

*Bloom's Modern Critical Views*

# JOHN MILTON

Edited and with an Introduction by  
**HAROLD BLOOM**



## *Bloom's Modern Critical Views*

African American Poets: Wheatley– Tolson	Samuel Taylor Coleridge Joseph Conrad	Jamaica Kincaid Stephen King Rudyard Kipling
African American Poets: Hayden– Dove	Contemporary Poets Stephen Crane Daniel Defoe	Milan Kundera D.H. Lawrence Doris Lessing
Edward Albee	Don DeLillo	Ursula K. Le Guin
Dante Alighieri	Charles Dickens	Sinclair Lewis
American and Canadian Women Poets, 1930– present	Emily Dickinson John Donne and the 17th-Century Poets	Norman Mailer Bernard Malamud David Mamet
American Women Poets, 1650–1950	Fyodor Dostoevsky W.E.B. DuBois	Christopher Marlowe Gabriel García Márquez
Maya Angelou	George Eliot	Cormac McCarthy
Asian-American Writers	T.S. Eliot	Carson McCullers
Margaret Atwood	Ralph Ellison	Herman Melville
Jane Austen	Ralph Waldo Emerson	Arthur Miller
Paul Auster	William Faulkner	John Milton
James Baldwin	F. Scott Fitzgerald	Molière
Honoré de Balzac	Sigmund Freud	Toni Morrison
Samuel Beckett	Robert Frost	Native-American Writers
Saul Bellow	William Gaddis	Joyce Carol Oates
The Bible	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	Flannery O'Connor
William Blake	George Gordon, Lord Byron	Eugene O'Neill
Jorge Luis Borges	Graham Greene	George Orwell
Ray Bradbury	Thomas Hardy	Octavio Paz
The Brontës	Nathaniel Hawthorne	Sylvia Plath
Gwendolyn Brooks	Ernest Hemingway	Edgar Allan Poe
Elizabeth Barrett Browning	Hermann Hesse	Katherine Anne Porter
Robert Browning	Hispanic-American Writers	Marcel Proust
Italo Calvino	Homer	Thomas Pynchon
Albert Camus	Langston Hughes	Philip Roth
Truman Capote	Zora Neale Hurston	Salman Rushdie
Lewis Carroll	Aldous Huxley	J.D. Salinger
Willa Cather	Henrik Ibsen	Jean-Paul Sartre
Cervantes	John Irving	William Shakespeare
Geoffrey Chaucer	Henry James	George Bernard Shaw
Anton Chekhov	James Joyce	Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley
Kate Chopin	Franz Kafka	Percy Bysshe Shelley
Agatha Christie	John Keats	

## *Bloom's Modern Critical Views*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn	Ivan Turgenev	Tennessee Williams
Sophocles	Mark Twain	Thomas Wolfe
John Steinbeck	John Updike	Tom Wolfe
Tom Stoppard	Kurt Vonnegut	Virginia Woolf
Jonathan Swift	Derek Walcott	William Wordsworth
Amy Tan	Alice Walker	Jay Wright
Alfred, Lord Tennyson	Robert Penn Warren	Richard Wright
Henry David Thoreau	Eudora Welty	William Butler Yeats
J.R.R. Tolkien	Edith Wharton	Emile Zola
Leo Tolstoy	Walt Whitman	
	Oscar Wilde	

---

*Bloom's Modern Critical Views*

---

JOHN MILTON

---

*Edited and with an introduction by*  
**Harold Bloom**  
Sterling Professor of the Humanities  
Yale University

 **CHELSEA HOUSE**  
PUBLISHERS  
A Haight Cross Communications Company  
Philadelphia

©2004 by Chelsea House Publishers, a subsidiary of  
Haight Cross Communications.

A Haight Cross Communications  Company

Introduction © 2004 by Harold Bloom.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means  
without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

John Milton / edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom.  
p. cm. — (Bloom's modern critical views)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7910-7657-1 (hardcover) — ISBN 0-7910-7824-8

(pbk.) 1. Milton, John, 1608-1674—Criticism and  
interpretation. I. Bloom, Harold. II. Title. III. Series.

