

“STAND” AND “FALL” AS IMAGES
OF POSTURE IN *PARADISE LOST*

Nicholas R. Jones

Emphasis on the doctrines of *Paradise Lost* without constant reference to their narrative foundation obscures the clarity of Milton's epic instruction. A major example of the unique conjunction of physical and metaphysical action which characterizes *Paradise Lost* is the multiple use of the verbs “stand” and “fall.” These words signify not only the moral aspect of the epic—obedience and disobedience—but also, simultaneously, its physical adjuncts—posture and position within the cosmos. Picturing the prelapsarian unity of obedience and upright posture, Milton narrates theological events in terms of concrete actions. Similarly, the wild infernal oscillations of size and stance in Book I vividly present the inevitable fall of disobedient creatures. The metaphoric complex associated with “stand” and “fall” operates most fully in the events of the temptation, where images of posture continually figure forth the crucial moral decisions. After the Fall, mankind, bereft of the image of God, learns of his promises to regenerate that image through Christ: Milton demonstrates that man will again stand upright in self-esteem.

READERS OF *Paradise Lost*, trying in retrospect to explain how Milton could possibly justify the ways of God to men, have often turned to God's first speech, near the beginning of Book III. For most of us, it is wonderfully convenient. Invited by the sudden ascent of the poem out of the narrowly confined perspectives of the first two books into the eternal mind which at once comprehends all places and all times, we relax the vigilant distrust that hell demands, seizing upon God's aphoristic phrases as explanations of human history. God, to our relief, expresses with precision and authority the doctrines of prescience and predestination, the nature of human obedience and

divine grace, and, most importantly, his own freedom from blame for the events which Satan is now initiating:

For Man will heark'n to his glozing lies,
And easily transgress the sole Command,
Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall
Hee and his faithless Progeny: whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who fail'd;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.¹

Although God's speech is knotty and paradoxical, the fragments are at least memorable, and it is simple for us to believe that hearing is understanding. In particular, the parallel structure and apparently lucid diction of two phrases appeal to the ear:

I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall,

and

Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.

By abstracting from these already abstracted formulas we may all too conveniently argue about the freedom of the will, the apparently arbitrary division of the good and reprobate in heaven, or the purpose of such an ill-fated creation. We are not, however, likely to succeed in clarifying these issues in our own minds, nor—as any teacher of *Paradise Lost* can witness—in gaining any more than fatigued assent from others. Like the devils, we are likely to find our high reasoning “Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie” (II, 565). The phrases, logically extended, seem not to lead us to the expected fields of consistency. As Northrop Frye has written, Milton invites “disastrous consequences” when he causes God to speak.²

Nonetheless, we are right in ascribing significance to these phrases. Unfortunately, their resemblance to points of abstract theology—their similarity, for example, to Milton's own treatise, the *Christian Doctrine*—blinds us to another, more uniquely poetic way in which they explain the action. In emphasizing the figurative meanings of the prominent verbs “stand” and “fall” we exclude their stronger, more literal mean-

ings. These concrete verbs of action, especially “fall,” belong to a long tradition of theological uses, and in certain contexts this history undercuts their basic denotations of posture and position. “Stand” and “fall” are not at all obscure, and we should not allow them to become so merely because it is God who uses them. As concepts of a very familiar, physical nature, they and their interconnections and extensions in the rest of the poem give us a subtler focus than their theological correlatives. *Paradise Lost* is basically a narrative, not a theological poem. “They stood; they fell” is one of the simplest and most basic of narrative events, and, in the right context, one of the most powerful. I will outline in the rest of this article the context which *Paradise Lost* provides—the complex shape of events and ideas with which the poem surrounds these simple actions.³

I

At least three types of meaning come into play in God's aphorisms. The first and most obvious is the theological, figurative sense of the key words: “to stand” means “to remain obedient.” God, by apposition, equates the verb form “will fall” with a specific action unrelated to the verb's literal sense: in this case, it means “will . . . transgress the sole Command, / Sole pledge of his obedience.” In describing states of being, then, “stand” and “fall” represent two opposite conditions on a *moral* scale: obedience and disobedience. This meaning, though primary in this context, is nonetheless purely figurative. A second meaning moves closer to the literal. “To fall,” in the traditional Christian cosmology, means to experience the transition between heaven and hell; “to stand” means simply not to undergo that change. This sense works toward the concrete by presenting not a moral state of being but a physically discernible effect: the good angels “stand” in heaven, the bad are fallen into hell. Throughout the first two books, of course, we are distinctly aware of this sense of “fall,” as when Milton tells of the prison of the rebellious angels: “O how unlike the place from whence they fell!” (I, 75) The first description of the good angels, just before God's speech, introduces this sense of “stand”:

About him all the Sanctities of Heaven
Stood thick as Stars, and from his sight receiv'd
Beatitude past utterance.

(III, 60-62)

This second meaning, representing the extremes of cosmic position, is applicable to human events and emotions only through a sort of analogical reading. Thus, with the action of the poem centering on earth, we can hardly maintain a strong perception of this sense: only when the characters are angels, fallen or standing, does this cosmic meaning come to life. In the sections of vaster scope, Milton can draw upon these grand effects of obedience while establishing their connections (as I shall show later) with the third and literal sense, the posture of the human or angelic body. This is the level of action, dealing not with moral conditions or consequences but with physical stature—the erect and tall body of Adam, the radiant deportment of Raphael, the protean and diminishing changes of Satan. Raphael stands, Satan falls, and Adam, with Eve, falls and is again uplifted. In this myth, apparently trivial actions, repeated and varied, are not only important *signs* of crucial moral decisions: they are also, in an admittedly circular complex of language and ideas, the *means* by which those decisions are made.

