

INFINITUDE CONFINED

— Notes on Milton's Idea of Matter and Spirit —

Kazuko Tamamushi

1. Some General Remarks

In the course of reading some critical works on *Paradise Lost* I came across the following passage in George Whiting's *Milton and This Pendant World*. Mentioning the importance of Christian faith that underlies the works of Milton, he remarks as follows:

Milton's interests were far-ranging; his mind was rich, his culture broad and genuine. However, religion was the dominant subject in his life, and he was in some respects "the last voice of an essentially medieval tradition." In his major poems the humanist is dominated by the Christian.¹

Elsewhere in the same book he criticizes Douglas Bush for emphasizing the poet's faith in the law of nature and human reason.² He observes that Milton discredits reason rather than confirms it, that to Milton natural and human worlds are in themselves transient and fallible. Man cannot rely upon "nature the ordered, the rational"; after the fall man's nature is corrupted, so that his salvation consists in denying nature.³ I agree with Whiting in asserting the fundamental importance of religious faith in Milton; and yet his critical approach seems somewhat different from my own.

It cannot be denied that human learning, the knowledge of this physical universe, was of secondary importance when Milton as a Christian believer proposed it his task to "justify the ways of God to men." As is well known to the readers, Raphael speaks to Adam after their

1. Whiting, George W., *Milton and this Pendant World*, Univ. of Texas Press, 1958, p. 82.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

discussion on the structure of the universe :

Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,
Leave them to God above, him serve and fear.

(*Paradise Lost*, VIII, 167f.)

Douglas Bush, in fact, is not totally contradicting Whiting's position (and the latter also admits it) for he also observes that it was Christian faith that Milton ultimately valued and turned to. Bush points out the complexity of factors that constitute the spiritual history of Milton's age. The seventeenth century, he says, saw the first conflict between the traditional religious belief and the advancement of scientific learning. He describes Milton's own career as the epitome of the friction of the age, and says: "If he began with a measure of 'humanistic' self-sufficiency, he ended with repudiating it."¹

Bush, nevertheless, points out the fact that Milton *was* a humanist who believed in the reason and original goodness of man. He writes in *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century*: "Man's guide is not the letter of civil or biblical law but the law of the Spirit written in the hearts of believers; for Milton as for Hooker and Taylor and others the law of God is the law of right reason and of nature."² The following passage from *The Christian Doctrine* will provide a good ground for this argument. Milton says that the existence of God is proved

by that feeling, whether we term it conscience, or right reason, which even in the worst of characters is not altogether extinguished.³

About nature he writes as follows :

-
1. Bush, Douglas, "Paradise Lost in Our Time; Religious and Ethical Principles" in *Milton—Modern Essays in Criticism—*, ed. by Arthur E. Barker, Oxford Univ. Press, (A Galaxy Book), 1965, p. 174.
 2. Bush, Douglas, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600—1660*, Second Edition, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 396.
 3. Hanford, J. H., Dunn, W. H., eds., *The Christian Doctrine*, tr. by Charles R. Sumner, in *The Works of John Milton*, gen. ed., Frank A. Patterson, Columbia Univ. Press, Vol. XIV, p. 29. The books of this series will be hereafter referred to as *Works*.

Nature cannot possibly mean anything but the mysterious power and efficacy of that divine voice which went forth in the beginning, and to which, as to a perpetual command, all things have since paid obedience.¹

Thus to obey the right reason was also to obey the law of nature, since "God and Nature bid the same."²

Bush explains the basis of Milton's philosophy as "Christian humanism" in which are fused the Christian belief in God and the classical belief in the dignity of human reason. Marjorie Nicholson, another outstanding critic of the seventeenth century literature and ideas, says that Milton stood on the middle ground between the poets who found contentment and peace in religion and those who aspired endlessly toward the knowledge of the universe. "Refusing to accept the metaphysics of a new philosophy," she writes, "[Milton] nevertheless experienced an aesthetic gratification in the vast."³

I am not concerned here to criticize the critics, nor am I competent to do so. I refer to the different critical emphases partly in order to show the complexity of the world of Milton, and partly to clarify the position from which I begin. Milton, indeed, was not only a Christian believer, but also a humanist, a rationalist, and even in a sense a materialist. These words should be defined, however, before they are justly applied to describe Milton and his ideas. The word "reason," for instance, had a much deeper meaning than it has in the present usage. I am not without hesitation in calling Milton a materialist since the connotation of the word today seems far short of explaining what Milton meant by "matter." And the best way to clarify their meanings, it seems to me, is to consider their relationships. It is too vast a proposition, however, for a paper of this size to give a general view of the whole cosmos of Milton's philosophy. I shall attempt here only to illustrate how the poet's idea of the relationship of the natural and the

1. *Works*, Vol. XV, p. 93.

2. *Paradise Lost*, VI, 176.

3. Nicholson, Marjorie Hope, *The Breaking of the Circle*, Columbia Univ. Press, (A Columbia Paperback), 1965, p. 182.

divine worlds appears in his writings. The organic interfusion that Milton shows between the two worlds will lead us to conclude that Milton as so-called "rationalist" or "materialist" does not contradict Milton as Christian believer. The religious and spiritual world in Milton, I believe, is better comprehended through the study of the significance that the physical and natural world had for him.

