

repeatedly requires that readers adjust to its shifting perspectives and accumulating hermeneutical effect. It also draws attention to different possible time schemes which shape the emerging narrative. Fowler has computed that the action of the poem, both before and after the Fall, amounts to a total of thirty-three days, where the end and beginning of each day, even in heaven before the creation of the world, is calculated by noting sunsets. The actual time scheme of the poem, however, is of esoteric interest; what matters is the sequence of events as they are presented to us. Had Milton opted to compose the narrative in a linear sequence, the poem would have been very different. The following table compares the linear, as opposed to the actual, sequence of events in the poem as we read it:

<i>Linear narrative timeline of events</i>	<i>Actual order of events in the poem</i>
God begets the Son and declares him Messiah	The devils awake in hell, regroup, build Pandæmonium and debate their next course of action (Books I–II)
Satan gathers a host of rebel angels and seduces them to revolt	Satan, having met his offspring Sin and Death, escapes hell across the gulf of Chaos and lands on the sun where he converses with the angel Uriel (Book II)
War breaks out in heaven between the rebel and obedient angels	The Father foresees the Fall of man and pronounces his future judgement, as the Son volunteers to redeem man from death (Book III)
The Messiah enters the battle, the rebels are routed and cast down to hell	Satan enters the Garden of Eden disguised as a cormorant, sees Adam and Eve and decides to cause their fall; he is then found by angels crouching by Eve's ear disguised as a toad whispering evil thoughts to her as she sleeps, and is expelled from the garden (Book IV)
The six days of creation in which God creates the world using the Son as his instrument, culminating with the creation of man on the sixth day	God sends Raphael to warn Adam and Eve and provide them with the necessary knowledge to resist temptation (Book V)

<i>Linear narrative timeline of events</i>	<i>Actual order of events in the poem</i>
The devils awake in hell, regroup, build Pandaemonium and debate their next course of action	Raphael discourses with Adam about the war in heaven which led to Satan's fall, explains about the creation of the world, warns about the limits of permissible knowledge and departs (Books V–VIII)
Satan, having met his offspring Sin and Death, escapes hell across the gulf of Chaos and lands on the sun where he converses with the angel Uriel	[beginning of Raphael's discourse:] God begets the Son and declares him Messiah (Book V)
The Father foresees the Fall of man and pronounces his future judgement, as the Son volunteers to redeem man from death	Satan gathers a host of rebel angels and seduces them to revolt (Book V)
Satan enters the Garden of Eden disguised as a cormorant, sees Adam and Eve and decides to cause their fall; he is then found by angels crouching by Eve's ear disguised as a toad whispering evil thoughts to her as she sleeps, and is expelled from the garden	War breaks out in heaven between the rebel and obedient angels (Books V–VI)
God sends Raphael to warn Adam and Eve and provide them with the necessary knowledge to resist temptation	The Messiah enters the battle, the rebels are routed and cast down to hell (Book VI)
Raphael discourses with Adam about the war in heaven which led to Satan's fall, explains about the creation of the world, warns about the limits of permissible knowledge and departs	The six days of creation in which God creates the world using the Son as his instrument, culminating with the creation of man on the sixth day (Books VII–VIII) [end of Raphael's discourse]
Satan re-enters the garden and tempts Eve disguised as a serpent; Eve next tempts Adam who decides to fall with her	Satan re-enters the garden and tempts Eve disguised as a serpent; Eve next tempts Adam who decides to fall with her (Book IX)

<i>Linear narrative timeline of events</i>	<i>Actual order of events in the poem</i>
The Son comes down into the garden to pass judgement on Adam and Eve; Sin and Death enter the world as Satan returns triumphant to hell; Adam and Eve lament and repent	The Son comes down into the garden to pass judgement on Adam and Eve; Sin and Death enter the world as Satan returns triumphant to hell; Adam and Eve lament and repent (Book X)
God sends Michael to set out before the fallen human couple a future vision of the world up to the Second Coming	God sends Michael to set out before the fallen human couple a future vision of the world up to the Second Coming (Book XI)
Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden	Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden (Book XII)

When comparing the linear sequence of events within the story to the order in which Milton arranges these events in the poem it becomes clear that it was never Milton's aim simply to tell a familiar biblical story with a few narrative embellishments; his aim was to retell a familiar biblical story in such a way as to fully engage his readers emotionally and intellectually in the main argument about disobedience and loss. The non-linear structure of the poem is meant to encourage an engaging interpretative process and to maximise its effect from the reader's point of view. Milton rearranges our narrative experience of the story's linear sequence so that our focus is always retained on the main action of the temptation leading up to the Fall in Book IX, while extensive digressions at crucial moments of the narrative fill us in on events before the creation which frame the human tragedy at the centre of the epic. The emphasis throughout is on carefully constructed points of view, almost like in a modern film where the same story is told from the different perspectives of individual characters remembering past events or experiencing present ones in real time. This narrative technique has the extraordinary effect of always filtering the immensity of the created universe, including even the ungraspable eternity and infinity of God, through the relative perspective of individual consciousness acting within the unfolding story, including, absurd as this might feel to some readers, the mind of God himself. This finally links back to different notions of time at work in the poem. Only before the Fall is it possible to talk of a linear progression of events unfolding in complete causal perspicuity according to the providential design of God. After the Fall, the providential design is still there, but human beings can no longer perceive