The most vital and powerful idea linking the moral and physical ontologies is that stated in the first of the two Creation myths in Genesis: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion . . . over all the earth. . . . So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."⁴ The resemblance of man to God, stated four times in this text, became a stock tool of writers eager to stress man's stamp of favor and dominion.

The problem arises of how to interpret this "image of God." Writers of the Renaissance generally began by associating it with man's virtually unique ability to stand on two legs. C. A. Patrides, noting many appearances of the idea in the seventeenth century and earlier, remarks that the erect posture of man was the most significant aspect of the divine resemblance.⁵ Man's stance not only symbolizes dominion over the beasts but also actively furthers God's plan by inducing man to look toward heaven: as Donne wrote, "*Man* in his naturall forme, is carried to the contemplation of that place, which is his *home, Heaven*."⁶ For Donne, concerned with contemporary life, this upright form serves an essentially spiritual purpose, the reunion of God with man through contrition and repentance. For Milton in the early parts of *Paradise Lost*, the posture of yet unfallen man is more simply related to action,

maintaining Adam and Eve in their dignified and easy relationship with the higher and lower orders of existence. As Raphael tells the story of Creation, he indicates that such a purpose informed God's act:

There wanted yet the Master work, the end
Of all yet done; a Creature who not prone
And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd
With Sanctity of Reason, might erect
His Stature, and upright with Front serene
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good
Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes
Directed in Devotion, to adore
And worship God Supreme who made him chief
Of all his works.

(VII, 505-16)

The diction of the verse ascends from "prone and brute" to "Supreme," by its very structure forming an image of the moral, physiological, and spatial scales of being. The position of man in these scales of God's universe is here imagined to be visible in his stance, which elevates him above other inhabitants of earth in sovereignty and directs his eyes toward heaven in devotion.

In Raphael's speculation, God's thought immediately takes shape in command:

Let us make now Man in our image, Man
In our similitude, and let them rule
Over the Fish and Fowl of Sea and Air,
Beast of the Field, and over all the Earth,
And every creeping thing that creeps the ground.

(VII, 519-23)

Merritt Hughes notes, with reference to God's command, that biblical scholars had often interpreted "image" in a spiritual or figurative sense, meaning God's gift to man of a "reasonable and understanding nature."⁷ So in Milton's verses on man the inner beauties are mingled with the outer: "endu'd / With Sanctity of Reason," "upright," "self-knowing," and so forth. Milton's attitude toward the question of the preferred meaning of "image" seems ambiguous. If at one point in the *Christian Doctrine* he seems to support the exterior likeness (p. 906), at another point he says, "it was not the body alone that was then made, but the soul of man also (in which our likeness to God principally consists)"

(p. 979). Most general statements in Milton's prose concentrate on associating God's image with all the virtues and endowments of a reasonable and obedient state.⁸

Milton's poetic use of the idea mingles the inner and outer aspects of similitude without logically restricting them. Perhaps the most resonant example is his first description of Adam and Eve:

the Fiend
Saw undelighted all delight, all kind
Of living Creatures new to sight and strange:
Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native Honor clad
In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all,
And worthy seem'd, for in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shone,
Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't;
Whence true authority in men. (IV, 285-95)

In this condensed description, we see a surprising variety of features in Adam and Eve—their unique posture, their responsible and ethical behavior, their reasonable obedience, and their sovereignty over the creatures of the earth. These qualities are united by a dependence upon man's creation in God's image, which is here interpreted as an imitation of more than merely physical attributes.

This first narrative expression of the multiple virtues of Adam and Eve uses four key repetitions as the syntactic markers of five sections. Each of the repeated words—"erect," "seem'd," "severe," and "true"—signals a thematic expansion of the material, tying man's physical and moral natures together in his resemblance to God. At first, the simple image of posture—"of far nobler shape erect and tall"—continues the literal sense of the transitional introduction ("the Fiend / *Saw*," "new to *sight* and *strange*"). We, fallen like Satan, tend at first to see only externals: we must be reeducated to this innocent equivalence of spirit and shape. What we see, then, is qualified by the repetition of a word of physical denotation, "erect." In its second use, that word leads us into a world of epic heroism: "Godlike erect, with native Honor clad / In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all." The diction is that of descriptions of the all-sufficient heroes of Virgil and Homer. With the important exception of the nakedness, these phrases could as well apply to Aeneas, appearing from the mist in

Dido's court, or to Odysseus, radiantly prepared by Athena to approach the palace of Alcinous. Such allusions bring to mind not only the physical appearance of the epic heroes but also their social, political, and ethical dignity.

After two units of description, the second repeated word, "seem'd," establishes the special condition of Eden, the congruence of appearance and reality:

And worthy seem'd, for in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shone,
Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure.

This central section of the passage reminds us that all man's qualities, physical and moral, are reflections of God; the image of God can both *seem* and *be* worthy. In this unfallen world, man's roles are all one. The intense negative connotation of "seeming," present in almost all seventeenth-century literature, is unavoidable even here: from our fallen perspective, we for a moment doubt this amazing unity of created man. But that initial hesitation on the repeated word makes the focal statement which follows all the more positive in its unambiguous equation of man's external and internal imitation of God.