In Milton matter and spirit are never considered wholly separate. The whole works of divine creation vary from the material to the spiritual, and each form of creation is placed in a chain of continuous gradation, linked to one another to make an organic whole. This is the idea, it seems to me, that underlies Milton's concept of the oneness of the law of God and the law of Nature, or his belief in "right reason" in man. There is a divine order which constitutes the universe, penetrating the physical, the human, and the divine worlds. Human reason is considered the remnant of divine spirit breathed into his body at the time of creation. Nature is the mirror of divine order. Although Raphael admonished Adam for aspiring too much to learn beyond the capacity given to man, he did not blame the latter for asking questions about the mysteries of the universe, for Heaven was

as the Book of God before [them] set
Wherein to read his wond'rous Works, and learn
His Seasons, Hours, or Days, or Months, or Years.
(*Paradise Lost*, VIII, 67-69.)

The law of nature and of reason was intrinsically good; the evil was the violation of the original order. What Milton blamed was not the pursuit of knowledge itself but the human hybris that makes us aspire beyond the limitation of man and thus break the divine harmony.

Thus in Milton the idea of the "oneness" of matter and spirit is co-existent with the idea of "order" or "hierarchy." In his concept are co-existing monism and dualism. Although the material and the spiritual worlds are organically related to each other, they still keep their distinction as two different planes of existence. The physical and the divine worlds, between which the world of man is placed, are for

Milton the two fundamental principles of creation.

In the following analyses I attempt to elaborate on the general remarks I have made above. Illustrations are taken in part from *The Christian Doctrine* and other prose writings; but the main references are to *Paradise Lost*, because that great epic, as Kester Svendsen observes, "creates in literary modes what it assumes philosophically—the participation of all outer and inner experience, all objects of sense or thought, all hierarchical gradations in a dynamic evolving singleness."¹

2. From the Grosser to the Purer

In Book V of *Paradise Lost* Raphael tells Adam about the mysterious principle of the primary matter that underlies every manifestation of divine creation. The lines read as follows:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not depriv'd from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all,
Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live, of life.

(V, 469-474)

Here Raphael suggests that there is no original distinction between physical and spiritual worlds; all have evolved from the "one first matter." We notice in the style of Raphael's speech that he makes no special distinction between the animate and inanimate beings. See how naturally he combines "substance" and "life" in the following lines: "Indu'd with various forms, various degrees / Of substance, and in things that live, of life." The shift from the inorganic to the organic world is made so naturally that their distinction is hardly perceptible. The above passage is then followed by the lines which show the gradual purification of matter into spiritual being. Those created forms are:

1. Svendsen, Kester, *Milton and Science*, Harvard Univ. Press, 1956, p. 247.

more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,
As nearer to him plac'd or nearer tending
Each in their several active spheres assign'd,
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
Proportion'd to each kind. So from the root
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More aery, last the bright consummate flow'r
Spirits odorous breathes : flow'rs and their fruit
Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding, whence the Soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being,
Discursive, or Intuitive.

(V, 475-488.)

And Raphael continues to say that human bodies "may at last turn all to spirit, improved by tract of time, and wing'd ascend ethereal" (497-499).

The close reading of the above passage, however, especially from line 479 afterwards, will reveal to us two different cycles of transformation. One cycle shows the transformation from the heavier to the lighter forms of being in physical nature, starting with the most substantial "root" and completed with the "consummate flow'r." With the "fruit," which is the final product of the flower, starts another cycle of gradation from the material to the spiritual, from the physical faculties of human beings up to the highest intellectual ability of "Intuitive Reason." The two complete cycles, natural and human, suggest the individuality of each plane of existence, which constitutes a part of the whole body of creation. Every form of being is perfected "in bounds proportion'd to each kind." There is a correspondence between the natural and the human worlds; the tree-flower gradation makes an allegory for the body-spirit gradation. It is clear, however, that these two cycles are not separate from each other; they are connected and involved in a still larger process of development.

There is the idea of linear continuity, on the one hand, and that of circular perfection, on the other, co-existing in Milton's metaphysics

of nature. Together with the concept of continuous gradation, there is a concept of boundary or limitation assigned to each plane of the hierarchy, as indicated in such expressions as "each in their several spheres assign'd," or "each had his place appointed." The unification of the idea of "degree" and that of "kind," it seems to me, results in something like Coleridge's organic theory of nature, where all forms of creation are placed in gradation forming concentric circles, the outer circles involving all the faculties of the inner ones. But before I elaborate on this problem later on in this essay let me analyze some other related passages from *Paradise Lost*.

In the same discourse as quoted above Raphael explains that angels, who are of purely spiritual nature, also enjoy earthly food :

what he gives
 (Whose praise be ever sung) to man in part
 Spiritual, may of purest Spirits be found
 No ingrateful food : and food alike those pure
 Intelligential substances require
 As doth your Rational ; and both contain
 Within them every lower faculty
 Of sense, whereby we hear, see, smell, touch, taste,
 Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate,
 And corporeal to incorporeal turn.

(V, 404-413)

Food is turned from the corporeal to the incorporeal through the body of man and the body of angel. (That angels have ethereal bodies will be explained later.) Both the "intelligential" substance of angels and the "rational" substance of man "contain within them every lower faculty" — they are not considered in separation from physical or sensory faculties. Notice in line 412 above the poet's deliberate arrangement of different kinds of physical power, ranging from the simpler to the more complicated: from "concoction" which is a mechanical mixing, through "digestion" which is a chemical transformation, finally to "assimilation" which belongs only to the organic principle of life. Raphael then explains that a similar gradation of feeding and receiving is observed in the world of four elements :

For know, whatever was created, needs
To be sustain'd and fed; Of Elements
The grosser feeds the purer, Earth the Sea,
Earth and Sea feed Air, the Air those Fires
Ethereal, and as lowest the Moon;
When in her visage round those spots, unpurg'd
Vapours not yet into her substance turned.

