

Paradise Lost as Fantasy Attractor Dynamics: Milton's Sealed Belief Systems [A] (2026) Robert Galida – June 2026

This is an exploratory research note applying the attractor framework's concepts (corrective permeability, sealing mechanisms, basin depth) as qualitative heuristics, not as quantitative measurements. For the full definitions, see Paper 1 ([Intelligence Without Consciousness](#)) and the paper [Non-Physical Claims Are Fantasy Attractors](#).

Abstract

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* offers a rich field for examining how belief systems become sealed against correction. Satan is a paradigmatic case of a **fantasy attractor**: his identity is fused with his rebellion, he deploys sealing mechanisms to neutralize disconfirming evidence, and his corrective permeability is extremely low (metaphorically speaking). However, this paper does not treat attractor language as a literal dynamical model; rather, it uses the framework as a heuristic to illuminate well-known features of the poem that traditional criticism (e.g., C.S. Lewis, Stanley Fish) has already noted. The goal is not to replace literary scholarship but to show how the attractor framework can describe the same phenomena in a unified vocabulary that links theology, politics, and cognitive psychology. The paper also acknowledges the complexity of Eve's deliberation and the

Son's grace as a genuine perturbation that restores corrigibility. It concludes that *Paradise Lost* can be read as a study of how sealed belief systems form, resist correction, and – under specific conditions – can be reopened.

1. Introduction

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) is a poem about the origin of evil, the fall of humanity, and the promise of redemption. It is also a remarkably precise study of how intelligent beings persist in beliefs that contradict evidence. Milton scholars (from Samuel Johnson to Stanley Fish) have long noted Satan's self-deception, Adam's blame-shifting, and the psychological complexity of the Fall. This research note asks: can the attractor framework's vocabulary – **corrective permeability** (κ), **sealing mechanisms**, **basin depth**, **fantasy attractor** – provide a useful lens for describing these dynamics, without pretending to measure them quantitatively or to replace existing scholarship?

The answer is: yes, as a **heuristic**. The framework does not reveal anything that Milton's close readers haven't already noticed. But it does offer a unified way to talk about belief persistence across domains (theology, politics, cognitive science) that may be valuable for readers familiar with the attractor framework. This note is therefore an exercise in **applied analogy**, not a contribution to Milton studies.

2. The Attractor Framework as Heuristic (Not a Formal Model)

In the attractor framework, a **fantasy attractor** is a belief system with very low corrective permeability ($\kappa \rightarrow 0$), a deep

basin (resistance to change), and sealing mechanisms that neutralize disconfirming evidence. A **reality attractor** has higher κ , a shallower basin, and updates in response to evidence.

In literary analysis, these are **qualitative descriptors**, not measurable quantities. We cannot assign a numeric κ to Satan or calculate the depth of Eve's basin. The value of the framework lies in its ability to pattern-match: to notice that Satan's behavior resembles that of a person locked into a sealed belief system, and to use that resemblance to generate insights about why such systems persist and how they might be disrupted.

This is not circular. We do not *infer* low κ from Satan's refusal to correct; we *describe* that refusal as low- κ behavior. The explanatory value is in the *contrast* between Satan (low κ) and pre-lapsarian Adam (higher κ), and in the *transition* from one state to another.

3. Satan: A Sealed Belief System (But Not a Simple One)

Traditional criticism (e.g., C.S. Lewis in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*) has long seen Satan as a portrait of pride – a being so self-absorbed that he cannot see his own misery. More recent critics (e.g., Stanley Fish) have emphasized Satan's theatricality and self-dramatization. The attractor framework adds a vocabulary: Satan's core claim ("Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven") is an **identity statement**, not a rational calculation. He has **fused** his rebellion with his sense of self. To abandon the rebellion would be to annihilate himself.

Sealing mechanism: "The mind is its own place, and in itself /

Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (I.254-255). This is a classic sealing move: reality is redefined as irrelevant. No external evidence can penetrate because the interaction channel between evidence and belief has been severed.

Self-awareness: Satan is not merely deluded. He repeatedly admits his misery: "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell" (IV.75). Yet he still does not update. This is the paradox of the fantasy attractor: **awareness of suffering does not imply corrigibility**. The attractor framework can model this as a state where the basin depth is so large that even the perception of misery is insufficient to trigger escape.

Thus, the framework does not reduce Satan to a simple automaton. It respects his internal conflict while still diagnosing his inability to change.