The last sections of this passage balance the first two in symmetry about this central assertion. As the second introduced physical images of the epic hero, the fourth touches on the moral qualities which such a hero must embody—discipline, obedience, and reason: "Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't." Marked off by the repetition of "severe," this one line connects God's severity, his requirement of obedience, with man's self-control—a different sort of severity which in turn depends on man's "true filial freedom." Similarly, as the first section began the passage with reference to man's physical superiority on earth, so the fifth, signaled by a repetition of "true," ends the description with a reference to man's sovereignty: "whence true authority in men." Freedom and authority, two important abstract qualities in the ontology of *Paradise Lost*, are in this passage linked, through the concept of the image of God in man, with the concrete elements of man's posture and action. From the familiar we move to the remote and complex, and that movement is an important expansion of the statement which introduced this discussion: "I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." From this first description of Adam and Eve standing in the garden, we gain a new perspec-

tive on the nontrivial importance of details of physical action in the mythological narrative.

Such is the power of the confident poise of Adam and Eve that even Satan recognizes the correspondence in them of virtue and appearance. His first sight of them reveals their favor with God to be even greater than his envy had supposed:

O Hell! what do mine eyes with grief behold,
 Into our room of bliss thus high advanc't
 Creatures of other mould, earth-born perhaps,
 Not Spirits, yet to heav'nly Spirits bright
 Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue
 With wonder, and could love, so lively shines
 In them Divine resemblance, and such grace
 The hand that form'd them on thir shape hath pour'd.

(IV, 358-65)

Satan is no dull observer in a case that so nearly touches his own. Recognizing that man is made of dust, "earth-born perhaps," he gives by that perception greater glory to the miracle of Creation. Satan has the eye to appreciate beauty, though not the heart to love it; through his anguish we feel the extraordinary gap in man between matter and form, between dust and "naked Majesty." Such a creature as man is so naturally impossible that Satan immediately ascribes its radiance to its true source, the grace of God. This knowledge only increases his envy and wrath, so fully has he inverted God's order. Yet his perception allows the reader to see the beauty and dignity of mankind as a miraculous and tenuous elevation of the bestial to the rational, of a lower to a higher order. It is man's high stature which gives significance to the chance of his falling; yet his continued standing is also his only defense against that chance. Within his own high nature lie both his peril and his protection.

II

In the fallen world in which the poet and reader live, the actions literally denoted by the verbs "stand" and "fall" are usually devoid of moral qualities. A sense of posture and position as significant elements of moral imagery is a major contribution of the Satanic portions of *Paradise Lost*. If shape is to be a measure of grace, Satan's metamorphoses in the later books are the most obvious indicators of his damna-

tion. We respond with full disgust to his voluntary assumptions of bestial shape and to his imposed transformation, when "supplanted down he fell / A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone, / Reluctant, but in vain" (X, 513-15). Satan's close association with Sin and Death, whose bodies are the gross reflection of their godlessness, reminds us harshly that the fallen angel is the enemy of God's image. Book I, however, is particularly subtle in its involvement with shape and stance. Closer attention to its sequential ironies and its comic deflation of pride will establish Milton's practical use of the metaphoric complex associated with "stand" and "fall" and reveal one aspect of his preparation for the tragedy of man with the comedy of Satan.

When we first encounter Satan near the beginning of the poem, his situation incorporates all three senses of the word "fall"—moral, cosmological, and physical. The drama of his story involves his attempt to free the two literal meanings from the moral, a task at which he ultimately fails. The overriding, figurative sense of Satan's fall—the one that he is stuck with—is clearly stated: "He trusted to have equall'd the most High" (I, 40). Disobedience is for him irreversible. The spatial, cosmic sense of "fall" also applies to Satan; although the word itself is not at first used, the image is most dramatically present:

Him the Almighty Power
 Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Sky
 With hideous ruin and combustion down
 To bottomless perdition. (I, 44-47)

The third "fall," the fall from erect stature, strikes our mind's eye directly:

Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night
 To mortal men, hee with his horrid crew
 Lay vanquisht, rolling in the fiery Gulf
 Confounded though immortal. (I, 50-53)

Such is the context of Satan's memorable lines of confident and energetic hatred, beginning "What though the field be lost? / All is not lost; the unconquerable Will" (I, 105-06). From the perspective of a reader who knows Satan's starting point, this assertion of revenge at first sounds noble. Its logic is much like that of modern man: Satan is drawing a contrast, justifiable in postlapsarian thought, between exterior and interior conditions, between the fallen body and the in-

domitable spirit. But this logic fails in the eternal perspective. Milton constantly undercuts our tendency to agree with it, steadily reforming our thought. By the end of Book I, Satan, though apparently well on his way to intended victory, is just as apparently journeying to defeat.

Milton makes it clear by direct statement and comment that the devils' gradual reversal of their physical and cosmic "fall" is neither a reflection of an inner virtue nor a condition likely to last long: the "indomitable Will" has little to do with their actions. The failure of confidence and dissimulation of their leader is obvious: "So spake th' Apostate Angel, though in pain, / Vaunting aloud, but rackt with deep despair" (I, 125-26). In Satan's will there is no freedom, nor any real strength within his apparently heroic actions:

So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay
Chain'd on the burning Lake, nor ever thence
Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation. (I, 209-15)

Satan's posture on the burning lake and his position in the cosmic topography are silent reminders of the futility of his vow to avoid any humble or contrite stance:

To bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee, and deify his power
Who from the terror of this Arm so late
Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,
That were an ignominy and shame beneath
This downfall; since by Fate the strength of Gods
And this Empyrean substance cannot fail. (I, 111-17)

In Satan's insistence on the separation between voluntary and enforced action, repeated to absurdity, lies much of his comedy of self-deception. He may raise "His mighty Stature" from the lake, with Beelzebub:

Both glorying to have scap't the *Stygian* flood
As Gods, and by thir own recover'd strength,
Not by the sufferance of supernal Power. (I, 239-41)

But their delusion is physically obvious in the horror of the burning land: "Such resting found the sole / Of unblest feet" (I, 237-38). Nat-

urally enough, in surprise Satan immediately restates his doctrine that the will remains free: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (I, 254-55).

