

Technique of anticipation and recapitulation in “Paradise Lost”: Book - 1

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Abstract

The Book 1 of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* serves as a kind of prelude to the whole epic. It moves back and forth in time. And precisely because Milton, in writing it, followed this technique of anticipation and recapitulation or the forward-backward-forward movement, one easily grasps the rest of *Paradise Lost*, by reading Book 1. By using this technique of anticipation and recapitulation, Milton organises action (structure), depicts character, presents the locale and handles the texture. This technique of flashback (past) and prophecy (future) makes it easy for the reader to extract meaning from parallel situations.

Key words: Anticipation, Recapitulation, Locale, Character, Action, Texture, Medias Res, Prophecy, Flashback, Satan and Beelzebub

Introduction

Book I of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is a brilliant insight into his whole epic through the varied interplay of reported actions directed now forward, now backward. The backward movement refers to action prior to Satan’s ejection from Heaven. By the same logic, the forward movement would point to actions taking place after Satan’s rout. The entire epic is built around two themes: the fall of the angels and the fall of man, which are harmoniously balanced. Hence the clever chronology of his narrative, through the technique of *Anticipation* and *Recapitulation*, shows that the real action of the poem is outside time and place, that it takes place everywhere and always, that it’s happening here and now.

It has been said about Book-I of *Paradise Lost* that one who knows it has known the whole of the epic. Book-I, being a kind of prelude to the entire work, moves back and forth in time, and precisely because Milton, in writing it, followed this technique of anticipation and recapitulation, the first book is unlike any other book of the epic. If we read it from this angle we shall not only grasp Book-I, but will know the rest of *Paradise Lost*. Milton uses this technique at four levels:

1. Action
2. Character
3. Locale
4. Texture

By employing this technique of anticipation and recapitulation, Milton organises action (structure), depicts character, presents the locale and handles the texture. The terms structure and texture are not to be used exactly in the sense in which Ransom has used them but rather broadly. By texture is meant such concrete particular details which could be easily differentiated from abstract ideas. The term ‘structure’ is used in the sense of sum of relationship of the parts of a literary whole to one another. The structure, therefore, among other things, is texture as well. Its conceptual horizon is broader than that of texture.

1. Structure (Organisation of Action)

As regards the structure, *Paradise Lost*, like an epic poem, begins not in the beginning but in *medias res*. Homer did it, so did Virgil; and Milton who followed both ran true to the type. As the poem opens, the revolt in heaven has already occurred, Satan and his second-in-command, his host Beelzebub have fallen, and now lie stunned on the burning lake that gives off darkness instead of light. Milton raises the question of how Adam and Eve's disobedience occurred and explains that their actions were partly due to a serpent's deception. This serpent is Satan and the poem joins him and his followers in Hell, where they have been cast after being defeated by God in Heaven. The speeches of the fallen angels are an assessment of the predicament in which they find themselves, and reflect the experience of their immediate past: these experiences largely shape the plan of action formulated, which carries us forward to the next stage. The "middle beginning" then does not pose any problem in tracing the sequence of epic narration. Lines 27 to 49 prove the point:

Say first, for heav'n hides nothing from thy view
Nor the deep tract of Hell, say first what cause
Mov'd our grant parents in that happy state
Favour'd of Heav'n so highly, to fall off
From their Creator, and transgress his will
For one restraint, lords of the World besides?
Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?
Th' infernal serpent; he it was, whose guile
Stirred up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv'd
The mother of mankind, what time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his host
Of rebel Angles, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in glory above his peers,
He trusted to have equal'd the Most High,
If he oppos'd; and with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God,
Rais'd impious war in Heav'n and battle proud
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky
With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamant chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to Arms.