(V, 414-420)

What we notice in these illustrations is that the idea of spiritual sublimation is conveyed in the images of physical rarefaction. The two processes are closely paralleled. The images are so well interwoven that different processes seem almost identical. Consider the word "spirit," for instance, in the following lines: "last the bright consummate flow'r / Spirits odorous breathes." We find that together with the image of fragrance (which is a purified and attenuated substance) the idea of divine spirit comes to our mind assisted with the image of bright beauty and perfection of the flower. The word "ether" also has double references: in the physical world it is related to stars, and in the spiritual, to angels. We see in the foregoing passage that the gradation from Earth to Fire is the transformation of the dense to the rare. Air and Fire, the higher elements of the four, are further sublimated into what Milton calls "Ethereal quintessence," of which the heavenly bodies (both luminaries and angels) consist. The following passage is part of the speech of Uriel to Satan describing the beginning of the world:

Swift to their several Quarters hasted then
The cumbrous Elements, Earth, Flood, Air, Fire,
And this Ethereal quintessence of Heav'n
Flew upward, spirited with various forms,
That roll'd orbicular, and turn'd to Stars
Numberless, as thou seest, and how they move;
Each had his place appointed, each his course,
The rest in circuit walls this Universe.

(III, 714-721)

The angels also find their bodily expression in ethereal substance. Tillyard writes in his *Elizabethan World Picture*, in reference to

Donne's "Air and Angels": "[an angel] is himself purely spiritual and for embodiment chooses something grosser than himself, yet not unworthy of his own purity. This is the ether, the pure air surrounding the heavenly spheres."¹ We also find in *The Christian Doctrine* that "Angels are spirits" and that "they are of ethereal nature."² Ether, the attenuated form of earthly substance, is therefore the correspondent matter to the sublimity of spirit.

It can be affirmed that Milton considered some sort of material continuity between the corporeal and the incorporeal, the physical and the metaphysical. Curry, in his *Milton's Ontology, Cosmogony and Physics*, writes as follows interpreting the speech of Raphael about the sublimation of human food into angelic spirit:

When he [Milton] asserts that angels assimilate food of an earthly nature and so corporeal to incorporeal turn (V, 413), he does not mean that gross matter is transformed into an entirely immaterial substance or into one having no bodily or material structure. In this instance "incorporeal" has reference to a sublimed, tenuous, subtile matter like that which composes the bodies of the angels.³

He then explains that Milton considered ether as "matter sublimated from the four elements, or merely a purer form of air and fire,"⁴ and not as a fifth element totally different from the other four. He continues as follows:

Both the visible and invisible heavens, therefore, the bodies of planets, stars, and angels, are composed of a thin, attenuated, purified form of that same matter which metaphysically underlies all other created things. Thus a material continuity is established between the visible and invisible worlds.⁵

-
1. Tillyard, E. M. W., *Elizabethan World Picture*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1967, p. 39.
 2. *Works*, Vol. XV, p. 35.
 3. Curry, Walter Clyde, *Milton's Ontology, Cosmogony and Physics*, Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1957, p. 161.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
 5. *Ibid.*

Milton writes in *Art of Logic* that "matter is common to all entities and non-entities, not peculiar to sensible and corporeal things."¹ As we see in the passage first quoted in this chapter, all things, natural, human and celestial, have proceeded from "one first matter." The process of spiritual sublimation and that of material purification are seen in allegorical parallel, but at the same time they are seen in single continuation. In this complexity of Milton's idea, we, for a moment, are illusioned to think that these two processes finally become *identical*, not *parallel*. At this stage of argument, however, we come to the point where we have to define the meaning of "matter" itself. In Curry's words, matter "metaphysically" underlies all created things. It is too simple to assume that by "material oneness" Milton meant the commonness of the substance that physically constitutes the universe. By his concept of "one first matter," I think, Milton does not mean to equate or confuse different degrees of the creative principle.

Milton's concept of the original matter, in relation to his idea of God, will be developed more fully in the next chapter. Allowing myself a little digression, I would like to analyze here the passage on Pandemonium which appears in the First Book of *Paradise Lost*, because it shows how the poet's idea of the transformation of matter is reflected in his elaborate use of imagery. In the process of making Pandemonium we see again the gradual change of matter from the heavier to the lighter:

Nigh on the Plain in many cells prepar'd,
That underneath had veins of liquid fire
Sluic'd from the Lake, a second multitude
With wondrous Art founded the massy Ore,
Severing each kind, and scumm'd the Bullion dross:
A third as soon had form'd within the ground
A various mould, and from the boiling cells
By strange conveyance filled each hollow nook:
As in an Organ from one blast of wind

1. Gilbert, Allan H., ed. & tr., *Art of Logic*, in *Works*, Vol. XI, p. 53.

To many a row of Pipes the sound-board breathes.
Anon out of the Earth a Fabric huge
Rose like an Exhalation, with the sound
Of Dulcet Symphonies and voices sweet.

