Lost* – and a Fall – separate Milton's description of the Father's plan of regeneration for humankind (3.173-97) from the actualization of the first stages of that plan (11.1-8). Clearly, the plan and actualization involve a special relation between God's grace and human free will. In Book 3 the Father places grace at the beginning of the process of regeneration (3.187), which is then followed by his softening of 'stony hearts / To pray, repent, and bring obedience due' (3.189-90).¹ This cause-effect relationship is repeated in Book 11. There, 'grace', operating from the 'mercy-seat above' (11.2), removes 'the stony' from the hearts of Adam and Eve (11.3-4), who then repent and start on their long way to regeneration. Yet nowhere in the poem do we seem to learn how this grace substantively operates in Adam and Eve to achieve regeneration. On the level of doctrine Dennis Danielson is surely correct in explaining that 'How God removes "the stony from hearts" and makes "new flesh / Regenerate grow instead" must remain a great mystery, and how the operation of such grace is experienced may be ineffable, even at times paradoxical'.² Yet Milton's poetry can find effective, even powerfully efficacious, ways of expressing ineffable paradox. I propose that in this case Milton discloses a part of the way grace operates in humankind by deploying an inner, secondary time structure in *Paradise Lost*. Running parallel to the explicit narrative of the Fall, this implicit chronicle of regeneration paradoxically intertwines two contrasting durations, one finite the other infinite, in this way applying the scholastic concept of the *aevum*. Translated from the Greek term *aion* and, possibly,

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¹ All quotations of *Paradise Lost* are from John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn. New York: Longman, 1998).

² Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 90. For similar views see Hugh MacCallum, *Milton and the Sons of God: The Divine Image in Milton's Epic Poetry* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1986), p. 185 and C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 210.

associated with the Hebrew word *olam*, the concept of the *aevum* was used in the thirteenth-century as a *tertium quid* between eternity and time to describe the domain in which angels exist.³ The *aevum* is a formulation, or a kind of logic, that builds durations of the divine and the human into the same structure. In Milton's case the *aevum* thus fits neatly into the framework of an Arminian doctrine of grace in which regeneration is seen as a cooperation of God's grace and human free will. In his influential study, *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode tried to suggest the continuing importance of the *aevum* in Western literature. Yet, as he later lamented, his suggestions on this score were largely ignored. I was initially drawn to an understanding of the *aevum* by these suggestions. Among other things, the present essay is therefore an attempt to add credibility to Kermode's high valuation of the term.⁴

My exposition of Milton's *aevum* in *Paradise Lost* proceeds through the following steps: section I focuses attention on the repentance scene in Book 11.1-8, in which the effect of grace is most clearly associated with Milton's representation of the *aevum*. It then traces the initial stage of the Miltonic *aevum* in a series of images that lead to Adam's and Eve's repentance. By discussing in detail the time structure of the image of the chariot in Book 6.748-50, section II concentrates on the second stage in the development of the Miltonic *aevum*. Central to this discussion are the poem's allusions to two formative moments – one Homeric, the other Hebraic – in which the relationship between the divine and the human is contextualized within eviternal moments. An analysis of the 'third sacred morn' within the context of these two pre-Christian moments will reveal the ways by which Milton represents the transformation of the primordial intuition of the *aevum* into a complex and multilayered Christian concept of grace. Finally, this study will trace the development of the present moment of consciousness into a full spectrum of time awareness, which allows for an understanding of grace not only as a mere intertwining of human and divine durations but also as a moral imperative. The epic's representation of the development of the

³ For the earliest recorded meanings of the term *aion* see *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). See also Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 201-202 and A. C. Pearson, *Verbal Scholarship and the Growth of Some Abstract Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 26-30. For the association of the *aion* with duration and *psyche* see W. von Leyden, 'Time, Number, and Eternity in Plato and Aristotle', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14.54 (1964), 35-52 (p. 36). R. C. Dales discusses the translation of the word *aion* into the Latin word *aevum* in various renditions of biblical texts, philosophical writings, and patristic sources. See R. C. Dales, 'Time and Eternity in the Thirteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49.1 (1988), 27-45. For a thorough discussion of the *aevum* from a philosophical point of view see Rory Fox, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 244-81.

⁴ See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of and Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 194-97. For Kermode's retrospective remark about the *aevum* see his 'Ending, Continued', in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 71-94 (p. 82).

aevum on the temporal level of *Paradise Lost* through rhetorical and grammatical structures is the focus of this study.⁵

I

In *Paradise Lost* the Miltonic *aevum* is most clearly associated with the concept of grace in the repentance scene that opens book eleven:

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying, for from the mercy-seat above
Prevenient grace descending had removed
The stony from their hearts, and made new flesh
Regenerate grow instead...