Again, Satan's renewed stature, emphasized by elaborate comparisons involving his spear and "ponderous shield" (I, 283-94), undergoes a half-comic, half-pathetic diminishment with the pain of walking:

His Spear, to equal which the tallest Pine
Hewn on *Norwegian* hills, to be the Mast
Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand,
He walkt with to support uneasy steps
Over the burning Marl, not like those steps
On Heaven's Azure, and the torrid Clime
Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with Fire. (I, 292-98)

So also the majestic awakening of the fallen legions—"as when men went to watch / On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread, / Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake"—qualifies heroism with fear and pain (I, 332-34).

The comedy of discomfiture is mixed with terror. At the moment of apparently full escape from torture, the devils are formidably strong and active:

Forthwith from every Squadron and each Band
The Heads and Leaders thither haste where stood
Thir great Commander; Godlike shapes and forms
Excelling human, Princely Dignities,
And Powers that erst in Heaven sat on Thrones. (I, 356-60)

Here the enemy is unqualifiedly noble in stature, and Satan himself stands with ease and dignity. These great adversaries, heroically loyal and fully capable of destroying God's image in man, are to be the cause of fallen mankind's continuing fall:

For those the Race of *Israel* oft forsook
Thir living strength, and unfrequented left
His righteous Altar, bowing lowly down
To bestial Gods; for which thir heads as low
Bow'd down in Battle, sunk before the Spear
Of despicable foes. (I, 432-37)

Strangely, though, even in the long catalogue of their future successes, these "Princely Dignities" sound more and more like merely "despicable foes." There is a concentrated ridiculousness about their

frauds and deceits, working by such monstrous transformations and disfigurements. These Middle Eastern idols seem to specialize in deforming themselves:

First *Moloch*, horrid King besmear'd with blood
Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears.

Next came one
Who mourn'd in earnest, when the Captive Ark
Maim'd his brute Image, head and hands lopt off
In his own Temple, on the grunsel edge,
Where he fell flat, and sham'd his Worshippers:
Dagon his Name, Sea Monster, upward Man
And downward Fish.

After these appear'd
A crew who under Names of old Renown,
Osis, Isis, Orus and thir Train
With monstrous shapes and sorceries abus'd
Fanatic *Egypt* and her Priests, to seek
Thir wand'ring Gods disguis'd in brutish forms
Rather than human. (I, 392-93, 457-63, 476-82)

After the interlude of these future degradations, the elevation of the devils' standard ("that proud honor claim'd / *Azazel* as his right, a Cherub tall" [I, 533-34]) signals an uplift of courage and morale, a new impulse wholly serious in nature. Now they are heroes, as with stoic acceptance they face no comic pain:

Advanc't in view they stand, a horrid Front
Of dreadful length and dazzling Arms, in guise
Of Warriors old with order'd Spear and Shield,

Thir visages and stature as of Gods. (I, 563-65, 570)

For one terrible moment, there is no question that they *stand* and that their stance reflects some inner strength. Satan, especially,

above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent
Stood like a Tow'r; his form had not yet lost
All her Original brightness, nor appear'd
Less than Arch-Angel ruin'd, and th' excess
Of Glory obscur'd. (I, 589-94)

Yet once more the contradictions inherent in their position destroy the illusion that their stature is a meaningful sign. The author finds in Satan's countenance the scars of thunder and the darkened glory; in his oratory, again, will and condition are separated with logic more suited to earthly than cosmic affairs:

For who can yet believe, though after loss,
That all these puissant Legions, whose exile
Hath emptied Heav'n, shall fail to re-ascend
Self-rais'd, and repossess thir native seat? (I, 631-34)

The noise of the excited devils—"highly they rag'd / Against the Highest, and fierce with grasped Arms / Clash'd on thir sounding shields the din of war, / Hurling defiance toward the Vault of Heav'n"—resounds in fact only against the vault of hell (I, 666-69). The ingenuity of Mammon's gangs reduces the stature of the heroic devils by surrounding them with a gaudy and excessively magnificent hall. The reader's underlying emotions toward this architecture and toward the brief renaissance of strength in hell is figured in Milton's shift of tone as he tells of the architect, at first with Ovidian smoothness:

from Morn
To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,
A Summer's day; and with the setting Sun
Dropt from the Zenith like a falling Star,
On *Lemnos* th' *Aegaeon* Isle. (I, 742-46)

Then, with abrupt contempt, the poet denies the fairy-tale tone:

thus they relate,
Erring; for he with this rebellious rout
Fell long before; nor aught avail'd him now
To have built in Heav'n high Tow'rs; nor did he scape
By all his Engines, but was headlong sent
With his industrious crew to build in hell. (I, 746-51)

This is a very real, harsh, and irreversible fall.

At the very end of the book, the stature of the chief devils appears once more firmly renewed as they prepare for the debate—"in thir own dimensions like themselves / The great Seraphic Lords and Cherubim" (I, 793-94). Milton certainly intended that at this point the stature of the devils be fully felt. Just before this scene of grandeur, however, is a series of comic actions and images which together present

the eventual failure of "the great consult." First is the description of the crowding devils, surprising for its emphasis on their insectlike qualities:

all access was throng'd, the Gates
And Porches wide, but chief the spacious Hall

Thick swarm'd, both on the ground and in the air,
Brusht with the hiss of rustling wings. (I, 761-62, 767-68)

Having touched upon the ridiculous, Milton corroborates the grander aspect of the image by means of a simile:

As Bees

In spring time, when the Sun with *Taurus* rides,
Pour forth thir populous youth about the Hive
In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers
Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed Plank,
The suburb of thir Straw-built Citadel,
New rubb'd with Balm, expatiate and confer
Thir State affairs. (I, 768-75)