PR3588.J653 2003b

821'.4—dc22

2003016890

Chelsea House Publishers  
1974 Sproul Road, Suite 400  
Broomall, PA 19008-0914

<http://www.chelseahouse.com>

Contributing Editor: Brett Foster

Cover designed by Terry Mallon

Cover photo: Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

Layout by EJB Publishing Services

## Contents

Editor's Note	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Harold Bloom</i>	
Milton's Minor Poems	23
<i>F.T. Prince</i>	
Heaven	33
<i>William Empson</i>	
Milton	55
<i>Thomas Greene</i>	
The Transcendental Masque	97
<i>Angus Fletcher</i>	
Echo Schematic	109
<i>John Hollander</i>	
Milton: "Lycidas"	121
<i>Peter M. Sacks</i>	
The Majesty of Darkness	151
<i>William Flesch</i>	
The genesis of gendered subjectivity in the divorce tracts and in <i>Paradise Lost</i>	171
<i>Mary Nyquist</i>	
The father's house: <i>Samson Agonistes</i> in its historical moment	203
<i>John Guillory</i>	

Milton's Prose: The Adjustment of Idealism	235
<i>C.A. Patrides</i>	
Aristotle on the Pinnacle: <i>Paradise Regained</i> and the Limits of Theory	261
<i>Price McMurray</i>	
The Birth of the Author: Milton's Poetic Self-Construction	275
<i>J. Martin Evans</i>	
Gently Raised	295
<i>Stanley Fish</i>	
"Something ... Written to Aftertimes"	319
<i>Barbara K. Lewalski</i>	
Chronology	331
Contributors	333
Bibliography	337
Acknowledgments	345
Index	347

## *Editor's Note*

My Introduction is in two parts, the first reviewing the High Romantic reading of *Paradise Lost*, and the second an account of Milton's troping of his precursors, so as to render them belated, and the poet of the Satanic epic (as Neil Forsyth calls it) sublimely early.

The poet-scholar, F.T. Prince, much missed by me, gives a sensitive and learned account of the Italian elements in Milton's Minor Poems, while the great William Empson fiercely assaults the dubious figure called "God" in *Paradise Lost*.

A great Renaissance scholar, the recently departed Thomas Greene, subtly locates the place of *Paradise Lost* in the epic sequence of angelic descents.

Two dazzling Orphic critics, who study allegorizing and allusiveness, Angus Fletcher and John Hollander, examine the role of echo in *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*, respectively.

Peter M. Sacks illuminates *Lycidas*, the strongest shorter poem in the language, by bringing together Freud and elegiac tradition.

In a superb essay, William Flesch keeps to a sophisticated version of the Romantic interpretation, rightly saying of the heroic Milton that he had the power to refuse "the safest way."

Provocatively, Mary Nyquist suggests that Eve's story takes priority over Adam's because of intimations offered by Milton in his divorce tracts.

John Guillory, with true originality, finds Milton's relation to his own father to be postfigured in the power of *Samson Agonistes*.

The heroic pattern of Milton's prose is traced by C.A. Patrides, after which Price McMurray celebrates the counter-sublimity of *Paradise Regained*.

Milton's Incarnation of the Poetical Character is analyzed by J. Martin Evans, while the essential Stanley Fish shows us action and risk fusing in Milton's unique splendor.



In her radiant epilogue to her biography of Milton, the best ever published, Barbara K. Lewalski reminds us that the extraordinary strength of the greatest poet in the language, after Chaucer and Shakespeare, resists the reductions of all the modes of our current criticism.