(11.1-5)

At first glance it seems that a simple temporal chain of cause and effect is traced between grace and repentance. As I have said, it would seem that grace, operating from the ‘mercy-seat above’ (11.2), removes ‘the stony’ from the hearts of Adam and Eve (11.3-4). This act somehow – we cannot immediately see how – generates repentance in the human pair (11.1-2). The cooperation of God’s grace and Adam’s and Eve’s free act of repentance leads to regeneration (11.4-5). Yet the verb ‘descending’ opens the possibility that what seems to be a well-organized temporal sphere is in fact a paradox: ‘grace’ which ‘had removed / The stony from their hearts’ (11.3-4) in a finite, clear

⁵ So far as I know, this study is the first to suggest the intermediate domain of the *aevum* as a possible context of interpretation along the domains of eternity and time. For the traditional interpretation of the question of time in *Paradise Lost sub specie aeternitatis* see, for example, A.R. Cirillo, “‘Hail Holy Light’ and Divine Time in *Paradise Lost*”, *JEGP* 68 (1969), 45-56, and R. L. Colie, ‘Time and Eternity: Paradox and Structure in *Paradise Lost*’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23 (1960), 127-38. In his groundbreaking work on the Miltonic concept of time E. W. Taylor considers time as an indispensable component for our understanding of the relationship between time and eternity. See E. W. Taylor, *Milton’s Poetry: Its Development in Time* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1979), 123-47. For more recent considerations of time as a significant component represented in the poem in its own right see, for example, Catherine Gimelli Martin, ‘The Enclosed Garden and the Apocalypse: Immanent versus Transcendent Time in Milton and Marvell’, in *Milton and the Ends of Time*, ed. by Juliet Cummins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 144-68, Sherry Lutz Zivley, ‘The Thirty-Three Days of *Paradise Lost*’, *Milton Quarterly* 34 (2000), 117-27, and Anthony Welch, ‘Reconsidering Chronology in *Paradise Lost*’, in *Milton Studies* vol. 41, ed. by Albert C. Labriola (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002), pp. 1-17. An elucidation of the time-scheme of *Paradise Lost* may be found in the introduction to John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn. (New York: Longman, 1998), pp. 29-33. For my interpretation of time in *Paradise Lost* as an indispensable form in and through which regeneration may be achieved, based on the distinction between the A- and B-series of time made by the twentieth century philosopher J. M. E. McTaggart, see A. C. Langer, “‘Pardon may be Found in Time Besought’”: Time Structures of the Mind in *Paradise Lost*’, in *Milton Studies* vol. 52, ed. Laura L. Knoppers (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University press, 2011), pp. 169-83.

action *in the past* is, or at least may be, descending *now*. In other words, this infinite, continuous action of descending, which takes place *now*, may be simultaneous with a finite, completed action, ‘had removed’, which occurred in the distant past, well prior to the praying of Adam and Eve. Being simultaneous with the action of removing ‘the stony’ from hearts, the infinite action of ‘descending’ may well impose everlastingness on the act of removing: removing ‘the stony’ could then be an endless process of becoming, in which the act of removing is permanently coming into being yet never comes to an end. The structure of grace as it is represented in this passage can suggest an everlasting becoming – both immobile and changing – that is expressed through the intertwining of two contrasted systems of finite and infinite modes. ‘Grace’ can therefore be interpreted here in an Arminian manner as a cooperation of the infinite and the finite and as such it complements the same diachronic reading of this passage.

The Miltonic *aevum* also underlies a series of images that are situated at key moments throughout Books 4-9. Though ‘grace’ is mentioned in none of these images, their time structure is identical to the time structure that underlies the description of grace in the repentance scene. On the basis of this similarity I refer to these images as images of grace. At the centre of each of these images is a description of either a sunrise or a sunset, and each captures the moment of an interchange between darkness and light. Such interchanges capture the doubleness of the moment of everlasting becoming that forms the intermediate temporal domain between night and day. In these images the description of the sunrise or the sunset is prolonged indefinitely to create a moment of everlasting becoming, which Milton closely associates with his representation of grace in the poem.

As the explicit narrative of *Paradise Lost* advances from the description of Satan scheming the ruin of humankind in Book 4 (4.505-38) to the representation of the Fall in Book 9 (9.780-81), the images of grace emerge into the chronological time of the poem. This forms a complementary narrative of regeneration, the function of which is to hint at a future regeneration in the event of a fall.⁶ The recurrence of this time structure promotes a consciousness of grace in the minds of Adam and Eve that allows for a free act of repentance and, ultimately, may lead to regeneration. The time structure of grace is imprinted also on the mind of the reader. By grounding the sequence of the images of grace in the concrete and intelligible structure of the Miltonic *aevum* Milton makes the reader experience the same development of grace that takes place in the minds of Adam

⁶ For similar lines of interpretation in which the narrative of the Fall is counter-balanced by a narrative of regeneration see, for example, E. M. W. Tillyard, *Studies in Milton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p. 13, Dennis Danielson, ‘The Fall and Milton’s Theodicy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. by Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 144-59 (p. 152) and Golda Werman, *Milton and Midrash* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), p. 150.

and Eve. However, whereas Adam and Eve are first made aware of the peculiar time of grace during their long instruction by Raphael (Books 5-8), Milton makes the structure of grace fully available to the reader already in the first descriptions of paradisaic life in Book 4. By making the entire narrative of grace fully accessible to the reader, *Paradise Lost* marks the reader's mind as the real scene of the drama of regeneration in the same way that it makes the reader's mind, as Stanley Fish argues, the real scene of the drama of the Fall.⁷

Occupying the temporal domain between night and day, Milton's images of the *aevum* or grace are situated in an apparently present moment, an extensible *now*. Milton's descriptions of this *now* are of variable length: in some cases it measures only two lines and in others, three Books. The variable length of this *now* suggests that these moments do not represent the present moment of the temporal order of the world, which consists of definite and coequal units of time, but rather an entirely subjective moment that lasts as long as the question of the intertwining of the infinite and the finite is contemplated in the mind. Thus we can say that the images of grace function in the poem as a series of acts of contemplation. In each of these acts, and through a repeated experience of the natural phenomenon of the sunrise or the sunset, grace is contemplated by both the human pair and the reader. In this moment eternity and time are intertwined into the same structure to form an abstract understanding of grace that could lead to a free act of repentance.