The time-honored epic *topos* of the commonwealth of bees at first redeems the devils' stature with connotations of the ordered and diligent troops of Dido and Agamemnon. Subtly, however, the emphasis shifts toward incongruous comparison: the abrupt scorn of "Thir State affairs," with its hint of Restoration court manners; the hidden disapproval of "thir Straw-built Citadel," physically appropriate to bees, but only morally to the devils; and—comically mimicked by the sound of "New rubb'd with Balm"—the opprobrium of "suburb," which carries the contemptuous force of Milton's phrase from *Eikonoklastes*, "Dissolute swordsmen and Suburb roysters."⁹

The lines which follow in this rapid comic sequence complete the preparation for the "great Seraphic Lords and Cherubim" by emphasizing the details of physical size:

So thick the aery crowd
Swarm'd and were strait'n'd; till the Signal giv'n,
Behold a wonder! they but now who seem'd
In bigness to surpass Earth's Giant Sons
Now less than smallest Dwarfs, in narrow room
Throng numberless, like that Pigmear Race
Beyond the *Indian* Mount, or Faery Elves. (I, 775-81)

Milton points to this mass "fall" with mock astonishment ("Behold a wonder!") to stress its absurdity and inevitability.

The stature of the devils, however, is significant only as it relates to human responses. Adam and Eve still stand obedient and, with reason intact, would only laugh at "the aery crowd." Modern, fallen man reacts less simply to the example of the "Faery Elves,"

Whose midnight Revels, by a Forest side
Or Fountain some belated Peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while over-head the Moon
Sits Arbitress, and nearer to the Earth
Wheels her pale course; they on thir mirth and dance
Intent, with jocund Music charm his ear;
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds. (I, 781-88)

For fallen man, stature is no longer the key to moral values. This "belated Peasant"—and the reader shares many responses with him—cannot understand the complex emotions he feels in this mixture of beauty and danger. This is the same moonlight confusion, when only a moment earlier all things seemed clear, which Eve will experience when at noon she encounters the master of these "Revels."

III

The oscillations of Book I provide an example of Milton's preparation of the metaphoric complex associated with the words "stand" and "fall." Posture, behavior, cosmic position, countenance, reason, obedience, and morality are some of the abstract and concrete qualities connected by this network. I have outlined their interrelations in two extreme cases, that of the ideal man and that of the fallen devils. A more confusing situation is that of actual unfallen man—man no longer seen as a static creation but rather existing *in time*, subject to various passions and influences. In the everyday life of the garden, and ultimately in the special events of temptation, Adam and Eve must work not so much as gardeners but as continual guardians of that perfection in which they were created.

Man's effort to remain standing relies principally on a sense of self-esteem, which in turn depends on a firm subjective distinction between the self and the "other." Man finds in *himself* the image of God—reason, strength, love, and happiness—and in the security

of that image he stands obedient. But in the beauty of the "other" there is a major distraction. As Adam reports to Raphael:

here passion first I felt,
Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
Superior and unmov'd, here only weak
Against the charm of Beauty's powerful glance. (VIII, 530-33)

Adam wants to separate reason from appearance, intuitively subjecting himself to Eve even while he asserts that she is inferior to him in mind and in stature:

For well I understand in the prime end
Of Nature her th' inferior, in the mind
And inward Faculties, which most excel,
In outward also her resembling less
His Image who made both, and less expressing
The character of that Dominion giv'n
O'er other Creatures; yet when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in herself complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Loses discount'nanc't, and like folly shows;
Authority and Reason on her wait,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally; and to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and nobleness thir seat
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guard Angelic plac't. (VIII, 540-59)

For Adam in the presence of Eve, the "other" becomes a greater image of God than the self. The images of this long passage show how the metaphoric complex of the physical appearance especially describes Adam's passionate dependence on Eve: "knowledge . . . falls / Degraded, Wisdom . . . Loses discount'nanc't." Adam creates an imaginary court around Eve as a heavenly queen, attended by "Authority and Reason" and guarded and illuminated by "Greatness of mind and nobleness." How far he is from seeing in her a true reflection of God's image appears in his extraordinary tableau of Wisdom as the fool in the court of Eve.

Raphael's warning to Adam reasserts the power of the self to control its own thought and action: Eve is

"Stand" and "Fall" as Images of Posture in *Paradise Lost* 237

worthy well
Thy cherishing, thy honoring, and thy love,
Not thy subjection: weigh with her thyself;
Then value: Oft-times nothing profits more
Than self-esteem, grounded on just and right
Well manag'd. (VIII, 568-73)

Raphael replaces Adam's generalizations ("knowledge," "Wisdom," etc.) with specific instructions for action. "Self-esteem" is the key to the angel's counsel, for only in the full knowledge of God's attributes in the *self* can man retain his stance. I should note at this point that the situations of Adam and Eve are not reciprocal: while Adam is at fault in subjecting himself to Eve, she is at fault if she does *not* subject herself to him. Most of Milton's uses of the doctrine of self-esteem apply mainly to Adam's condition, for obvious reasons. Yet Eve has a parallel to Adam's passion: yearning for her reflection in the pond, she forgets that she is herself the image of God. She, like Adam, sacrifices her dignified and reasonable nobility in a misdirected search for another image. Most readers would agree that this search does not end with her acceptance of Adam as her mate. Eve's story of her own narcissistic passion corroborates Adam's problem: passion directs mankind toward weakness, while reason urges him toward strength.