(I, 700-712)

The expression in the last few lines that Pandemonium "rose like an exhalation" makes the reader imagine the mystery, the ghostly charm, and at the same time the frail and non-substantial nature of Pandemonium. In the lines preceding, however, Milton describes the work of the fallen angels in the volcanic region of Hell, digging and melting the massy metal. A careful reading of the whole passage will show the gradation of the material from solid through liquid turning finally into gaseous or vapourous substance. The movement from the heavier to the lighter here corresponds to the transformation of the raw material into the work of art. The individual images show intricate echoes among one another. First we see solid and heavy liquid images expressed in such words as "cells," "veins," "massy ore," or "dross," and then we see the images of air and wind conveyed in words like "pipes," "blast" or "breathes." The air-image is further echoed in the word "exhalation." There is also an image of organ providing a simile: the way in which the melted metal was conveyed to the mould is compared to the inner mechanism of an organ by which the air is sent into all the pipes. This music image is developed in the next place into "Dulcet Symphonies, and voices sweet," to which sound Pandemonium "rose like an Exhalation." The shift of images from the mechanism of the organ into the sound of symphonies, it seems to me, parallels the change of the heavy mould of metal into the non-substantial and mysterious "exhalation."

The pattern of gradation repeated in the process of the creation in Hell seems to indicate that the infernal world is the shadow of Heaven. However, instead of signifying spiritual purification, the scale in Hell from the dense to the rare signifies vanity and frailty. Take the word, "exhalation," for instance. This word, frequently seen in *Paradise Lost*, suggests a state of dubious suspension between the

corporeal and incorporeal beings. Most often it is related to such words as "mist" or "vapour" and signifies the yet unpurged state of earthly substance. In the rising movement it is purified into ethereal bodies (*e. g.*, V, 419ff.), and in the falling it comes back to the earth as showers (*e. g.*, V, 185-192; XI, 740-745). This word is also used to signify the means of false disguise; Satan, just before the act of fraud, sinks into the river and then rises "involved in rising mist" (IX, 74-75). In this form of mist he creeps into the body of a serpent.¹

It is often said that there is nothing original in Milton's divine and natural philosophy. The chain of being, the hierarchy of nature, the four elements, or the correspondence of matter and spirit — these concepts, partly derived from the classical learning, were more or less common ideas with the writers of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. It is not the main concern here, however, to trace the origin of Milton's philosophy. The recurring idea of the gradual transformation of things, and the dynamic reversibility of the process that appears in the use of imagery, are not to be considered mere "knowledge" outwardly given. The poet had digested the traditional concept, and recreated it in his poetry as the product of his own imagination. The fact that we see the same pattern of idea repeated in the description of the totally different nature of creation, one in Heaven and the other in Hell, also indicates that the traditional philosophy was for Milton not mere prescribed knowledge. The philosophy functioned as a dynamic power enriching the poet's imagination of the world's mystery.

3. Infinitude Confined

Milton's idea of matter and spirit should be explained through two reverse processes which are indeed complementary halves of Milton's

1. For the detailed discussion on the images of mist and exhalation, refer to Svendsen's *Milton and Science*, Chapter III, "This Vast Sublunar Vault."

cosmic philosophy. We saw in the last chapter how matter ascended the chain of being to become a finer and more purified form of existence. In this chapter I attempt to show how divine and spiritual essence finds its embodiment in order to be manifested to human perception. To Milton, the incorporeal beings are known to human beings only through their correspondence with the terrestrial forms, as Raphael says to Adam in *Paradise Lost*:

what surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
By lik'ning spiritual to corporeal forms,
As may express them best, though what if Earth
Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on Earth is thought?
(V, 571-576)

Given the boundary and local habitation, a being is differentiated from the infinite and thus acquires its own individuality.

The description of the beginning of the world in Book VII of *Paradise Lost* shows the act of circumscription of the infinite space, thus making the finite from the infinite. The son of God speaks to the formless sea of the universe at the first decisive moment of creation:

Silence, ye troubl'd waves, and thou Deep, peace,
Said then th' Omnific Word, your discord end:
Nor stay'd, but on the Wings of Cherubim
Uplifted, in Paternal Glory rode
Far into *Chaos*; and the World unborn;
For *Chaos* heard his voice: him all his Train
Follow'd in bright procession to behold
Creation, and the wonders of his might.
Then stay'd the fervid Wheels, and in his hand
He took the golden Compasses, prepar'd
In God's Eternal store, to circumscribe
This Universe, and all created things:
One foot he centered, and the other turn'd
Round through the vast profundity obscure,
And said, Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,

This be thy just Circumference, O World.

(VII, 216-231)

First there is the ending of the discord and noise of chaos, and then the circumscription of the world.¹ The circle drawn by the golden compasses signifies harmony and perfection, and it contains "eternity" in its own "boundary." This passage is equivalent to Uriel's speech on the creation of the world which appears in the last part of Book III:

I saw when at his Word this formless Mass,
This world's material mould, came to a heap:
Confusion heard his voice, and wild uproar
Stood rul'd, stood vast infinitude confin'd.

(III, 708-711)

The boundary circumscribed by the divine compasses is expressed by Uriel as "infinitude confin'd." Here in this paradoxical combination we see the reconciliation of the infinite and the finite, of substance and form. The Creator's words, "Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds, / This be thy just circumference, O World," reveal to us divine justice, order, and above all his paternal love for the created world.