Though all the images of grace in *Paradise Lost* are clearly grounded in the paradoxical time structure of the Miltonic *aevum*, the epic presents us with two distinct stages in the development of the narrative of regeneration in the human mind. In the first stage the mind perceives the paradoxical nature of the intertwining of the finite and infinite modes only in and through the natural phenomenon of the interchange between darkness and light. This attachment of mind to phenomenon is expressed in the text by an interweaving of the *now*, which represents the present moment of consciousness, into the representation of the sunrise or the sunset. At this stage the *now* of consciousness still parallels the present moment of the chronological time of the narrative.

The second stage in the poetic chronicle of regenerative events that are engendered in the human mind begins with the representation of the chariot of paternal deity in Book 6. In this image, the primordial concept of grace, in which the intuitive form of grace was still engaged with its sensuous particulars, is transformed into a Christian concept of grace, in which the principles of grace are formed independently of the appearances

⁷ See Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 1.

from which they are derived. More significant still, the present moment of consciousness, in which the undetachable concept of grace is formed, is transformed in the image of the chariot into a continuum in which the past and the future are equally represented. In this new level of the Christian consciousness of grace the present moment is charged with both the constitutive power of two pre-Christian representations of grace – Hebraic and Homeric – and with the ethical and religious meanings of the Christian vision of things to come. This transformation takes place in the minds of Adam and Eve, but it is also made fully available to the reader. By deploying a complex of literary means, all of which operate on the temporal level of his epic, Milton achieves a representation of the precise moment in which the mind of Adam and Eve and also that of the reader becomes independent of physical phenomena.⁸

The first stage of the development of an inner chronicle of regeneration is represented in *Paradise Lost* by a description of an exceptionally long present moment, the *now*, which forms the context of the first sunset in Paradise. This moment of *now* is constituted by a cluster of three different images, each grounded in the Miltonic *aevum*. The first of these images is a pastoral scene describing ‘all beasts of the earth’ (4.341) preparing for their nocturnal rest:

others on the grass
Couched, and *now* filled with pasture gazing sat,
Or bedward ruminating: for the sun
Declined was hasting *now* with prone career
To the Ocean Isles, and in the ascending scale
Of heaven the stars that usher evening rose...
(4.350-55; emphases added)

That the time of this evening is the present moment, a *now*, is specified twice in this passage. This *now* is then extended over more than two hundred and fifty lines. Thus, in line 540, a hundred and eighty nine lines later, the interchange between light and darkness is described again:

⁸ Milton’s representation of the transcendence of the primordial consciousness of grace in *Paradise Lost* is very similar to the process that Ernst Cassirer describes in his theory of symbolic forms, by which the primordial, naïve structure of the natural world concept is transformed into a theoretical or abstract form. Cassirer maintains that in forming the theoretical concept the mind detaches itself from the direct involvement with sensuous particulars, which is the hallmark of the natural world concept. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 3: The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957), pp. 281-84.

Meanwhile in utmost longitude, where heaven
With earth and ocean meets, *the setting sun*
Slowly descended and with right aspect
Against the eastern gate of Paradise
Leveled his evening rays...
(4.539-43; emphases added)

In this passage the opening adverb ‘meanwhile’ designates the same temporal domain in which the declining sun of the previous example was hastening to the Ocean Isles. Two hundred and forty six lines after the sun has started its descent (4.352) a third image is contextualized within the same moment, which is still that of quiet or motionless ‘still evening’: ‘*Now* came still evening on, and twilight grey / Had in her sober livery all things clad’ (4.598-99; emphasis added). This evening, then, is still in a process of changing into night in the same moment, *now*, of the two previous descriptions of the sunset. Only in lines 4.605-609, when Hesperus leads ‘the starry host’, does this prolonged evening finally come to an end:

Hesperus that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen unveiled her peerless light,
And o’er the dark her silver mantle threw.
(4.605-609)

This unusually prolonged *now*, which sets the temporal domain of the first sunset in Paradise, is the first of a series of four exceptionally extended interchanges between darkness and light in *Paradise Lost*.⁹ Like all of the other prolonged moments in *Paradise Lost*, this moment is not a representation of the present moment of the physical, measurable world, but rather the present moment of contemplative consciousness. In this subjective moment the concepts of eternity and time are contemplated in the mind in terms of the poem’s special time structure of grace, which constitutes the concept of grace as a simultaneity of forces of two completely different orders: the human and the divine.

⁹ The other moments are the first description of morning in Paradise (5.1-143), the second morning in Paradise (9.192-99), and the exceptionally long noon time in which Raphael instructs Adam and Eve in the bower of bliss (5.300-8.632), from which I will later consider the moment at which the Son enters time in the chariot of paternal deity (6.746-48).