The most explicit and moving statement of the sufficiency of the self comes in Raphael's parting benediction:

Be strong, live happy, and love, but first of all
Him whom to love is to obey, and keep
His great command; take heed lest Passion sway
Thy Judgment to do aught, which else free Will
Would not admit; thine and of all thy Sons
The weal or woe in thee is plac't: beware.
I in thy persevering shall rejoice,
And all the Blest: stand fast; to stand or fall
Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies.
Perfet within, no outward aid require;
And all temptation to transgress repel. (VIII, 633-43)

The central injunction is "stand fast," echoing the many previous uses of the word "stand." Raphael urges Adam to see himself as valuable and complete. He is a vessel of "weal or woe" whose only danger lies in heedlessness. His stature is both cause and effect in the angel's sequence: strength to stand firm leads to joy and love ("Be strong,

live happy, and love"), and to love God is to remain obedient, to stand in God's favor and blessing. "Stand fast" is no vague warning; it is specifically directed to what Adam knows of his own virtue and appearance. The loss of that knowledge is the prelude to the Fall.

Man's posture has by this point become not only a sign of his innocence but the chief reminder to him of the means by which he may keep that innocence. In the elevation of reason, the strength of sufficiency, and the stature of dominion, man in his body openly displays the attributes of God. If the self is firm, the relationship with the "other"—be it Eve, or an image of the fancy, or the angel, or God—becomes not dependency but love. Raphael instructs Adam, "Perfet within, no outward aid require"; in Adam's nature is all his aid. Passion, the disastrous and unreasonable dependence upon an "other," cannot "sway" this conscious strength.

Adam has learned from Raphael that virtue consists in action, in a strenuous effort of the will: "Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part; / Do thou but thine" (VIII, 561-62). When Adam in turn warns Eve, he echoes Raphael's words: "God towards thee hath done his part, do thine" (IX, 375). The emphasis on action is an important element of the complex of images around the verbs "stand" and "fall." Here Adam and Eve are each about to experience actively the test of their obedience. To match their situation the reader has in mind the example of Abdiel, who in the test of angels acted with the energy of a single being conscious of his sufficient strength. Abdiel's stance and movement reflect the image of God as it appears later in Christ, victorious in heaven:

Abdiel, than whom none with more zeal ador'd
The Deity, and divine commands obey'd,
Stood up, and in a flame of zeal severe
The current of his fury thus oppos'd.

From amidst them forth he pass'd,
Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustain'd
Superior, nor of violence fear'd aught;
And with retorted scorn his back he turn'd
On those proud Tow'rs to swift destruction doom'd.
(V, 805-08, 903-07)

This vibrant, energetic posture contrasts sharply with the moral wavering of the rebellious angels. As the reader already knows from Book

I and as Adam is about to learn from Raphael, this Satanic fall from obedience implies the swift humiliation of a literal fall. Abdiel's moral and physical stance—"Among innumerable false, unmov'd, / Unshak'n" (V, 898-99)—invests the active search for virtue in temptation with a memorable precedent of success.

That precedent, however, is forgotten. The lengthy debate between Adam and Eve which precedes their separation just before the Fall (IX, 204-384) allows the reader to watch the process by which sin grows out of inaction. Remembering Abdiel's zeal in a similar situation, we cannot read these polite, even loving speeches without a reaction of horror. This drama is based on a graceful wavering which grows ever more obvious until it includes the fall of each participant and at last the wild dislodging of the cosmic orbits. There is no idea in the debate which is itself sinful: each response seems to reflect some virtue or some example of success in the poem. The whole, however, leads to a separation which is important not only as a device of plot but also as a seal on the passions of the debate. It ensures that Eve's discontent and Adam's subjection continue to sway them from their proper self-esteem. Adam's laxity appears in his sudden reversal ("Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more" [IX, 372]) and his failure to correct Eve's last words:

The willinger I go, nor much expect
A Foe so proud will first the weaker seek;
So bent, the more shall shame him his repulse. (IX, 382-84)

Adam's reason submits to his passion, even though he has brought to mind again the injunctions of Raphael. He applies them only to Eve, not to himself, telling her that the image of God, the stamp of her creation, is sufficient to preserve her:

O Woman, best are all things as the will
Of God ordain'd them, his creating hand
Nothing imperfet or deficient left
Of all that he Created, much less Man,
Or aught that might his happy State secure,
Secure from outward force; within himself
The danger lies, yet lies within his power:
Against his will he can receive no harm. (IX, 343-50)

Security will be found only in a conscious and active posture of strength and self-confidence.

The two human beings, separated, are made frail by passion—Adam's desire to please Eve (which later surfaces ironically as the "glorious trial of exceeding Love" [IX, 961]) and Eve's sensation of triumph and of perils safely past. Her frailty is brought home to us in the explicit poetic leap from her environment to her moral state, as we see her through Satan's eyes,

oft stooping to support
Each Flow'r of slender stalk, whose head though gay
Carnation, Purple, Azure, or speckt with Gold,
Hung drooping unsustain'd, them she upstays
Gently with Myrtle band, mindless the while,
Herself, though fairest unsupported Flow'r,
From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh. (IX, 427-33)

This metaphoric glimpse of Eve's failure to stand fast is the more ironic when Satan soon after successfully appeals to her posture, the sign of her dominion over the beasts, telling his lies about the forbidden tree:

About the mossy Trunk I wound me soon,
For high from ground the branches would require
Thy utmost reach or *Adam's*: Round the Tree
All other Beasts that saw, with like desire
Longing and envying stood, but could not reach. (IX, 589-93)

Again, ironically, her beauty briefly conquers the evil in Satan:

her Heav'nly form
Angelic, but more soft, and Feminine,
Her graceful Innocence, her every Air
Of gesture or least action overaw'd
His Malice, and with rapine sweet bereav'd
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought. (IX, 457-62)

If she were only conscious of it, her countenance and posture would be the key to her obedience, the outward image of him "whom to love is to obey, and keep / His great command." Yet she is so resolutely proud of her adventure that Satan can distort that same image to his evil purpose: "Fairest resemblance of thy Maker fair, / Thee all things living gaze on" (IX, 538-39). Forgetting her true creation "erect and tall," Eve falls.