These lines suggest a varied interplay of reported actions directed now forward, now backward. The backward movement refers to action prior to Satan's ejection from Heaven. By the same logic the forward movement would point to actions taking place after Satan's rout. The forward movement is suggested by line 27, and ends with the rhetorical question at line 32. Using the usual epic device Milton tells his readers of the sublime theme of his epic, namely, the fall of Adam for transgressing God's will. The next movement, which is suggested by line 33, has reference to Satan who would be instrumental in bringing about the high tragedy and who is the central character in Book-1. Thus the line refers to action that will be enacted afterwards. It should be observed, too, that the future action suggested in the line refers to near futurity when Milton simply mentions the seduction of Eve by Satan (1. 33). The remote futurity is suggested by the phrase 'infernal serpent' of 1. 34. The phrase therefore looks forward to Book IX (and hence remote futurity), where Milton describes how Satan entered the body of a serpent to tempt Eve; it also refers to Book X, where both Satan

and “co-partners and associates” would receive the judgement of eternal metamorphosis. The forward movement suggested by 1. 33 comes to a halt in lines 35 to 43 in which Milton takes his readers back to the time before the enactment of the high tragedy. They refer to Satan’s pride, his revolt against God, his associates, and the vain war he had fought. The result of these actions is given in lines 44-49. The backward movement is thus time past, and the forward movement time future and both time past and time future point to time present which lines 44-49 seem to suggest.

From the structural point of view, the passage is a brilliant summing-up of the entire action narrated in *Paradise lost*. The book is built round two great themes which are harmoniously balanced: the fall of the angels and the fall of man. “Conscious of the universal application of the theme, Milton is at pains (despite the vast and generalised descriptions of Hell and Eden and the clever chronology of his narrative) to collapse the space/time scheme of his story in order to show that the real action of the poem is outside time and place, that it takes place everywhere and always, that it is happening here and now”^[1]. The quoted statement suggests that in the first two books the action will take place in Hell. And as Hell is antithesis of Heaven, the latter would be the subject matter of book III. In the next book, Book IV, will be described Paradise, where the human protagonists, Adam and Eve, will be presented in their prelapsarian state. If the first two books suggest present action, the third and the fourth books describe the future action. From the fifth book till the eighth all actions are suspended. Episodic books as they are, in them Milton takes up such ancillary matters that are concerned with the main action but not central to it. In them also Milton prepares the readers’ mind for the momentous event, which is to be enacted, that is, the fall of Adam and Eve. The episodic books over, Milton now describes the Fall, changing his style to tragic, and its consequence in the remaining books, that is Book IX to XII. The poem thus both presents and interprets action. G.K. Hunter remarks:

Paradise Lost is ... a poem dominated by its past ... It is also a poem about the way forward. The fall of man is a beginning of one story as well as the end of another one. The subject-matter thus encourages the poem to be liberal beyond example with both flashback and prophecy (or anticipation) ... The amount of attention Milton’s poem gives to retrospect (Books V-VIII) and prophecy (Books XI – XII) establishes these as of comparable weight to present-tense narrative^[2].

Retrospect or backward movement and prophecy or forward movement are two of the traditional techniques of setting out the meaning of epic actions, as against ‘straight narrative’ sequence. Milton uses these techniques to set out his events in an order which does not deny a narrative construction but which places in front of such a structure a set of alternative methods of construing the material, noting variant arrangement of the action.

W. Grem, *Paradise Lost: Books IV and IX* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), p. 9^[1].

G.K. Hunter, *Paradise Lost* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), p.36^[2].

2. Character

The FBF technique (short for Forward-Backward-Forward) is employed by Milton not merely to organise the action of his epic; he also uses it in presenting his character, the doer of action. Man’s disobedience is the main theme, so Satan is mentioned as the instrument of man’s fall, not as the hero of the poem or the subject of half of the poem. Being the chief instrument, he is to be described first. Therefore in Book I Satan dominates over all other characters. The focus that emerges when the FBF technique is applied to Satan’s character looks at three directions, namely the character of Satan at the time of revolt, after the fall from Heaven, and finally when he degrades himself into a peeping Tom while tempting Eve. All these directions are present in the first book, though the first two directions have been described more vividly, and at length, than the third which Milton reserves for subsequent books. In describing these three directions Milton uses the F B F technique as he does in the manipulation of the structural pattern of his epic.