HAROLD BLOOM

*Introduction*

By 1652, before his forty-fourth birthday and with his long-projected major poem unwritten, Milton was completely blind. In 1660, with arrangements for the Stuart Restoration well under way, the blind poet identified himself with the prophet Jeremiah, as if he would “tell the very soil itself what her perverse inhabitants are deaf to,” vainly warning a divinely chosen people “now choosing them a captain back for Egypt, to bethink themselves a little, and consider whither they are rushing.” These words are quoted from the second edition of *The Ready and Easy Way*, a work which marks the end of Milton’s temporal prophecy and the beginning of his greater work, the impassioned meditations upon divine providence and human nature. In these [meditations] Milton abandons the field of his defeat, and leaves behind him also the songs of triumph he might have sung in praise of a reformed society and its imaginatively integrated citizens. He changes those notes to tragic, and praises, when he praises at all, what he calls the better fortitude of patience, the hitherto unsung theme of Heroic Martyrdom. Adam, Christ and Samson manifest an internal mode of heroism that Satan can neither understand nor overcome, a heroism that the blind Puritan prophet himself is called upon to exemplify in the England of the Restoration.

Milton had planned a major poem since he was a young man, and he had associated his composition of the poem with the hope that it would be a celebration of a Puritan reformation of all England. He had prophesied of the coming time that “amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of the saints some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains in new and lofty measures to sing and celebrate thy divine mercies and marvellous judgements in the land throughout all ages.” This vision clearly concerns a national epic, very probably on a British rather than a Biblical theme. That poem, had it been written, would have rivaled the great poem of Milton’s master, Spenser, who in a profound sense was Milton’s “Original,” to cite Dryden’s testimony. *Paradise Lost* is not the poem that Milton had prophesied in the exuberance

---

Part of this introduction first appeared as “Milton and His Precursors” in *A Map of Misreading*.  
copyright © 1975 by Oxford University Press.

of his youth, but we may guess it to be a greater work than the one we lost, for the unwritten poem would not have had the Satan who is at once the aesthetic glory and the moral puzzle of Milton's epic of loss and disillusion.

The form of *Paradise Lost* is based on Milton's modification of Vergil's attempt to rival Homer's *Iliad*, but the content of Milton's epic has a largely negative relation to the content of the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*. Milton's "one greater Man," Christ, is a hero who necessarily surpasses all the sons of Adam, including Achilles and Aeneas, just as he surpasses Adam or archetypal Man himself. Milton delights to speak of himself as soaring above the sacred places of the classical muses and as seeking instead "thee *Sion* and the flow'ry brooks beneath," Siloam, by whose side the Hebrew prophets walked. For *Paradise Lost*, despite C.S. Lewis's persuasive assertions to the contrary, is specifically a Protestant and Puritan poem, created by a man who finally became a Protestant church of one, a sect unto himself. The poem's true muse is "that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases." This Spirit is one that prefers for its shrine, in preference to all Temples of organized faith, the upright and pure heart of the isolated Protestant poet, who carries within himself the extreme Christian individualism of the Puritan Left Wing. Consequently, the poem's doctrine is not "the great central tradition" that Lewis finds it to be, but an imaginative variation on that tradition. Milton believed in the doctrines of the Fall, natural corruption, regeneration through grace, an aristocracy of the elect, and Christian Liberty, all of them fundamental to Calvinist belief, and yet Milton was no orthodox Calvinist, as Arthur Barker has demonstrated. The poet refused to make a sharp distinction between the natural and the spiritual in man, and broke from Calvin in his theory of regeneration. Milton's doctrine of predestination, as seen in *Paradise Lost*, is both general and conditional; the Spirit does not make particular and absolute choices. When regeneration comes, it heals not only man's spirit but his nature as well, for Milton could not abide in dualism. Barker makes the fine contrast between Milton and Calvin that in Calvin even good men are altogether dependent upon God's will, and not on their own restored faculties, but in Milton the will is made free again, and man is restored to his former liberty. The hope for man in *Paradise Lost* is that Adam's descendants will find their salvation in the fallen world, once they have accepted Christ's sacrifice and its human consequences, by taking a middle way between those who would deny the existence of sin altogether, in a wild freedom founded upon a misunderstanding of election, and those who would repress man's nature that spirit might be more free. The regenerated descendants of Adam are to evidence that God's grace need not provide for the abolition of the natural man.