The relationship of the incorporeal and the corporeal is seen in its highest and most recondite form in the relationship of God to his Son. God is the creator of the universe, or the primary cause of creation, but he himself is "uncircumscribed" (VII, 170). He summons his only begotten Son to the act of creation: "by thee / This I perform, speak thou, and be it done" (VII, 163-164). It was through the Son that the divine will of creation "gave effect" (VII, 175). The Son is the existence in whom "all his Father shone / Substantially expressed" (III, 139-140). The Father also calls him as follows:

Effulgence of my Glory, Son beloved,
Son in whose face invisible is beheld

1. The "world" here does not mean "earth." The world is the place confined in the outer shell of the universe which is called Heaven or Firmament.

Visibly, what by Deity I am,
And in whose hand what by Decree I do,
Second Omnipotence.

(VI, 680-684)

Although the Son *is* a divine existence, however, he is not considered co-equal or co-essential with the Father. As is seen in the words, "Second Omnipotence," the Son is considered to be a different existence from the Father. Elaborating on this idea in *The Christian Doctrine* Milton says as follows: "the nature of the Son is indeed divine, but distinct from and clearly inferior to the nature of the Father."¹ Elsewhere in the same treatise he remarks: "He [Christ] is distinct from God who is unity. How then is he himself also God?"² He quotes the first verses of John, and interprets them: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* It is not said, from everlasting, but *in the beginning.* *The Word,* — therefore, the Word was audible. But God, as he cannot be seen, so neither can he be heard; John v: 37. The Word therefore is not of the same essence with God."³ The Word, according to Milton, was the divine decree made "audible"; and it is by the hand of the Son that the divine decree was executed (cf. *Paradise Lost* VI, 683 above). Regarding this last point the following passage will give a fuller information:

When it is said *all things were by him* [Christ], it must be understood of a secondary and delegated power; and that when the particle *by* is used in reference to the Father, it denotes the primary cause...; when in reference to the Son, the secondary and instrumental cause.⁴

Milton thus explains his idea of the duality of God the Father and the Son. It does not mean, however, that Milton denies their unity. Neither does it mean that the Son was a mere instrumental agency to the spirit of the Father. The Son is the corporeal manifestation of

1. *Works*, Vol. XIV, p. 337.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

God, as stated in I Timothy, iii: 16: *God was manifest in the flesh.* Milton says that "in any other way he is invisible." But he adds immediately: "nor did Christ come to manifest himself, but his Father."¹ Those who see the Son do not see him but his Father. Here we come to notice that the very fact that Christ is distinct from and lesser than the Father paradoxically proves his unity with the Father. The Son is lesser than the Father in his mode of existence, but the decree of the Father is only made manifest through the word of the Son.

A few passages above I quoted Milton's words that in the son "all his Father shone substantially expressed." Here the word "substance" can be interpreted in double meanings. Etymologically it means "the essence that underlies phenomena." Milton, in *The Christian Doctrine*, analyzes the word *hypostasis* which is translated "substance" in Hebrews, i: 3: "the very image of his substance"; and he points out that *hypostasis* means "not the *ens* itself but the essence of the *ens* in the abstract."² And he concludes that *hypostasis* is the same thing as *essence*. The word "substance," on the other hand, can be interpreted in a more ordinary meaning: it is "the being which manifests corporeal existence." Immediately following the words, "substantially expressed," Milton says: "and in his face divine compassion *visibly* appear'd" (The italic is mine). In *The Christian Doctrine* he also refers to Colossians, ii: 9: "in him dwelleth all the fulness of Godhead bodily"; and he explains that the word "bodily" is equivalent to "substantially" in opposition to "vain deceit."³ We understand from these arguments that in the Son the divine essence and its physical manifestation are unified. We know God only through the substance (in the second sense) of the Son, but what we see in the Son is the substance (in the first sense) of God.

I have touched upon the problem of the relationship between God and the Son because it shows the paradox of the co-existence of unity

1. *Works*, Vol., XIV, p. 265.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

and duality in Christian Godhead, which seems to underlie the whole body of Milton's metaphysics. The further development of this subject, however, is beyond the scope of this essay.

The unity of the corporeal and the incorporeal is also seen in Milton's idea of the relationship of light and the luminary. Light in the physical world is placed at the highest of the chain of being, as a more sublime and elemental existence than ether. It was the first thing created by the Word of God, and its mysterious virtue is compared to divine omnipotence. The poet writes in the invocation to Book III of *Paradise Lost*:

Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is Light,
And never but in unapproach'd Light
Dwelt from Eternity, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
Or hear'st thou rather pure ethereal stream,
Whose Fountain who shall tell? before the Sun,
Before the Heavens thou wert, and at the voice
Of God, as with a Mantle didst invest
The rising world of waters dark and deep,
Won from the void and formless infinite.

(III, 1-12)

The concept of primitive light as "bright effluence of bright essence increate" echoes the idea that God himself is an "uncircumscribed" being. As an "increate" or infinite being, light existed "before the Heavens"; it was on the fourth day of creation that the luminaries were formed from the ethereal substance. The luminaries were not lighted, however, before light was infused in their bodies, as indicated in the following lines:

of Celestial Bodies first the Sun
A mighty Sphere he fram'd, unlightsome first,
Though of Ethereal Mould.

Of Light by far the greater part he took,
Transplanted from the cloudy Shrine, and plac'd

In the Sun's Orb, made porous to receive
And drink the liquid Light, firm to retain
Her gather'd beams, great Palace now of Light.