Satan’s first utterance, as he surveys his dismal surroundings, is defiant and unrepentant, and

his thought is of revenge. But the very first lines of his speech indicate his nostalgic lament for the lost of heaven; hence an instance of the backward movement.

If thou beest he; but oh how fallen! how changed
 From him, who in the happy realms of light
 Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine
 Myriads though bright....
 ... so much the stronger proved
 He with his thunder:

Book I, Lines 85-93

These opening lines are fraught with sighs; they express the memory of the past glory and the present misery of defeat, pity for a companion in ruin, regret for a comradeship leading only to disaster. The movement is from past to present. These lines are followed by a first definition of the contest that is to be undertaken through the books followings:

To do aught good never will be our task,
 But ever to do ill our sole delight
 As being the contrary to his high will
 Whom we resist. It then his providence
 Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
 Our labour must be to prevent that end,

Book I, Lines 159-164

This foreshadows the pain to be put to the full assembly of the fallen angels-a renewed assault on heaven through ‘covert guile’:

To wage by force or guile eternal war,
 Irreconcilable to our grant foe,

Book I, Lines 121-122

“The unconquerable will,” “courage never to submit or yield”-such phrases bespeak a hero. The speech, Milton adds:

So spake the apostate angel, though in pain,
 Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair;

(Lines 125-126)

According to Waldock ^[3], here is a comment to condition our response to the heroic Satan. But if these two lines are viewed from the FBF technique, it will be observed that they refer to one aspect of Satan’s character after the fall, whereas the other aspect, namely the heroic aspect is alluded to in lines 83-124 which precede these two lines. What with unconquerable will and immortal hate. The word ‘despair’ looks backward to Satan’s days in Heaven and the celestial happiness he had enjoyed before his revolt, and which will be never his after the revolt though he would pine for it. This is suggested, for example, in the following lines:

Farewell happy fields
 Where joy for ever dwells

And also in the lines

Now the thought
 Both of lost happiness and lasting pain

Torments him ...

Filled with despair, far removed from God and light of Heaven, Satan's pride hardens in Hell. He, therefore, cultivates the study of revenge, immortal hate, obdurate pride, and courage never to submit or yield in order to derive strength from them. These qualities are, therefore, not inherent in his character, but projections of his mental chaos at the loss of celestial pleasure.

A.J.A Waldock, *Paradise Lost and its Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p.78 ^[3].

In dealing with the character of Satan, Milton is not dealing with a hard-hearted criminal, or a hero with positive values, but with a man who suffers a state of mental division. This is evident in Satan's flashbacks and then in his embittered decisions and plans regarding future. St. Augustine declares in *City of God* that all natures are good, as God first created them and that evil is, in effect, a twisting or preventing of good; it is not a condition independent of good. Satan, like all angels, is a good being but his nature has been distorted by wrong decision on his part. Since his basic nature is good, all Satan's thoughts and deeds are related to good: they are parodies, mockeries, slightly falsified versions, or in one way or another perverted forms of good. The more he becomes practised in the art of falsification, the less recognisable as fundamentally good becomes his nature. This is simply an expression of the Augustinian idea that the sinner becomes more sinful through practice. So the evolution of Satan's character from start to finish, from Book I to Book X, brings out clearly the consequences of his mental division. Thus our admiration of Satan, even in Book I, is unreal. To consider him as a hero is, indeed, a perversion of commentary. Satan "invites" the Devils to consider a "future" of revenge to recoup a "past" of defeat.

3. Locale

The locale of Book I is Hell. By applying F B F technique to the locale, we can see that in picturing Hell, Milton has contrasted it with Heaven. Milton's Hell is no less vivid than Dante's, and in many respects its geography resembles Virgil's Hades in the *Aeneid*. Lines 61 to 74 describe Hell as follows.

A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
As one great furnace flames, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe,
... such place eternal justice had prepared
For those rebellious, here their prison ordained
In utter darkness, and their portion set
As far removed from God and portion set
As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole.