Paradise Lost's first extended moment of contemplative consciousness is built into the text by a constant repetition of the Miltonic *aevum*: each of the images of grace that constitute this moment is marked by an intertwining of finite and infinite modes into a single syntactic unit. In the first of these images a finite action that was completed in the past, 'the sun declined' (4.352-53), is intertwined with a continuous action in the past whose end is not specified in the text: 'was hastening' (4.353). I quote the relevant lines again for ease of reference:

for the sun
Declined was hastening *now* with prone career
To the Ocean Isles, and in the ascending scale
Of heaven the stars that usher evening rose...
(4.352-55; emphasis added)

Clearly, the *now* of line 4.353 is the context within which an already declined sun is said to be still hastening, though in the past, 'with prone career / To the ocean Isles' (4.353-54). Still contextualized in the present moment, evening is ushered in, an action that is also described in the past tense: 'the stars that usher evening rose' (4.355). Thus, a paradox is created at the syntactic level of the image in which two incompatible durations, finite and infinite, are intertwined into a single structure.

This pattern, in which the present moment, the *now*, is the temporal duration within which a past, completed, action is intertwined with a continuous, incomplete action, occurs in all the poem's representations of the interchanges between darkness and light. In the first stage of the Miltonic *aevum* this *now* is invariably represented as an indispensable part of the syntactic structure that underlies the description of the sunrise or the sunset. The poem's first moment of contemplative consciousness, for example, is woven into the midst of the description of the setting sun: 'the sun / Declined was hastening *now* with prone career / To the Ocean Isles' (4.353-54). This might suggest that at this preliminary stage, when the mind only starts contemplating the idea of grace, the mind is still attached to the phenomenon of the sunset that triggers this contemplation. Initially, the idea of grace can only be formed in the mind in close association with the phenomenon of the interchange between darkness and light. God's grace is therefore offered to humankind in and through nature, which, at this stage, is the sole trigger for the contemplation of the idea of grace in the human mind.

II

The second stage in the development of the concept of grace in the mind is marked by the representation of the chariot of paternal deity (6.746-892). In this pivotal image the Son enters time in a chariot, modeled on Ezekiel's *Merkabah*, in order to decide the war in heaven. On the face of it, the time structure of the image of the chariot seems identical with the time structure of each of the primordial images of grace of the first stage. The intertwining of the durations of eternity and time into a single structure that is so characteristic of the primordial images of grace is represented in the image of the chariot by the coming into being of the third day of the war in heaven:

And the third sacred morn began to shine
Dawning through heav'n: forth rushed with whirlwind sound
The chariot of paternal deity...
(6.748-50)

The 'sacred morn' is described in its process of becoming: 'Dawning through heav'n' light permeates the scene that is developing towards a full morning. Nevertheless, as the grammar of 'dawning' indicates, this is a continuous process. The morning begins to shine; yet the passage of light from night to day is somehow endlessly caught in this coming into being of a day that seems never to reach the point of fullness. Both everlasting and incessantly coming into being, for Milton the time structure of grace is precisely this moment which is situated at the border between everlasting Being and everlasting becoming, sharing in both.

Yet similar as it may be to the moment of grace depicted in the earlier images of grace, the moment in which 'the third sacred day [begins] to shine' is acutely different from its predecessors. Whereas in the previous images the interchange is directly experienced by Adam and Eve, here, for the first time in the epic's representation of the development of a consciousness of grace, the phenomenon of grace is not represented as an integral part of paradisaical space and time. Rather, the 'dawning through heav'n' marks the temporal border-line between night and day in *pre*-paradisaical time, which is far beyond the limits of the experience of Adam and Eve. The sunrise of this image is brought to the awareness of the human pair only through the mediation of Raphael's account of the war in heaven, an event that occurred far before the creation of their world. This is effected in the text by creating a 'time within time' situation: the time within which Raphael's account is contextualized, that is the third sacred morning, is 'nested' within the present moment of noon time, the *now*, at which Adam and Eve are listening to Raphael's account of the war in heaven.

The technique of ‘nesting’ time within time allows Milton to frame the rising of the sacred morning within the present moment of contemplative consciousness without weaving it directly into the description of the phenomenon of the sunrise. Thus, the present moment of consciousness, the *now*, is not opened up with the description of the sunrise in Book 6.746 but rather at noon time more than a thousand lines earlier. Constituting the longest moment in the poem, the *now* that forms the temporal context for the image of the chariot starts with Raphael’s visit to Paradise in Book 5.300 and concludes with the angel’s departure at the end of Book 8. During this exceptionally long moment Raphael relates to Adam and Eve the details of angelic nature, the story of the creation of the world and the history of the war in heaven. This moment opens in Book 5, when Adam first discerns the coming of the angel:

Him [Raphael] through the spicy forest onward come
Adam discerned, as in the door he sat
Of his cool bower, while *now the mounted sun*
Shot down direct his fervid rays to warm
Earth’s inmost womb, more warmth than Adam needs...
(5.298-302; emphases added)

More than two hundred and fifty lines later, after Raphael has answered Adam’s questions concerning angelic nature, Adam specifies that it is still noon time:

And we have yet large day, for scarce the sun
Hath finished half his journey, and scarce begins
His other half in the great zone of heaven.
(5.558-60)

Clearly, some time must have elapsed since Raphael has begun instructing Adam and Eve in the mysterious nature of angelic life. Yet the time is still that intermediate moment of noon which is situated between the two halves of the sun’s journey. This suspension of noon time is maintained during the two following parts of Raphael’s teaching. Thus, preceding the angel’s story of the creation the epic specifies that the time is still this *now* of contemplative consciousness which has been opened in Book 5.300:

and *now*

Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know

[...]