(VII, 354-356, 359-363)

Thus the Sun and other celestial bodies became "lights" whose office now is to "give Light on the Earth" (VII, 345). Light in its primary form shines in the "cloudy Shrine" which is the eternal dwelling of God, but its physical efficacy is known to us in its secondary form, through the luminaries. Here also Milton suggests both distinction and unity between the incorporeal and its material habitation. This idea we see is summarised in the following passage from *The Christian Doctrine*: "We cannot form any conception of light independent of a luminary; but we do not therefore infer that a luminary is the same as light, or equal in dignity."¹

In the invocation to Light quoted in the preceding paragraph we see that God is metaphorically equated with Light. Having a co-eternal existence with God, Light performs in the physical world what God executes in the spiritual. Light is what divides cosmos from chaos. At the first circumscription of the world, the formless infinitude came to bear a shape of fluid mass which then, in Raphael's words, "came to a heap" (III, 709 above). This is the very first step of the organic individuation of the world. Then the Spirit of God, the divine agency of creation, broods over the mass and infuses its "vital virtue" and "vital warmth," and thus it divides the material of the World from the "infernal dregs adverse to life," making the first general form of the World.² The generation of Light in the next moment completes the creation of order from disorder. Satan, flying towards the new World through the chaos, views the verge of Nature where chaos ceases to exist:

But now at last the sacred influence
Of light appears, and from the walls of Heav'n,

1. *Works*, Vol. XV, p. 31.

2. See *Paradise Lost*, VII, 232-242.

Shoots far into the bosom of dim Night
A glimmering dawn ; here Nature first begins
Her farthest verge, and *Chaos* to retire.

(II, 1034-1038)

In the passages referred to above, we see that many of the images have geometrical and especially biological connotations. The creation of the world is described as if it were the primitive stage of the generation of life, where the formless matter is impregnated with the potential order.

The idea of God and Light as principal and active cause of creation should be considered in relation to the idea of "one first matter" from which all the forms of the universe have evolved. Here we are going to see how the two principles, efficient and material, work in organic union in the act of divine creation.

According to Milton, the "one first matter" is the effluence of God, for God is, as Raphael says, one Almighty "from whom all things proceed, and up to him return." Milton thinks that if God is the primary and efficient cause of all things, he should have needed matter of some sort in order to complete his act of creation. In the chapter on matter in *Art of Logic* Milton says as follows:

Matter is the cause from which a thing is. In the order of nature matter follows the efficient cause, and is a sort of effect of the efficient cause; for the efficient cause prepares the matter that it may be fit for receiving the form. As the efficient cause is that which first moves, so the matter is that which first moved.¹

In *The Christian Doctrine* Milton discusses the inseparability of active and passive principles of creation and concludes that matter, too, has proceeded from God's existence. He writes: "God did not produce everything out of nothing, but of himself."² The same idea is expressed in the following lines from *Paradise Lost*, in which God the Father orders the Son to go into the boundless deep to silence the discord:

1. *Works*, Vol. XI, p. 51.

2. *Works*, Vol. XV, p. 27.

ride forth, and bid the Deep
Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth,
Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscrib'd myself retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, Necessity and Chance
Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate.
(VII, 166-173)

We cannot imagine, however, that matter has proceeded from God as space-filling substance of any kind. Curry observes that if matter is a "part" or a numerical portion of God's essence, Milton cannot escape the charge of being a mere materialist or a pantheist.¹ The danger of misconception arises when we have any physical or pictorial image of "matter."

As I briefly referred to in the preceding chapter, Milton writes in *Art of Logic*: "Matter is common to all entities and non-entities, not peculiar to sensible and corporeal things." He then continues: "But of whatever sort these things are, such the matter of them ought to be; the sensible should be composed of sensible things, the eternal of eternal things, and so in the rest."² Matter then, in its metaphysical sense, is not necessarily an actualized being in the physical world; it is the fundamental passive principle that works in union with the efficient cause. In *The Christian Doctrine* Milton remarks that it is an inconceivable assumption that matter should have existed independent of God, and he says as follows:

There are, as is well known to all, four kinds of causes, *efficient, material, formal* and *final*. Inasmuch then as God is the primary, and absolute, and sole cause of all things, there can be no doubt but that he comprehends and embraces within himself all the causes above mentioned.³

The "one first matter," then, is considered to have proceeded from God as part of the creative virtue inherent in divine nature.

-
1. Curry, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.
 2. *Works*, Vol. XI, p. 53.
 3. *Works*, Vol. XV, p. 21.

The sensible or corporeal matter is the actualization in this world of that divine material principle. In the first process of creation the primitive matter exists as a formless deep, an "uncircumscribed" substance, till the Word of God, the executive power of the Son, formulates it and gives order to it. According to *The Christian Doctrine* it is a "substance . . . derivable from no other source than from the fountain of every substance, though at first confused and formless, being afterwards adorned and digested into order by the hand of God."¹ There is, as Curry also points out, a certain concept of time in the process in which the original matter is formulated into ordered beings, as we see indicated in such words as "at first" and "afterwards."² This concept of time sequence in the actualization of matter, it seems to me, corresponds with the idea that the Son was generated "within the limits of time."³ (Milton explains this fact by referring to the Scriptural phrase: *This day have I begotten thee.*"⁴ We also remember that Milton, explaining the duality of God and the Son, emphasizes that the Word existed "in the beginning, not from everlasting." See page 47 above.) At first there was the divine decree, and at a certain point of time, the decree became audible through the generation of the Word.