Enmeshed in "utter darkness" (1. 72)-The word 'utter' means both outer and inner, that is complete-Hell is far removed from "God and light of Heaven" (1. 73). Milton says that Hell is situated at a distance which is thrice the distance from the centre of the earth to the pole of the universe (1. 74). In Milton's cosmology the centre refers to the centre of the earth, not the centre of the universe, and the utmost pole to the imaginary line of the universe. Hell is therefore remote from Heaven, from God, and from our cherished ideal. Hell is a dungeon horrible and its "burning marl" (1. 295) is unlike "these steps in Heaven's asure" (1. 296). Deprived of Heaven's "vision beatific" (1. 684) Satan wants to make "a Hell of Heaven" (1. 255).

Milton's Hell may, therefore, be considered as psychological and non-local. As Satan Says, "The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven" (11.

254-55). On the strength of this utterance it has been suggested that Milton's Heaven and Hell both definitely outlast the physical universe. But the passage where Satan denies the effects of Hell on the fallen angels' mind is belied by his shock at the change in Beelzebub—"If thou beest he, but O how fallen! How changed" (1. 84), and almost verbally contradicted in Book IV, ff 75, "Which way I fly is Hell".

The full irony of Satan's speech—"the mind is its own place..." (11. 254-55)-becomes clear if we compare it with his address to the Earth in Book IX. Admiring Earth because it resembles Heaven and reminds of joys he can no longer possess, he cries:

... the more I see
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
Torment within me...

(IX, 119-121)

That is to say, his mind is tormented by the place and cannot, therefore, be "its own place." T. Crehan remarks in his introduction to *Paradise Lost: Books I and II*.

We may think of the character of Satan as a portrait at two levels, the level of epic or story and the level of conduct or thought... Satan's qualities of courage, defiance ... appear as virtues ... appropriate to a heroic figure ... In terms of conduct, Satan's qualities are made to appear angelic virtues gone wrong because they are devoted to a dreadful end, the overthrow of God... All the fire and defiance ... all the grand appeals and super cries will prove, in the end, to be futile ^[4].

At the level of thought, then, Satan sees Hell as a terrible and constant reminder of what he was and what he is now. Milton's Hell then compels our attention to Heaven. By that contrast the hideousness of Hell is augmented. Even when the contrast is not actualised directly, it presents itself ubiquitously, and is implanted in the reader's mind to whet the macabre vision of Hell and the abysses of spiritual evil. Hell has also been presented as a mirror reflecting the feeling of its occupants. We are told of the "rueful stream," the "baleful streams," and so on. This device of attributing human feelings or human significance to non-human objects, is used by Milton to create a simultaneous sense of unity and contrast between past and present. In this connection Dr. Tillyard opines:

T. Crehan, *Paradise Lost: Books I and II* (London: University of London Press, 1966), p. 22 ^[4].

The picture of Heaven corresponds to that of Hell, and gains greatly in beauty by contrast... Divine beatitude is described, but more shortly than Hell's concrete miseries. Far below, Adam and Eve, in blissful solitude, are the unconscious cause in Heaven, as they had been in Hell, of debate and deliberation. As in the council in Hell Satan alone accepts the perilous journey through chaos to Earth, so in the council in Heaven the Son alone dares sacrifice himself for the redemption of man.... Another intentional contrast is between the divided occupations of the fallen angels in Hell when the council is over and the common hymn of praise in Heaven when the issue of the heavenly council has been decided ^[5].

Hell as a locality has to serve a double duty: it is a place of perpetual and unceasing punishment, in theory; and it is also, in the practice of the poem, a place to transport the angels respectively to the past, an assembly ground, a military area, a base for future operations. The severe punishment of Hell is the result of their past sins and the cause of their future acts of revenge.

4. Texture

Milton makes generous use of F B F technique in weaving the texture of the poem as he does in building its structure comprising images, which are of many kinds-visual, tactile, motor, gustatory, olfactory, auditory. Milton uses these images either directly or indirectly through figures of speech such as metaphor, simile and so on. The textural exercise would, therefore, imply an analysis of images, an analysis that would yield a harvest different from that of the

structural exercise. Whereas the latter enkindles, as we have already observed, the time-sequence and causality of Milton's story, the former illumines the atmosphere by which the story is surrounded. Knowledge of atmosphere is as important for understanding the structure of the story as its meaning. It widens our vision enabling us to see larger and still larger areas of the story that we tend to miss if we stop short at the structural exercise.