Proceeded thus to ask his heavenly guest.

(7.60; 7.69, emphasis added)

Distanced from this mention of the unchanged time by the content of Book 7, in the opening lines of Book 8 the same *now* is specified again, this time by Adam:

What thanks sufficient, or what recompense

Equal have I to render thee, divine

Historian, who thus largely hast allayed

The thirst I had of knowledge, and vouchsafed

This friendly condescension to relate

Things else by me unsearchable, *now* heard

With wonder, but delight, and, as is due,

With glory attributed to the high

Creator...

(8.5-13, emphasis added)

Only in Book 8 does this longest moment in the poem come to an end with Raphael's words of departure:

But I can *now* no more; the parting sun

Beyond the earth's green cape and verdant isles

Hesperian sets, my signal to depart.

(8.630-32; emphasis added)

Significantly, it is not only the narration of 'things above [their] world' (5.455) that is brought to a conclusion in Raphael's farewell words, but also the longest present time of consciousness within which these things were represented in the minds of Adam and Eve. In this moment, the details of angelic nature, the story of the creation of the world and the history of the war in heaven – all included in Raphael's account – are not directly experienced by Adam and Eve. Instead, these things are contemplated from a distance in a mind that has now become capable of *imagining* the paradox that inheres in the Miltonic *aevum* and, more generally, of structuring the order of the world according to its own criteria.

The *now* of consciousness, in which Raphael communicates the image of the chariot to Adam and Eve, is also the moment at which what has been hitherto an unconscious mind becomes a fully conscious intellectual being which seizes control over its own process of development. This *now* is the first to be fully recognized by Adam as a moment of suspension, that is a moment in which the incessant movement of time is immobilized and God's eternity overlaps human temporality. On two occasions during Raphael's account Adam takes note of instances of the moment of the *aevum*. After the angel has completed his account of the war in heaven Adam notes that the day will continue to delay to hear Raphael's account of the generation of time:

And the great light of day yet wants to run
Much of his race though steep, suspense in heaven
Held by thy [Raphael's] voice, thy potent voice he hears,
And longer will delay to hear thee tell
His generation, and the rising birth
Of nature from the unapparent deep...
(7.98-103)

In this passage Adam discloses his awareness of the suspension of time in which the angel's account has been contextualized when he expresses a wish that the day would delay even 'longer' to hear 'his generation' (7.101-102). At the end of Raphael's account of the creation, the narrator describes a similar suspension in time, but this time this suspension takes place in Adam's inner time of consciousness. Thus, though the angel is said to have concluded his narration, his words are still ringing in Adam's ear:

The angel ended, and in Adam's ear
So charming left his voice, that he awhile
Thought him still speaking, still stood fixed to hear;
Then as new waked thus gratefully replied.
(8.1-4)

This ringing of Raphael's voice in Adam's mind occurs, too, in a suspension of time, for Adam is described as standing fixed to hear the angel's voice that is 'still speaking' in his inner time of consciousness (8.3). In this paradoxical structure an indefinite verb that describes an incessant movement, 'speaking', is coupled with the adverb 'still', which designates, *inter alia*, immobility. In this way a paradox is created of an endless movement which is at the same time immobilized. Significantly, the narrator associates the moment of *aevum* in which Adam acquires knowledge with regeneration. At the end of his contemplation of the angel's words Adam is likened to someone who is *new*

waked (8.4). A little further on, Adam uses precisely this phrase in his description of his own creation:

For man to tell how human life began
Is hard; for who himself beginning knew?
Desire with thee still longer to converse
Induced me. *As new waked* from soundest sleep
Soft on the flowery herb I found me laid
In balmy sweat, which with his beams the sun
Soon dried, and on the reeking moisture fed.

(8.250-56, emphasis added)

The description of himself as a newly created being in the physical sense is made possible only after Adam's consciousness has been 'newly awaken[ed]'. Adam's physical and mental awakening are grounded in this everlasting moment of the *aevum*, in which the mind begins to seize control over its own process of development.

The distance that the mind places between itself and reality is achieved in the image of the chariot also by broadening the scope of the present moment of consciousness. This is done and indicated by a process of allusion. In the opening lines of the image of the chariot the 'third sacred morn' is closely associated with two representations of similar pre-Christian moments, Homeric and Hebraic: one is the sunrise of the longest day in the *Iliad* and the other is the coming into being of the day of revelation in Exodus.¹⁰ To be sure, neither of these associations can be made by Adam and Eve, for whom both the *Iliad* and Exodus belong to an inaccessible literary corpus, yet in the reader's mind these powerful allusions nevertheless levy on and extend a meaning derived from tradition. Thus, by way of association with two pre-Christian representations of the moment of everlasting becoming, the time structure of grace in the reader's mind is extended to include not only the present but also the past. This is the first step in the epic's transformation of the present moment of consciousness into a full spectrum of time awareness which will ultimately be achieved, as we shall see later, with the extending of the Miltonic *aevum* into the future.