To know and remember this as Milton's ideal is to be properly prepared to encounter the dangerous greatness of Satan in the early books of *Paradise*

*Lost*. The poem is a theodicy, and like *Job* seeks to justify the ways of Jehovah to man, but unlike the poet of *Job* Milton insisted that reason could comprehend God's justice, for Milton's God is perfectly reasonable and the perfection of man in Christ would raise human reason to a power different only in degree from its fallen status. The poet of *Job* has an aesthetic advantage over Milton, for most readers rightly prefer a Voice out of a Whirlwind, fiercely asking rhetorical questions, to Milton's sophistical Schoolmaster of Souls in Book III of *Paradise Lost*. But Milton's God is out of balance because Satan is so magnificently flawed in presentation, and to account for the failure of God as a dramatic character the reader is compelled to enter upon the most famous and vexing of critical problems concerning *Paradise Lost*, the Satanic controversy itself. Is Satan in some sense heroic, or is he merely a fool?

The anti-Satanist school of critics has its great ancestor in Addison, who found Satan's sentiments to be "suitable to a created being of the most exalted and most depraved nature.... Amid those impieties which this enraged spirit utters ... the author has taken care to introduce none that is not big with absurdity, and incapable of shocking a religious reader." Dr. Johnson followed Addison with more eloquence: "The malignity of Satan foams in haughtiness and obstinacy; but his expressions are commonly general, and no otherwise offensive than as they are wicked." The leading modern anti-Satanists are the late Charles Williams, and C. S. Lewis, for whom Milton's Satan is to some extent an absurd egoist, not altogether unlike Meredith's Sir Willoughby Patterne. So Lewis states "it is a mistake to demand that Satan, any more than Sir Willoughby, should be able to rant and posture through the whole universe without, sooner or later, awaking the comic spirit." Satan is thus an apostle of Nonsense, and his progressive degeneration in the poem is only the inevitable working-out of his truly absurd choice when he first denied his status as another of God's creatures.

The Satanist school of critics finds its romantic origins in two very great poets profoundly and complexly affected by Milton, Blake and Shelley. This tradition of romantic Satanism needs to be distinguished from the posturings of its Byronic-Napoleonic cousin, with which anti-Satanists have loved to confound it. The greatest of anti-Satanists (because the most attracted to Satan), Coleridge, was himself guilty of this confusion. But though he insisted upon reading into Milton's Satan the lineaments of Bonaparte, Coleridge's reading of the Satanic character has never been equaled by any modern anti-Satanist:

But in its utmost abstraction and consequent state of reprobation, the will becomes Satanic pride and rebellious self-idolatry in the relations of the spirit to itself, and remorseless despotism relatively to others; the more hopeless as the more obdurate by

its subjugation of sensual impulses, by its superiority to toil and pain and pleasure; in short, by the fearful resolve to find in itself alone the one absolute motive of action, under which all other motives from within and from without must be either subordinated or crushed.

Against this reading of the Satanic predicament we can set the dialectical ironies of Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the imaginative passion of Shelley in his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* and *A Defence of Poetry*. For Blake the Satan of Books I and II supremely embodies human desire, the energy that alone can create. But desire restrained becomes passive, until it is only a shadow of desire. God and Christ in *Paradise Lost* embody reason and restraint, and their restriction of Satan causes him to forget his own passionate desires, and to accept a categorical morality that he can only seek to invert. But a poet is by necessity of the party of energy and desire; reason and restraint cannot furnish the stuff of creativity. So Milton, as a true poet, wrote at liberty when he portrayed Devils and Hell, and in fetters when he described Angels and God. For Hell is the active life springing from energy, and Heaven only the passive existence that obeys reason.

Blake was too subtle to portray Satan as being even the unconscious hero of the poem. Rather, he implied that the poem can have no hero because it too strongly features Milton's self-abnegation in assigning human creative power to its diabolical side. Shelley went further, and claimed Satan as a semi-Promethean or flawed hero, whose character engenders in the reader's mind a pernicious casuistry of humanist argument against theological injustice. Shelley more directly fathered the Satanist school by his forceful statement of its aesthetic case: "Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of Satan as expressed in *Paradise Lost*." Whatever else, Shelley concluded, might be said for the Christian basis of the poem, it was clear that Milton's Satan as a moral being was far superior to Milton's God.