However, in applying the F B F technique for untangling the threads of the texture, we have to understand it not in the same way as we have understood it while dealing with the structure but somewhat differently. As book I is woven in a texture of one single theme, that of Hell, and Hell was designated 'Forward' in our structural analysis, forward being posterior to backward in time-sequence, forward applied to textural exercise would naturally signify images connected with incidents anterior to the fall of Satan from Heaven, while the second forward in the triune (FBF) would mean the texture in the Adam-Eve fabric.

E.M.W. Tillyard, *Milton; Paradise Lost: The Construction* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p.29^[5].

The texture in Book I is rough, uneven and dark. The only colour that we see here is darkness. Its furnace flames but from those flames, as Milton's famous oxymoron suggests, only darkness is visible: "No light, but rather darkness visible". Its "burning marle" (l. 295) is unlike "the richness of Heaven's pavement, trodden gold" (l. 682). Its surface, too, is uneven. Milton describes its topography using the volcano simile (ll. 230-237). The simile says that the hue of the solid land of Hell has the appearance of a "signed bottom" wreathed with "stench and smoke" very much like "the shattered side of thundering Aetna", or like the surface "when the force of subterranean wind transports a hill torn from Belorus". The meaning of the image would be lost if by hue we simply mean colour. It was a complex word in the 17th century, and Milton uses it both in the sense of surface appearance and its texture.

In this dark world one is astounded, amazed and astonished. Therefore, the word "astounded" or its synonym is omnipresent in Book I. There is a constant reference to horrid and fury. Hell has a satanic attraction for us drawing and paralysing our consciousness. There is in this attraction a loss of "vision beatific" (l. 684). Fully to apprehend this experience we have to understand it in relation to the texture connected with Heaven and Paradise, since the F B F technique implies that the understanding of one unit depends on the simultaneous comprehension of the other two units of the triune. Thus it is that in Book I there are reference to God, light of Heaven, happy realms, transcendental brightness-all textural units connected with heaven. These reference sharpen our perception of Hell and make us realise that Hell is a desolate and dark universe where you are baffled, confounded and constricted by Evil.

The F B F technique is also applied to images used to describe Satan. In Book I, Satan is described as being like a Tower (l. 591), like the sun (l. 595). With the latter image we see the beginning of the process of shrinking. He is still like the sun, but

... as when the sun new-risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon
In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations...

(Book 1, ll. 594-98)

The backward movement refers to the images of his past glory. Having brought us to face the present, Milton artfully clashes with his demonstration to show Satan's fall. So we have two levels: the level of demonstration or exhibition and the level of allegation or commentary.

The forward movement is applied in the great anticipatory simile in which Satan is compared to

Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim th' Ocean stream:
Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam,
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind
Noors by his side under the lee, while night
Invests the sea, and wished morn delays:

(Book I, 11. 201-208)

It is easy to see why Milton should have used the great sea-beast Leviathan to indicate the enormous size of Satan as he lay 'prone on the flood;' the relevance of that part of the simile to the immediate context is clear. It is not so easy to see why Milton goes on to tell the little story about the pilot of the skiff, mistaking Leviathan for an island, and mooring his vessel on to the animal. But imagine what will happen to that skiff and its crew when Leviathan wakes from 'slumbering' and decides to take a deep plunge. Leviathan was traditionally a deceiver and an emblem of Satan. Here is the 'anticipatory'-that which has a general narrative significance-part of the simile. In future Eve would put her trust in Satan, and find him to be a dangerous deceiver.

Thus the forward-backward-forward (or anticipatory and recapitulative) technique-the retrospective reconstruction of the past and anticipatory prophecies of the future-offers us intellectual precedents rather than narrative ones. The recapitulations and variations in destiny that flashback and prophecy make it possible for Milton to establish a sequence which is not handled primarily as a narrative, but as a set of variations, differentiated chiefly by the meaning that can be extracted from parallel situations.

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