¹⁰ Whereas the association of *Iliad* 11.84 with *Paradise Lost* 6.748-49 has been pointed out in the literature – though only thematically – the association of Exodus with *Paradise Lost* 6.748-49 is my own. In both sources the structure that underlies the moment in which the divine and the human are intertwined is strikingly similar to that of the third sacred morning which opens the description of the chariot in *Paradise Lost*.

The allusion of Milton's *third sacred morn* (6.748) to *Iliad* 11.84 is already mentioned in Henry John Todd's edition of *Paradise Lost* from 1801.¹¹ Line 11.84 in the *Iliad*, 'when it was dawn and *hieros* [sacred] day was increasing', introduces the description of the carnage perpetrated by Agamemnon on the Trojan fighting heroes. The thematic connection is clear: both *Iliad* 11.84 and *Paradise Lost* 6.748 set the temporal background against which a battle is to take place. In the former it is Agamemnon who wreaks havoc among the Trojans. In the latter it is the Son who is sent to decide the war in heaven.

Yet it is also on grounds of structural affinity that Milton alludes to *Iliad* 11.84 in his representation of grace in Book 6.748-49 of *Paradise Lost*.¹² Similar to the 'sacred morn' of *Paradise Lost* 6.748-49, the morning of the 'sacred day' of *Iliad* 11.84 is described in its process of becoming. Line 11.84 describes the morning in its process of continuous growing:

ὄφρα μὲν ἠὼς ἦν καὶ ἀέξετο ἱερὸν ἦμαρ,
When it was dawn and *hieros* [sacred] day was increasing.¹³

In Homer's description the dawn comes into being as light permeates the world increasingly, yet the day never reaches the point of being. Set against this temporal background of everlasting becoming, Homer's representation of the rising of the holy day is highly similar to Milton's representation of the 'sacred morn' in 6.748-49. Another point of similarity is the representation of this day in the *Iliad* as the longest in the poem. Like the 'first sacred morn' of 6.748, which is contextualized in the longest moment of suspension in *Paradise Lost* (5.298-8.630), the dawn that comes into being in *Iliad* 11.84 opens up the longest day in the *Iliad*. This day measures six books (12-18).¹⁴

¹¹ Bowle, to whom Henry John Todd attributes this allusion, is most likely Rev. John Bowle (1725-1788), whose annotated copies of *Paradise Lost* were in Todd's possession. See *The Poetical Works of John Milton with Notes of Various Authors*, 6 vols, ed. by H. J. Todd, (London: 1801; repr. 1826), xviii and 6.748n.

¹² So far as I know, the similarities between the time structures that ground both *Paradise Lost* 6.746-48 and *Iliad* 11.84 have escaped the attention of earlier commentary.

¹³ In Michael Clarke's translation. See Michael Clarke, 'The Wisdom of Thales and the Problem of the Word HIEROS', *The Classical Quarterly* 45, 2 (1995), 296-317 (p. 311). *Aexeto* is translated in Liddell-Scott as increase, grow. See *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. by Liddell-Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

¹⁴ In his introduction to Book 11 of the *Iliad* Alexander Pope summarizes the main actions that take place in this longest day of the poem. See Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. by Alexander Pope (London: Henry Lintot, 1743), p. 150.

Yet unlike the morning of everlasting becoming in Milton's image of the chariot, the moment of everlasting becoming in *Iliad* 11.84 is not framed within any other time. This moment simply exists in its present form as the events which are contextualized in it unfold one after the other. This can be explained by the peculiar nature of the time structure of the Homeric poems. Erich Auerbach argues that in the Homeric poems there exists only the present moment. This present, which Auerbach terms the 'absolute present', is the foreground in which events in the Homeric poems progress, fully illuminated, with no perspective in time and place. The Homeric style, says Auerbach, is devoid of any 'subjectivistic-perspectivistic procedure'; it does not create 'a foreground and background, resulting in the present lying open to the depths of the past'.¹⁵ On the contrary; the Homeric style 'knows only a foreground, only a uniformly illuminated, uniformly objective present'.¹⁶ Thus, when the *Iliad* sets the events described in books 12-18 in this morning, 'when it was dawn and *hieros* [sacred] day was increasing' (*Iliad*, 11.84), it defines a moment that exists entirely in the objective present. In contrast to *Paradise Lost*, there is in *Iliad* 11.84 no intermediate domain such as the *aevum* in which grace is understood as a concept that intertwines the contrasting concepts of eternity and time into a single structure. Further, in this passage the sacred and the mundane are not represented as opposite terms wherein the sacred is set apart from the physical world. As Walter Burkert points out, in the Homeric poems the word *hieros*, sacred, has not yet acquired the meanings of taboo or a well-defined and set apart divine space which later dominated its meaning.¹⁷ The sacred in *Iliad* 11.84 is therefore grounded in the all-pervasive form of the present moment, which, in its uniform and objective form, defines both the supra mundane and the ordinary. In its close relationship between the phenomenon of the sunrise and the present moment the everlasting moment in the *Iliad* is very similar to the form of the interchange between darkness and light in the primordial images of grace. When Milton associates the time structure of the 'third sacred morn' (6.748) of the war in heaven with the time structure of the everlasting dawn of *Iliad* 11.84 he invests – *but only partially* – the former with the all-pervasive character of the latter.

