

The Garden as Original Home: Nostalgia in *Paradise Lost*

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The haunting sentiment that one can never go home again plays a key role in the concept of nostalgia. The longing to return home resonates with every individual. The desire for a home that is no more, whether because of changes in time, space, or essence, causes pain and often affects and produces the certain identity of each person. This painful longing for home is encompassed in the word *nostalgia*, which comes from the Greek *nostos* for “return home” and *algia* for “pain.” A characteristic of nostalgia is that one who feels the painful yearning for home is displaced and disoriented, searching for the orientation one receives from the place of origin. The notion of nostalgia is connected to memory and experience. The memory of home entails childhood, innocence, and comfort derived from the place where one felt unmediated experience with life, which then becomes transposed into memory for some lost paradise where we no longer belong. We are wanderers, alienated in our own lives, searching in all places (whether it is in another person, place, or object) for the sense of home sweet home. Nostalgia has negative connotations; most see it as escapism into the past and neglect of the present, a desire for the past to be the present, yet there is a redeeming quality in the manifestation of nostalgia despite the present sentimental connotation of the term. Nostalgia is not simply the old man thinking back upon the days of old, when times were good; instead, it holds within its very nature the concept of a generative power that helps in forming the destiny of the future. In keeping the remembrance of the past in one's heart, this memory must then be carried forward towards the ultimate home. One must keep the remembrance of home in one's heart so that the image can

provide a place in the future. In this way, nostalgia provides a reshaping of the self when one encounters the longing that resides in one's mind. Home is something not material, but rather, it belongs in the mind and soul of each person.

Nostalgia is a consequence of the Fall. Adam and Eve's Fall from grace represents the root of all beginnings. The Garden of Eden is man's original home, where true harmony existed between all of life's creatures and where man had a direct relationship with God, his Creator. In the Garden, man had immediate knowledge. Just as humans turned from the grace of God through the actions of Adam and Eve in their original sin, so too did they relinquish their rights to their true home. God was now transcendent, no longer in the world and immanently available. Human beings felt cut off, barred forever on earth from the only home they had ever known. Adam and Eve, and consequently all people, were now in exile, journeyers wandering the earth and searching in vain for a home to replace their original home of the Garden. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* poetically describes the nature of the fall and shows the birth of the first pangs of nostalgia. In Milton's poem, the reader gets only a glimpse of the un-Fallen Eden. The Fall and loss of innocence are hinted at in the first description of Paradise, which gives the reader a sense of the fragility of Paradise and always the sense of the loss of home. Michael Wilding in his essay "Milton's *Paradise Lost*" states, "The Devil has already entered Paradise when we see it; the fall impending. . . .The very first time Eden is mentioned in the poem it was in connection with the word *loss*, 'with loss of Eden'(I.4)"(82). Eden is portrayed as poignant, rare, and full of worth, reminding us of how the original home will be lost to us forever. The way of love ultimately saves Adam and Eve and their future generations. Love rescues them from the abyss, for it is in the reconciliation of their love that they are pointed towards Christ's redemptive love and the place of man's true home. After the Fall and all the woe that Adam and Eve experience,

together they kneel and weep unto the earth and ask God for his forgiveness. Through the intercession of the Son, God grants them forgiveness, but the tainted Adam and Eve still must be cast out of Paradise. Adam is granted a vision of the future sorrow and renewal of mankind through the incarnation of God's Son, while Eve's dream shows a greater acceptance of a higher good when she speaks with humility of the exaltation of her future seed. Eve's very last word in the poem is "restore," which hints at the hope underlying the grief of her loss. In the long view, the human enterprise involves much loss and destruction, but it is still worthwhile to rebuild and start anew. One sees the hopeful rebuilding begin in the last lines of the epic poem. Though Adam and Eve must leave Paradise, they will always keep Paradise in their hearts. Hand in hand with nostalgic grief for the only home they have ever known, Adam and Eve face the openness of the world before them. As Adam and Eve are sent from the garden, they weep tears of sadness at leaving their familiar surroundings, yet they also look forward in a double motion of anticipation. They are anticipating returning to the home where they can be united with God once more through the coming of Christ. Marilyn Stewart points out in her essay "Human Dreams and Angelic Visions: Paradise Lost," that Adam's instruction by Raphael is meant to prepare him for life in the fallen world, "to plant seeds of God's love for humankind and of the breath of his divinity within them, seeds that will persist in memory and preserve the future" (203). Adam must keep the memory and a certain longing for that home for the future. There is a wounding and a healing that are encompassed in the meaning of nostalgia. The pain of the loss of home must be confronted by all for healing to take place as we will see in the figure of the epic hero. The innermost nature of nostalgia and its connection to mankind's original beginning lays the foundation for the nature of the epic.