Each reader of *Paradise Lost* must find for himself the proper reading of Satan, whose appeal is clearly all but universal. Amid so much magnificence it is difficult to choose a single passage from *Paradise Lost* as surpassing all others, but I incline to the superlative speech of Satan on top of Mount Niphates (Book IV, ll.32–113), which is the text upon which the anti-Satanist, Satanist or some compromise attitude must finally rest. Here Satan makes his last choice, and ceases to be what he was in the early books of the poem. All that the anti-Satanists say about him is true *after* this point; all or almost all claimed for him by the Satanists is true *before* it. When this speech is concluded, Satan has become Blake's "shadow of desire," and he is on the downward path that will make him "as big with absurdity" as ever Addison and Lewis claimed him to be. Nothing that can be regenerated remains in

Satan, and the rift between his self-ruined spirit and his radically corrupted nature widens until he is the hissing serpent of popular tradition, plucking greedily at the Dead Sea fruit of Hell in a fearful parody of Eve's Fall.

It is on Mount Niphates again that Satan, now a mere (but very subtle) tempter, stands when he shows Christ the kingdoms of this world in the brief epic, *Paradise Regained*. "Brief epic" is the traditional description of this poem (published in 1671, four years after *Paradise Lost*), but the description has been usefully challenged by several modern critics. E. M. W. Tillyard has warned against judging the poem by any kind of epic standard and has suggested instead that it ought to be read as a kind of Morality play, while Arnold Stein has termed it an internal drama, set in the Son of God's mind. Louis L. Martz has argued, following Tillyard, that the poem is an attempt to convert Vergil's *Georgics* into a mode for religious poetry, and ought therefore to be read as both a didactic work and a formal meditation on the Gospel. *Paradise Regained* is so subdued a poem when compared to *Paradise Lost* that we find real difficulty in reading it as epic. Yet it does resemble *Job*, which Milton gave as the possible model for a brief epic, for like *Job* it is essentially a structure of gathering self-awareness, of the protagonist and hero recognizing himself in his relation to God. Milton's Son of Man is obedient where Milton's Adam was disobedient; Job was not quite either until God spoke to him and demonstrated the radical incompatibility involved in any mortal's questionings of divine purpose. Job, until his poem's climax, is an epic hero because he has an unresolved conflict within himself, between his own conviction of righteousness and his moral outrage at the calamities that have come upon him despite his righteousness. Job needs to overcome the temptations afforded him by this conflict, including those offered by his comforters (to deny his own righteousness) and by his finely laconic wife (to curse God and die). The temptations of Milton's Son of God (the poet's fondness for this name of Christ is another testimony to his Hebraic preference for the Father over the Son) are not easy for us to sympathize with in any very dramatic way, unlike the temptations of Job, who is a man like ourselves. But again Milton is repeating the life-long quest of his poetry; to see man as an integrated unity of distinct natures, body and soul harmonized. In Christ these natures are perfectly unified, and so the self-realization of Christ is an image of the possibility of human integration. Job learns not to tempt God's patience too far; Christ learns who he is, and in that moment of self-revelation Satan is smitten with amazement and falls as by the blow of a Hercules. Milton had seen himself in *Paradise Lost* as Abdiel, the faithful Angel who will not follow Satan in rebellion against God, defying thus the scorn of his fellows. Less consciously, something crucial in Milton had found its way into the Satan of the opening books, sounding a stoic defiance of adversity. In *Paradise Regained* Milton, with genuine humility, is exploring the Jobean problem within himself. Has he, as a Son of

God also, tried God's patience too far, and can he at length overcome the internal temptations that beset a proud spirit reduced to being a voice in the wilderness? The poet's conquest over himself is figured in the greater Son of God's triumphant endurance, and in the quiet close of *Paradise Regained*, where the Savior returns to his mother's house to lead again, for a while, the private life of contemplation and patience while waiting upon God's will, not the public life forever closed to Milton.