Like Milton's 'first sacred morn' of 6.748 and the dawn in *Iliad* 11.84 the morning of Revelation at Mount Sinai is described as a moment of becoming:

¹⁵ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 50th Anniversary (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. by John Raffan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985; originally published in German 1977), p. 269.

And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunder and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount and Moses went up.¹⁸

In the first verse the morning, *boqer* in the original Hebrew, is accompanied by *bihəyōt*, a mode that the King James Version avoids translating:

wayehî bayôm hašəlîšî bihəyōt haboqer

And-it-came-to-pass on-the-day the-third at-becoming the-morning

The grammatical instruction of *bihəyōt* is ‘at the moment of becoming’. This moment is everlasting. As is the case in the image of the chariot in *Paradise Lost*, there is in the biblical text no mention of this morning’s ending. Only in Exodus 24.16, more than five chapters later, and without mentioning that the morning of Exodus 19.16 has come to an end, are we informed again about the time scheme within which God’s revelation on Sinai is described. Also like the morning of *Paradise Lost* 6.748-49 the morning of Exodus 19.16 is contextualized within another moment which marks the concept of grace in both descriptions as the ‘absolutely other’ or as a taboo concept. Stéphane Moses insightfully describes the three days that precede the revelation in Exodus as an interruption or *caesura* in time, by which the moment of revelation is presented as entirely separated from ordinary time:

Revelation is separated from the unfolding of profane time, just as – during this period of three days – the space surrounding Mount Sinai appears as a sacred space. This cutting of space and rupture of time delimit a different kind of reality, through which absolute otherness can manifest itself. The biblical narrative itself thus tells us that interruption (or *caesura*) is the very condition

¹⁸ Exodus 19.16, King James Version.

for the constituting of sense: it is in the absence of narrative...and the stopping of time...that divine speech may be heard.¹⁹

What Stéphane Moses describes as the stopping of time is clearly also an intertwining, into a single moment, of divine eternity, static and immobile, with the incessant movement of human time. This moment is a consecrated or holy time, and as such it is presented as separated from the physical reality of the world. Only in its separated, detached form, can this moment, in which divine law is communicated to human beings, be contemplated. Only from a distance, both spatial and temporal, can the divine component in human time be invested with meaning. Thus, when Milton alludes in his description of the chariot to the moment of revelation in Exodus 19 he invests it with this Hebraic meaning of the newly formed relationship between the divine and the human, which can only be fully understood from a distance. From both structural and thematic perspectives, the moment of everlasting becoming in which the Son enters time on 'the third sacred morn' is modeled on the moment of revelation on Mount Sinai 'on the third day in the morning'. This biblical moment, which marks the beginning of an ethical understanding of the relationship between God and human beings, is built into Milton's description of the chariot to dissociate the mind further from the immediate spatio-temporal conditions of the phenomenon of the sunrise within which it is embedded.

Milton's representation of grace in the image of the chariot is therefore invested with both Homeric and Hebraic ideas of the relationship between the divine and the human. On the one hand, the allusion to the increasing day of *Iliad* 11.84 charges the representation of 'the third sacred morn' of *Paradise Lost* 6.748-49 with the Homeric sense of the relationship between the divine and the human as an all-pervasive concept. On the other hand, the allusion to Exodus 19.16-20 charges the representation of the same 'sacred morn' with the consecrated meaning of the relationship between God and humankind, which is contemplated in its detached form. When Milton forms his Christian idea of grace in the image of the chariot he combines both the Homeric and the Hebraic meanings of what he considers to be grace into his representation of the relationship between the divine and the human. His Christian idea of grace is a detached, abstract concept which is nevertheless invested with the memory of a primordial sense of the localization of the sacred, in which form is still involved with sensuous particulars. Even in its abstract form the concept of grace is not – and, indeed, could not be – completely detached from the phenomenon of grace. In other words,

¹⁹ Stéphane Moses, 'Patterns of Negativity in Paul Celan's "The Trumpet Place"', in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 209-24 (p. 216).

even in its representation of the highest religious truth and in its deepest meaning as a taboo, consecrated concept, Milton's Christian concept of grace in *Paradise Lost* 6.748-49 remains attached to the world of appearances from which it has gradually distanced itself. In Milton's epic the abstract form of grace in the human mind is therefore never completely detached from its image, which forever remains a living, creative force in its constant process of coming into being.

Yet, in its Miltonic development, the abstract form of grace in which this dialectic of attachment and detachment takes place could not be entirely achieved until the full continuum of time is represented in the present moment of consciousness. This is finally achieved in Milton's epic when the present moment of consciousness is extended towards the future. Unlike the representations of the moment of everlasting becoming in *Iliad* 11.84 and Exodus 19.16-20, and unlike the earlier representation of the Miltonic *aevum* in the images of grace in *Paradise Lost*, the representation of grace in the image of the chariot has a clearly defined point of beginning. Initiated by the separation of the Son from the Father, 'the third sacred morn [*begins*] to shine':

So said, he o'er his scepter bowing, rose
From the right hand of glory where he sat,
And the third sacred morn *began* to shine
Dawning through heav'n: forth rushed with whirlwind sound
The chariot of paternal deity...