4. Pre-lapsarian Eden: A More Corrigible State

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve operate in what the framework calls a **reality attractor**: they receive correction (from God and angels), discuss it, and update their behavior. When Eve has a troubling dream, she tells Adam, and they dismiss it (V.95-113). Their κ is relatively high; their basin is shallow.

This is not a claim that they are perfectly rational. It is a claim that their belief system is **structurally open** to correction – a condition that will be tested by the serpent.

5. The Fall: A Gradual Attractor Transition

The serpent's temptation introduces a false promise: "Ye shall be as gods" (IX.708). This is a **non-physical claim** – it has no interaction channel with the world as Adam and Eve know it. It cannot be verified or falsified. In attractor terms, it is the kind of claim that easily becomes a fantasy attractor.

Eve's deliberation in Book IX is subtle. She does not simply flip. She reasons, hesitates, and persuades herself. The framework can describe this as a **gradual reduction in κ** , not an instantaneous collapse. The sealing mechanism ("What could be more fair than to know good and evil?" – IX.727-728) is deployed before the fruit is eaten. By the time she eats, her basin has already deepened.

Adam's choice is different: he knows he is transgressing, but he chooses to fall with Eve out of love (or perhaps fatalism). His κ collapses almost instantly. The framework allows for **different rates of κ change** for different characters.

6. Post-lapsarian Behavior: Deflection and Hiding

After the Fall, Adam and Eve exhibit classic fantasy-attractor behaviors: blaming others (X.128-137), hiding from God (IX.1112-1113), and struggling to answer when questioned. These are **sealing mechanisms** – attempts to avoid the perturbation that would force correction. The framework describes this as a state of **reduced κ** , not necessarily zero. Redemption is still possible.

7. The Son as a Genuine Perturbation

God's interrogation is the first attempt to reopen the basin. The Son's promise of salvation (Book XI-XII) is a **new interaction channel** – grace, mercy, and the possibility of redemption. This is not a mechanical “increase in κ .” It is a theological event. The framework merely notes that such an event functions as an external perturbation that can break a sealed system.

Milton's own theology emphasizes free will and repentance. The attractor framework is compatible with that: repentance is a conscious act that increases κ , but it requires an initial perturbation (grace) to make repentance possible. The framework does not replace Milton's language; it translates it into a different register.

8. Political Allegory: A Modest Reading

Milton was a republican who defended the regicide of Charles I. Many scholars (e.g., Christopher Hill) have read *Paradise Lost* as a political allegory. In attractor terms, one could argue that:

- **Monarchy** (especially absolute monarchy) tends to become a fantasy attractor: it seals itself against correction by appealing to divine right, tradition, and the subject's identity.
- **Republicanism**, in Milton's ideal form, is a reality attractor: it depends on public reason, free press, and corrigible institutions.

But this is **one possible reading**, not a definitive mapping. The paper does not assert that Milton himself thought in these terms. It simply notes that the attractor framework can

describe the political dynamics that Milton was engaging with.

A critic could object that republics can also become sealed (e.g., the Jacobin terror). The framework would agree: any political system can become a fantasy attractor if it loses its corrigibility. The distinction is structural, not ideological.

9. What Would Disconfirm the Framework?

To avoid the accusation of unfalsifiability, the paper offers a specific **falsification condition**:

A character who persists rigidly in a belief but updates rapidly and completely when presented with new evidence (without rationalization or delay) would not be described as a fantasy attractor. Conversely, a character who updates slowly and with resistance would be a candidate.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan's refusal to update after clear evidence (his defeat, his misery) fits the pattern of a fantasy attractor. If a reader could find a counter-example where Satan *does* update without resistance, the framework would be weakened. (No such example exists in the poem.)

This is a modest falsifiability condition, but it is genuine.

10. Conclusion

The attractor framework, used as a heuristic, offers a useful vocabulary for describing the belief dynamics in *Paradise Lost*. It does not replace traditional literary criticism; it re-expresses familiar observations in a unified language that

connects theology, politics, and cognitive psychology. The paper does not claim to measure k or basin depth; it uses these terms qualitatively, as one might use “depression” or “obsession” in psychological criticism.

The core insight – that Satan’s self-sealing pride is a fantasy attractor – is not new. But the framework may help readers see how such sealing mechanisms operate across domains, and why they are so resistant to correction. Milton’s poem remains, as it always has been, a profound study of self-deception, identity, and the possibility of grace.

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