Published with *Paradise Regained* in 1671, the dramatic poem *Samson Agonistes* is more admired today than the brief epic it accompanied. The poem's title, like the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus, refers to the episode in the hero's life upon which the work is centered. The reference (from the Greek for athletic contestants in public games) is to Samson's ordeal before the Philistines at their Feast of Dagon, where he is summoned for their sport to demonstrate his blind strength, and where his faith gives him light enough to destroy them. Samson is Milton's Christian modification of Athenian drama, as *Paradise Lost* had been of classical epic. Yet Milton's drama is his most personal poem, in its experimental metric and in its self-reference alike. Modern editors cautiously warn against overstressing the extent to which Samson represents Milton, yet the representation seems undeniable, and justly so, to the common reader. Milton's hatred of his enemies does not seem particularly Christian to many of his modern critics, but its ferocious zeal fits both the Biblical story of Samson and the very bitter situation that the blind Puritan champion had to face in the first decade of the Restoration. The crucial text here is the great Chorus, ll.652–709, in which Milton confronts everything in the world of public events that had hurt him most. The theodicy of *Paradise Lost* seems abstract compared to the terrible emotion conveyed in this majestic hymn. The men solemnly elected by God for the great work of renovation that is at once God's glory and the people's safety are then evidently abandoned by God, and indeed thrown by Him lower than He previously exalted them on high. Milton had lived to see the bodies of his great leaders and associates, including Cromwell, dug up and hanged on the gallows to commemorate the twelfth anniversary of the execution of Charles I. Sir Henry Vane, for whom Milton had a warm and especial admiration, had been executed by order of "the unjust tribunals, under change of times, / And condemnation of the ingrateful multitude." *Samson Agonistes* give us not only the sense of having experienced a perfectly proportioned work of art, but also the memory of Milton's most moving prayer to God, which follows his account of the tribulations of his fellow Puritans:

So deal not with this once thy glorious Champion,  
The Image of thy strength, and mighty minister.  
What do I beg? how hast thou dealt already?  
Behold him in this state calamitous, and turn  
His labours, for thou canst, to peaceful end.

MILTON AND HIS PRECURSORS<sup>1</sup>

NO poet compares to Milton in his intensity of self-consciousness as an artist and in his ability to overcome all negative consequences of such concern. Milton's highly deliberate and knowingly ambitious program necessarily involved him in direct competition with Homer, Virgil, Lucretius, Ovid, Dante and Tasso, among other major precursors. More anxiously, it brought him very close to Spenser, whose actual influence on *Paradise Lost* is deeper, subtler and more extensive than scholarship so far has recognized. Most anxiously, the ultimate ambitions of *Paradise Lost* gave Milton the problem of expanding Scripture without distorting the Word of God.

A reader, thinking of Milton's style, is very likely to recognize that style's most distinctive characteristic as being the density of its allusiveness. Perhaps only Gray compares to Milton in this regard, and Gray is only a footnote, though an important and valuable one, to the Miltonic splendor. Milton's allusiveness has a distinct design, which is to enhance both the quality and the extent of his inventiveness. His handling of allusion is his highly individual and original defense against poetic tradition, his revisionary stance in writing what is in effect a tertiary epic, following after Homer in primary epic and Virgil, Ovid, and Dante in secondary epic. Most vitally, Miltonic allusion is the crucial revisionary ratio by which *Paradise Lost* distances itself from its most dangerous precursor, *The Faerie Queene*, for Spenser had achieved a national romance, of epic greatness, in the vernacular, and in the service of moral and theological beliefs not far from Milton's own.

The map of misprision move[s] between the poles of *illusio*—irony as a figure of speech, or the reaction-formation I have termed *clinamen*—and allusion, particularly as the scheme of transumption or metaleptic reversal that I have named *apophrades* and analogized to the defenses of introjection and projection. As the common root of their names indicates, *illusio* and allusion are curiously related, both being a kind of mockery, rather in the sense intended by the title of Geoffrey Hill's poem on Campanella, that "Men are a mockery of Angels." The history of "allusion" as an English word goes from an initial meaning of "illusion" on to an early Renaissance use as meaning a pun, or word-play in general. But by the time of Bacon it meant any symbolic likening, whether in allegory, parable or metaphor, as when in *The Advancement of Learning* poetry is divided into "Narrative, representative, and allusive." A fourth meaning, which is still the correct modern one, follows rapidly by the very early seventeenth century, and involves any implied, indirect or hidden reference. The fifth meaning, still incorrect but bound to establish itself, now equates allusion with direct, overt reference. Since the root meaning is "to play with, mock, jest at," allusion is uneasily allied to words like "ludicrous" and "elusion," as we will remember later.