It should be noted, however, that by saying that the Son was generated "within the limits of time" and not "from all eternity," Milton does not mean to deny the essential eternity of Christ's existence. The actualization of the divine decree in the form of Word may be considered to have taken place at a certain point of time, but the whole existence of the Son is completed by his returning to God in resurrection. The same idea is seen regarding the world of matter. The concept of time here, it seems to me, should be interpreted in reference to the acquisition of "form," the degree and the mode of

-
1. *Works*, Vol. XV, p. 23.
 2. Curry, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.
 3. *Works*, Vol. XIV, p. 189.
 4. *Ibid.*

existence which every created thing manifests in the universal hierarchy of being. A "form" is received, it is true, "within the limits of time," but the substance or essence that underlies the form remains incorruptible. From this concept comes Milton's idea that matter "proceeded incorruptible from God; and even since the fall it remains incorruptible as far as concerns its essence."¹ It is in this essential state that matter "proceeds" from God and finally "returns" to him; in the eternal cycle of existence matter receives a temporal form in the created world. Some may still object, Milton says, by saying that body cannot emanate from spirit. To this he replies that since spirit is a higher substance, it should involve in it the inferior one, "as the spiritual and rational faculty contains the corporeal."² The material emanates from the spiritual, and at the same time, the spiritual arises from the material. The former is the process of creation, while the latter, in its final sense, is the process of resurrection.

"The original matter," Milton says, "is not to be looked upon as an evil or trivial thing, but as intrinsically good."³ God, however, created matter as a free existence, not bound to his absolute will. Milton's God, in the process of creation, did not assume any instrumental power to put forth his goodness because he himself retired "uncircumscribed."⁴ About the fall of the material world he writes:

it is neither matter nor form that sins; and yet having proceeded from God, and become in the power of another party, what is there to prevent them, inasmuch as they have now become mutable, from contracting taint and contamination through the enticements of the devil...?⁵

The potentiality of both good and evil in created matter is seen in *Paradise Lost* in the passage about the war in Heaven, where Satan declares to produce gunpowder out of the minerals in Heaven. Satan creates evil instruments out of the celestial soil which otherwise could

1. *Works*, Vol. XV, pp. 23, 25.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

4. See quotation, *Paradise Lost*, VII, 166-173, on p. 52 above.

5. *Works*, Vol. XV, p. 25.

have generated flowers under the influence of light. Kester Svendsen observes on this point that the "existence of gunpowder and gold in Heaven . . . is a proclamation of the neutrality of matter."¹ The actualized matter, like human beings, is not subject to predetermined Necessity or haphazard Chance; it is good when it is under the guidance of natural law which is the will of God, but it is corrupted when put under artful scheme and contrivance.²

From these writings of Milton we gather that all forms of the created world are placed as in concentric circles, the outer and the higher involving and assimilating all the faculties of the inner and the lower. As is symbolically expressed in the circling of the compasses in the infinite, every created form manifests in its own degree the unity of divine matter and spirit. This leads us to the concept of the omnipresence of divine nature in the creation. In Book XI of *Paradise Lost*, before Adam is banished from Eden, Michael comforts him saying that God's presence is not confined to Paradise but he is present everywhere in Nature:

Adam, thou knowest Heav'n his, and all the Earth,
Not this Rock only; his Omnipresence fills
Land, Sea and Air, and every kind that lives,
Fomented by his virtual power and warm'd:

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.

(XI, 335-338, 349-354)

This cannot be considered as mere pantheism. The above passage shows the fundamental unity of God, not his plurality. Divinity is indivisible, and what every creature received "was not a portion of God's essence, or a participation of the divine nature, but that measure

1. Svendsen, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

2. See quotation, *Paradise Lost*, VII, 166-173, on p. 52 above.

of the divine virtue or influence, which was commensurate to the capabilities of the recipient.”¹ The image of God we have from the above passage is God who “fills,” who “compasses round,” who “warms” and “foments,” and above all who loves all his creatures. He is omnipresent as *embracing* all, not as being distributed. This, it seems to me, is what Milton means by saying that God comprehends within himself all the lesser causes.

Human beings, when created, received “soul” in conjunction with “body.” Generation of human nature, Milton considers, should not be exceptional to the general law of creation but should be analogous to the generation of other beings. The following passage shows his idea of the inseparability of body and soul of man :

Man is a living being, intrinsically and properly one and individual, not compound or separable, not, according to the common opinion, made up and framed of two distinct and different natures, as of soul and body, but that the whole man is soul, and the soul man, that is to say, a body, or substance individual, animated, sensitive, and rational; and that the breath of life was neither a part of the divine essence, nor the soul itself, but as it were an inspiration of some divine virtue fitted for the exercise of life and reason, and infused into the organic body.²

In *Paradise Lost* the same idea is seen in Adam’s conclusion after speculating on the problem of death. Adam is troubled at the thought that if the spirit is immortal and the body is mutable, he may have to suffer a partial death :

Yet one doubt
Pursues me still, lest all I cannot die,
Lest that pure breath of Life, the Spirit of Man
Which God inspir’d, cannot together perish
With this corporeal Clod; then in the Grave,
Or in some other dismal place, who knows
But I shall die a living death? O thought
Horrid, if true! yet why? it was but breath
Of Life that sinn’d; what dies but what had life
And sin? The Body properly hath neither.

1. *Works*, Vol. XV, p. 39.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

All of me then shall die: let this appease
The doubt, since human reach no further knows.