Louise Cowan explores the epic in her essay "The Epic as Cosmopoesis":

though the poets can use only the vehicle of their own societies to express this eschatological sense, the epic action they depict has all the time in its purview: it remembers the sacred past, contends with the ambiguous present, and aspires to the prophesied future. (16)

Epics by nature are concerned with the remembrance of the past, the places of origin, and the future destiny of an individual or a people. This double action of the image of home in memory and the place making action of the future can be seen in some of the most famous epics in history, such as the above mentioned Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Homer's *Odyssey*. Virgil's *Aeneid* hearkens to the original action of Adam and Eve. Aeneas too must leave his home by order of the deities above for he must give himself over to a greater destiny, yet even so, Aeneas is not altogether taken with idea of leaving Troy, his beloved city. He weeps and longs for his home and keeps the image of Troy in his mind as he pushes forward. He is directed not only by the gods and his father but by his longing for home. Aeneas must make a new home, a new greater Troy that all the gods will praise for generations. Aeneas receives a vision of the future in his trip to the underworld that is likened to Adam's vision as portrayed by Milton. Adam is granted a vision of the future by St. Michael, showing the future horror and corruption of mankind yet also the redemption of the Son made flesh. Aeneas' vision is also of the terrible wars which the New Troy will undergo but also of the greater good of the city, for even the redemption in the coming of Christ is hinted at in the future of Rome.

The nature of the epic is that the foundation of a home, a dwelling place, consists of the synthesis of the past and the future. Homer's *Odyssey* is an obvious acknowledgment of the nostalgia inherent in epic. The entirety of the poem is based on Odysseus' *nostos*, his return home. The gods actively participate in the Greek hero's homecoming, whether by obstructing,

delaying, or by aiding it. The tale of Odysseus' wanderings shows the transformation of a character in the action of returning home. Dennis Slattery notes in "The Narrative Play of Memory in Epic" that "the hearth as place, the *nostos*, or homecoming, as an act of coming back to place, to the origins of one's being--these are the important geographies of the Odyssean epic"(342). Odysseus must also keep the longing for home central in his quest but not be overtaken by longing for it to be the same home. Home is something different for each. To find a new home or one's past home, one must understand oneself and the dark recesses of one's own nature. Odysseus must know himself so as to find and rebuild his true home. In this way, the epic becomes an emblem for each person; all must know themselves correctly and have a memory of home to truly attain a correct sense of home.

Slattery points out, "The heroic needs the right images to yearn for--be it the promise of a new city, the desire to retrieve a friend from death, the hearth one has lost, the heavenly city one hopes to attain" (333). In the epic when one must rebuild, as Odysseus must with Ithaka, and Aeneas with Rome, one is partaking in the thrust back into history and forward towards a destiny, a future that is as distant as the past it brings to life. Cowan reveals that the epic "is retrospective, so that it tends to look back with some nostalgia to whatever communal treasure of inherited nobility may still be visible.... It looks back in order to discern what is worth saving from the past"(26). Establishing a new place, a new home, is a transformation where a new way of being emerges. Nevertheless, this transformation cannot occur without the painful remembrance of home. The pain of the remembrance is the wounding that must be confronted and then healed in the epic, not only for the ultimate destiny but for the wholeness of the person on the journey. This journey is one that all encounter in the yearning for home that reveals one's ultimate destiny. Through the examples of Adam and Eve, Odysseus, and Aeneas, one can see

that not only is nostalgia a part of the hero's journey and destiny, but it is also inherent in everyone, no matter how exalted or lowly. Whether for good or bad, nostalgia affects a person's identity and the outcome of his/her journey; all are haunted by this notion.

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