Milton's expression of Adam's frailty as he perceives Eve's fall is the climax of the complex associations developed between the moral

and physical conditions. Adam's passion is at once more intense and more obvious than Eve's. Here Adam loses his freedom of action as he loses his strength:

On th' other side, *Adam*, soon as he heard
The fatal Trespass done by *Eve*, amaz'd,
Astonied stood and Blank, while horror chill
Ran through his veins, and all his joints relax'd;
From his slack hand the Garland wreath'd for *Eve*
Down dropp'd, and all the faded Roses shed:
Speechless he stood and pale. (IX, 888-94)

Milton stresses that Adam, at the point of fall, still knows the right but will not act upon it:

he scrupl'd not to eat
Against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd,
But fondly overcome with Female charm. (IX, 997-99)

His reason, though it seems still to perceive and understand, has lost its connection with the will.

The rapid degradation of God's image in man after the Fall creates a new theme: the shamefulness of the body. Though many correspondences in the terrestrial order are broken with the Fall, that between body and spirit remains for a while longer; no more, however, can either soul or flesh reflect the image of God or generate that self-esteem which was their ornament and protection. Milton describes the loss of moral qualities as if it were physical:

innocence, that as a veil
Had shadow'd them from knowing ill, was gone,
Just confidence, and native righteousness,
And honor from about them, naked left
To guilty shame. (IX, 1054-58)

As in the case of Satan, the poet leaves unspecified the details of metamorphosis, the marks of the encroachment of Sin and Death. They are, nonetheless, real erosions of the image of God:

Bad Fruit of Knowledge, if this be to know,
Which leaves us naked thus, of Honor void,
Of Innocence, of Faith, of Purity,
Our wonted Ornaments now soil'd and stain'd,
And in our Faces evident the signs
Of foul concupiscence. (IX, 1073-78)

Uselessly, pathetically, Adam and Eve try to disguise the effects and the instruments of passion:

Those Leaves
They gather'd, broad as *Amazonian* Targe,
And with what skill they had, together sew'd,
To gird thir waist, vain Covering if to hide
Thir guilt and dreaded shame; O how unlike
To that first naked Glory. (IX, 1110-15)

The task is "vain" because the body, formerly the source and sign of strength, has become the instigator and reminder of sin.

IV

The first solace Adam and Eve obtain will continue to be the major solace of their children: the knowledge of Christ, whether in promise or in presence. The Son's role in providing consolation and reordering begins on a simple, physical level—clothing the naked, disguising the corrupted image of God:

As Father of his Family he clad
Thir nakedness with Skins of Beasts, or slain,
Or as the Snake with youthful Coat repaid. (X, 216-18)

But some continuing grace is more sorely needed. That gift comes also through Christ, who renews in each repentant man the image of God. Christ himself is that image—

The radiant image of his Glory

Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,
In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud
Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines. (III, 63, 384-86)

Through Christ's continuing gift, unjust man, guilty of sin, can rediscover his self-esteem and stand once more justified before God.

The struggle of history—the long stretch of time between the Fall and the last day—demands of us a constant wariness, a posture far more diligently kept than Adam's. As before the Fall, our knowledge of the image of God in us is both the cause and the effect of our standing in the face of repeated temptations and assaults. The difference is that now the image of God is no longer born in us but imputed to us through Christ's free gift.

The doctrine of the historical struggle of man is naturally more explicit in Milton's lesser works than in *Paradise Lost*. Particularly in the prose, Milton refers again and again to the revived dignity of the human form and its role in salvation. In *The Reason of Church Government*, he links it both to Creation and to redemption:

But there is yet a more ingenuous and noble degree of honest shame, or call it, if you will, an esteem, whereby men bear an inward reverence toward their own persons. . . . [H]e that holds himself in reverence and due esteem, both for the dignity of God's image upon him and for the price of his redemption, which he thinks is visibly marked upon his forehead, accounts himself both a fit person to do the noblest and godliest deeds, and much better worth than to deject and defile with such a debasement and such a pollution as sin is, himself so highly ransomed and ennobled to a new friendship and filial relation with God. (p. 680)

The idea of the rediscovery of self-esteem is crucial to Milton's belief in Christian liberty. In a long passage from the same treatise, his images of posture and countenance, used both for the individual and for the church, reflect in physical terms the moral sufficiency which only Christ gives to the faithful:

But when every good Christian . . . shall be restored to his right in the church, . . . this and nothing sooner will open his eyes to a wise and true valuation of himself, which is so requisite and high a point of Christianity, and will stir him up to walk worthy the honorable and grave employment wherewith God and the church hath dignified him; not fearing lest he should meet with some outward holy thing in religion which his lay touch or presence might profane, but lest something unholy from within his own heart should dishonor and profane in himself that priestly unction and clergy-right whereto Christ hath entitled him. Then would the congregation of the Lord soon recover the true likeness and visage of what she is indeed, a holy generation, a royal priesthood, a saintly communion, the household and city of God. (p. 681)

The individual and the church must stand firm, independent of external props and controls. In regeneration, both man and society assume once more the posture of self-esteem and the image of God.