(X, 782-793)

The so-called "immortality of spirit" is not what Adam longs for. The life of spirit, without the life of body, is to Adam a most unnatural and horrible thing to imagine. He is consoled by the thought that his spirit will die together with his body; for man's true immortality is attained only through resurrection, the resurrection of both body and spirit. Adam elsewhere calls death (and also the end of this Earth) "dissolution" (XI, 552; XII, 459). The word is quite distinct in connotation from "destruction"; it signifies, it seems to me, the resolution of the corporeal forms, the return of both body and spirit into a more elemental, and therefore more incorruptible, state of existence.

To see an organic whole in each existence in the chain of being is to recognize the divine law that runs through man and nature and unites them into one. The breaking of that law in any single part affects the whole body of existence. This idea is very impressively shown in the passage in *Paradise Lost* about the fall of man and its effect on the whole nature. When Eve plucks and eats the fruit a vital change occurs in nature:

her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat:
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
That all was lost.

(IX, 780-784)

And when Adam finally ate the fruit drawn by the "Bond of Nature," "Earth trembled from her entrails, as again / In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan" (IX, 1000-1001). The universal lament was felt as real as the vital wound in a living body. Changes were made in nature "as sorted best with present things" (X, 651), and from that time on man has to suffer the eclipses, storms, heat, cold, and pestilences.

In his book entitled *Answerable Style*, Professor Stein explains sin and evil as the violation of divine order, or the isolation from that order into the world of self-love.¹ This violation of order is at the same time the violation of unity, because in Milton, as we have seen through many instances, the idea of order and that of unity are not to be separated. Sin was to aspire for knowledge beyond the boundary given to human beings, beyond that measure of wisdom which was commensurate to the capacity of human nature. We have also seen that evil was due to the separation of the material principle from the spiritual, as exemplified in the case of the war in Heaven. The divine world is an organically related cosmos; involved in the original order and the law of God, even death becomes a temporal thing.

* * * *

The analyses above, I hope, will help us understand what Bush calls the oneness of the law of nature and that of God, or what Svendsen explains as the unity of God and nature, God and man, and man and nature. We see that behind the idea of the oneness of beings there is the idea of fundamental duality. Svendsen notes that the whole structure of *Paradise Lost* consists of "alternative, option, ambivalence, or ambiguity" that precipitate a "remarkable interrelation of parts."² It may require a still longer argument to explain the principle of unity and duality that constitutes the world of Milton, but it is better for us here to turn back to the words of Raphael which express the idea with utmost simplicity — to his description of the ever cycling movement of the one first divine substance, coming out of God and finally returning to God.

To say that "God and nature are one" or that "the law of God is the law of right reason and of nature" does not mean to degrade divinity. The idea is based upon the belief in the goodness of humanity,

-
1. Stein, Arnold, *Answerable Style*, Univ. of Washington Press, (Washington Paperbacks), 1967. The special reference is to the chapter entitled "The Fall."
 2. Svendsen, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

in which we still catch a glimpse of the divine righteousness and simplicity of the prelapsarian world. What, then, is the essential difference before and after the fall? Michael explained to Adam that the pole of the earth had been "turned askance" to the course of the sun, reflecting the distortion of man's spirit.¹ The earth still remains, however, losing the eternal spring by its sad distortion, and yet gaining instead the changing seasons which, through the severity of winter, still more emphatically impresses man with the grace of the rebirth of life in the coming season. For Milton, good was not the state of seclusion from evil. Good sprang into the world twinned with evil, as two inseparable halves of the fallen world.² Human beings, ever since, have suffered the puzzling paradox and deep irony of life, struggling to recover the original grace and dignity.

The "way of God" which Milton justifies in *Paradise Lost* is not mere justice. Neither is it the predestination of human fate by absolute decree. It is divine Love, which comprehends within it all the contrarities of the natural and human worlds. It is the virtue of this Love that persistently confirms us of the fact that this world, with its "fair defect,"³ is still not alien from its Creator.

1. *Paradise Lost*, X, 668ff.

2. Haller, W., ed., *Areopagitica*, in *Works*, Vol. IV, p. 310.

3. *Paradise Lost*, X, 891.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Texts :

1. Hughes, Merritt Y., ed., *John Milton — Complete Poems and Major Prose—*, New York, The Odyssey Press, 1957.
2. Patterson, Frank Allen, general editor, *The Works of John Milton*, 18 vols. in 21, Columbia University Press, 1931—38.

II. Reference Books :

1. Barker, Arthur E. ed., *Milton—Modern Essays in Criticism—*, Oxford Univ. Press, (A Galaxy Book), 1965.
2. Bush, Douglas, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century*, Second Edition, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962.
3. Bush, Douglas, *The Renaissance and English Humanism*, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965.
4. Curry, Walter Clyde, *Milton's Ontology, Cosmogony and Physics*, Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1965.
5. Nicholson, Marjorie H., *The Breaking of the Circle*, Columbia Univ. Press, (A Columbia Paperback), 1965.
6. Stein, Arnold, *Answerable Style*, Univ. of Washington Press, (Washington Paperbacks), 1967.
7. Svendsen, Kester, *Milton and Science*, Harvard Univ. Press, 1956.
8. Tillyard, E. M. W., *The Elizabethan World Picture*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1967.
9. Whiting, George W., *Milton and this Pendant World*, Univ. of Texas Press, 1958.
10. Willey, Basil, *The Seventeenth Century Background*, Columbia Univ. Press, 1962.