(6.746-50; emphasis added)

This beginning defines a new direction in the *now* of consciousness: the future. When 'the third sacred morn [*begins*] to shine' it creates a new form of temporal vision, which is rooted not in the world of phenomena but rather in abstract thought. What has hitherto been understood as a static idea, which is either involved with the present or the past, is transformed into a dynamic, creative idea which is directed towards the future. This representation of the future in the present moment of consciousness marks the point at which Adam and Eve develop a new understanding of grace as a living force in human life. From this point in the epic all of the representations of the concept of grace in *Paradise Lost* have a beginning. Thus, for example, the last prelapsarian sunrise in Paradise is described as having a definite point of beginning:

Now whenas sacred light *began* to dawn
In Eden on the humid flowers...

(9.192-93, emphasis added)

Likewise, the first postlapsarian sunrise in Paradise, though described in a fragmentary way, clearly *begins* its process of coming into being:

for see the morn
All unconcerned with our unrest, *begins*
Her rosy progress smiling...
(11.173-75; emphasis added)

Significantly, the beginning of this sunrise is reported neither by the narrator nor by Raphael. It is Eve whom Milton chooses as the first to grasp fully the moment of grace in its entirety. In her almost desperate attempt to return to her prelapsarian life after the Fall, Eve notices the moment in which ‘the morn...begins / Her rosy progress smiling’ (11.174-75). Eve’s attempt to resume the old prelapsarian routine fails, and so does the coming into being of the morning. The ‘short blush of morn’ (11.184) ends with an eclipse, and nature starts its postlapsarian transformation. But Eve’s mention of the beginning of the day is clearly evidence of the internalization of the future in the present moment of human consciousness. The phenomenon of the interchange between darkness and light is now represented in her mind as an event that progresses into the future.

Similarly, Adam’s last words in the poem are evidence that he, too, has internalized the representation of the future in the present moment of consciousness:

Henceforth I learn that to obey is best,
And love with fear the only God, to walk
As in his presence, ever to observe
His providence, and on him sole depend,
Merciful over all his works, with good
Still overcoming evil, and by small
Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak
Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
By simply meek...
(12.561-69; emphasis added)

Adam’s use of the adverb *henceforth* – from now on – at the opening of his last words in *Paradise Lost*, reveals that it is not only the present moment that is represented in his *now* of consciousness but also the future. To be sure, Adam’s use of ‘henceforth’ is the last step in the epic’s transformation of the present moment of consciousness into a full spectrum of time awareness. But it may also imply the resolve of the free will that has

been disclosed by the *aevum* moments. By grounding his newly acquired knowledge that ‘to obey is best’ in the future moment of the Miltonic *aevum*, Adam discloses his understanding of the concept of grace not only as a mere conversion of two contrasting durations but also as a moral imperative. This is further expressed in the following lines, ‘to walk / As in his [God’s] presence’ (12.562-63) and ‘ever to observe his providence’, (12.563-64) by which Adam captures the paradox that inheres in the Miltonic *aevum* in moral terms.

A few lines later, this understanding is strikingly represented in the language of the Miltonic *aevum*. The combination ‘still good’ in the phrase ‘with good / Still overcoming evil’, (12.565-66) may be understood as an immobile and changeless good, but it is, at the same time, persistently and perhaps even endlessly (‘still’) overcoming evil. The word ‘still’, then, is built into the semantic level of the sentence in both its meanings as immobility and persisting through time, in this way creating the paradox of the Miltonic *aevum*. Significantly, Adam’s use of the language of grace within the context of the future moment of the Miltonic *aevum* echoes Michael’s reassuring words that even in a postlapsarian world God is ever present. In reply to Adam’s anxious question, ‘in yonder nether world where shall I seek / His bright appearances, or footstep trace?’, Michael says:

Yet doubt not but in valley and in plain
God is as here, and will be found alike
Present, and of his presence many a sign
Still following thee, still compassing thee round
With goodness and paternal love, his face
Express and of his steps the track divine.

(11.349-54)

In this passage God’s presence in the world is expressed not only on the semantic level of the sentence but also in its syntactic structure. The word ‘still’ in the structures ‘still following thee’ and ‘still compassing thee’ (11-352) may be understood in both its meanings as stasis and persistence in time. Thus, the many signs of God’s presence in the world may be seen as statically – yet, paradoxically, also dynamically – following or encompassing humankind ‘with goodness and paternal love’ (11.353). By grounding Michael’s words in the Miltonic *aevum* Milton’s poetry effectively expresses what seems to be an ineffable paradox of the relationship between God and humankind. Adam’s echoing of Michael’s formulation of the paradox of the Miltonic *aevum* in his association of God’s presence in the world with ‘good / Still overcoming evil’ (12.565-66) shows that he has fully internalized the understanding of grace in and through the

paradox of the Miltonic *aevum* and, like Michael, expresses this understanding in moral terms. Thus, in its fully transformed form, complete with its moral implications, the representation of the full scope of the present time of consciousness in the minds of Adam and Eve shifts the emphasis from an understanding of grace as a static concept to an understanding of grace as a dynamic, creative force, which is no less human than it is divine. At the end of *Paradise Lost*, when the fallen Adam and Eve ‘hand in hand with wandering steps and slow / Through Eden take their solitary way’ (12.648-49), they have nevertheless developed a full awareness of the concept of grace, which by now has become a regenerative, formative power in the individual minds of each of our self-conscious primordial parents.