The same images and themes recur in Milton's autobiographical writings. There is in his strong passages of self-consolation that same sense of a full but patient use of one's given being. His rejoinders in *The Second Defense of the People of England* concentrate with particular force on his opponent's charges of physical deformity. He replies, "how can that be called diminutive which is great enough

for every virtuous achievement?" (p. 824). In defending his blindness, Milton anticipates the easy transition between physical and spiritual strength which he develops in *Paradise Lost*:

There is, as the apostle has remarked, a way to strength through weakness. Let me then be the most feeble creature alive, as long as that feebleness serves to invigorate the energies of my rational and immortal spirit; as long as in that obscurity, in which I am enveloped, the light of the divine presence more clearly shines; then, in proportion as I am weak, I shall be invincibly strong, and in proportion as I am blind, I shall more clearly see. (p. 826)

Such confident assertions of self-esteem are, of course, part of the public image necessary to an international apologist. Milton more privately expresses his doubts about uselessness and physical disability in the sonnet, "When I consider how my light is spent." He presents a state of confusion between the eagerness to act in God's behalf and the annoyance that his means of action are so severely curtailed through blindness:

"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied,"
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his State
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

Both action, which he seeks, and patience, which he finds, are redefined in his self-consolation. Action, because God does not *need* it, is important mainly as a test of obedience; patience meets action in the key word, "stand." The final image of the sonnet pictures a far more active, strenuous engagement than may at first appear. He who can *stand* fulfills that crucial condition which was hoped of Adam—obedience; for that, he must employ the whole sufficiency of nature and grace, maintaining the image of God by means of and in behalf of his creation and redemption.

Man's life after the Fall is both active and patient: standing in the knowledge of his strength and in preparedness for trial, walking in the restless labor of procuring physical and spiritual nourishment and shelter. The easy tasks of Eden are transformed, in the final books of *Paradise Lost*, into the nearly impossible demands of Michael's histories and of the harsh settlement of the world. The consolation

for this harsh change appears, in part, in those pictures of Adam and Eve which physically illustrate the sustaining covenant of grace. Adam says to Michael,

Ascend, I follow thee, safe Guide, the path
Thou lead'st me, and to the hand of Heav'n submit,
However chast'ning, to the evil turn
My obvious breast, arming to overcome
By suffering, and earn rest from labor won,
If so I may attain. (XI, 371-76)

Adam's apparent literal dependence on the guidance of heaven, which supports his own natural but fallen strength, is an image of the militant Christian soul upheld in virtue by faith and reason.

The "ingenuous and noble degree of honest shame, or . . . esteem," which Milton describes as an essential quality of Christian liberty, is a major element in Adam's new stature of dependent dignity:

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. (XII, 561-64)

We are to remember how Adam, earlier in the poem, walked with confidence in the presence of God.

At the very end, in the midst of a vast landscape, the tiny figures of Adam and Eve maintain by means of God's support that sufficiency and freedom in which they were created:

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,
Through *Eden* took thir solitary way. (XII, 646-49)

They have fallen, yet they stand. Providence now guides them, whereas previously reason was enough; their dependence—on God and on each other—is now undoubted. Much is desolate in their future and in the future of their children—grief, sin, damnation—and many will fall along this "solitary way." Yet implicit in this ending is the hopeful and developed knowledge, poetically secure in the image in which it is expressed, that whoever walks in the consciousness of his created and sustained capacity to serve God shall finally stand the test.

NOTES

1. *PL* III, 93-102. All quotations from Milton are from *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), unless otherwise indicated.
2. *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (Toronto, 1965), p. 99.
3. Throughout this paper, I am indebted to the work of Stanley E. Fish, particularly to "Standing Only: Christian Heroism," the fourth chapter of his *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (New York, 1967).
4. Genesis i, 26-27 (Authorized Version).
5. "Renaissance Ideas on Man's Upright Form," *JHI*, XIX (1958), 256-58.
6. *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, quoted in Patrides, "Renaissance Ideas," p. 256.
7. *John Milton*, p. 359 n.
8. See C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 49-51.
9. See *OED*, s.v. "suburb," 4 b.

SPEECH IN *PARADISE LOST*

Beverley Sherry

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries several treatises (religious, philosophical, and rhetorical) discussed the Fall of Man as involving a corruption of mankind's speech. In *Paradise Lost* we witness a dramatization of that corruption. Adam and Eve lose what Thomas Wilson, in his *Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), calls the "Eloquence first giuen by God"; their speech is confounded in the way Godfrey Goodman describes fallen man's speech in *The Fall of Man* (1616). This confounding of their utterance is particularly noticeable in Adam and Eve's speech rhythms, which in the context of *Paradise Lost* are transformed from a celestial to an infernal resemblance. Adam and Eve's conversation also suffers an impairment, so that by the close of the poem they have inaugurated what Richard Allestree in *The Government of the Tongue* (1675) calls "our rusty drossy Converse." Their conversation with each other has been changed and limited, their converse with God and the angels virtually lost. The poem itself, however, curiously makes up for this fall in Adam and Eve's speech. The poet projects himself as a fallen man, a son of Adam and Eve, but as a man conversing freely with God and graced with an eloquence given by God. The poem itself is in fact the result of the poet's converse with God.

"SPEECH," WROTE Ben Jonson, "is the only benefit man hath to express his excellency of mind above other creatures";¹ Godfrey Goodman, in his treatise on *The Fall of Man* (London, 1616), calls speech "the only companion, and wisse of reason" (p. 295). This was a commonplace Renaissance belief, and it is also one of the first things Milton's Adam discerns about himself; surveying the animals of paradise, Adam complains to his Creator, "I by conversing cannot these erect / From prone, nor in thir wayes complacence find" (VIII, 432-33).² So he asks God for a mate to converse with. His request