Thomas McFarland, formidably defending Coleridge against endlessly



repetitive charges of plagiarism, has suggested that “plagiarism” ought to be added as a seventh revisionary ratio. Allusion is a comprehensive enough ratio to contain “plagiarism” also under the heading of *apophrades*, which the Lurianic Kabbalists called *gilgul*, as I explained [previously]. Allusion as covert reference became in Milton’s control the most powerful and successful figuration that any strong poet has ever employed against his strong precursors.

Milton, who would not sunder spirit from matter, would not let himself be a receiver, object to a subject’s influencings. His stance against dualism and influence alike is related to his exaltation of unfallen pleasure, his appeal not so much to his reader’s senses as to his reader’s yearning for the expanded senses of Eden. Precisely here is the center of Milton’s own influence upon the Romantics, and here also is why he surpassed them in greatness, since what he could do for himself was the cause of their becoming unable to do the same for themselves. His achievement became at once their starting point, their inspiration, yet also their goad, their torment.

Yet he too had his starting point: Spenser. Spenser was “the soothest shepherd that e’er piped on plains,” “sage and serious.” “Milton has acknowledged to me, that Spenser was his original,” Dryden testified, but the paternity required no acknowledgment. A darker acknowledgment can be read in Milton’s astonishing mistake about Spenser in *Areopagitica*, written more than twenty years before *Paradise Lost* was completed:

... It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil. As therefore the state of man is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear, without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness; which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare

be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the person of Guyon, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know, and yet abstain....

Spenser's cave of Mammon is Milton's Hell; far more than the descents to the underworld of Homer and Virgil, more even than Dante's vision, the prefiguration of Books I and II of *Paradise Lost* reverberates in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*. Against Acrasia's bower, Guyon enjoys the moral guidance of his unfaltering Palmer, but necessarily in Mammon's cave Guyon has to be wholly on his own, even as Adam and Eve must withstand temptation in the absence of the affable Raphael. Guyon stands, though at some cost; Adam and Eve fall, but both the endurance and the failure are independent. Milton's is no ordinary error, no mere lapse in memory, but is itself a powerful misinterpretation of Spenser, and a strong defense against him. For Guyon is not so much Adam's precursor as he is Milton's own, the giant model imitated by the Abdiel of *Paradise Lost*. Milton rewrites Spenser so as to *increase the distance* between his poetic father and himself. St. Augustine identified memory with the father, and we may surmise that a lapse in a memory as preternatural as Milton's is a movement against the father.

Milton's full relation to Spenser is too complex and hidden for any rapid description or analysis to suffice, even for my limited purposes in this [essay]. Here I will venture that Milton's transumptive stance in regard to all his precursors, including Spenser, is founded on Spenser's resourceful and bewildering (even Joycean) way of subsuming his precursors, particularly Virgil, through his labyrinthine syncretism. Spenserian allusiveness has been described by Angus Fletcher as collage: "Collage is parody drawing attention to the *materials* of art and life." Fletcher follows Harry Berger's description of the technique of *conspicuous allusion* in Spenser: "the depiction of stock literary motifs, characters, and genres in a manner which emphasizes their conventionality, displaying at once their debt to and their existence in a conventional climate—Classical, medieval, romance, etc.—which is archaic when seen from Spenser's retrospective viewpoint." This allusive collage or conspicuousness is readily assimilated to Spenser's peculiarly metamorphic elegiacism, which becomes the particular legacy of Spenser to all his poetic descendants, from Drayton and Milton down to Yeats and Stevens. For Spenser began that internalization of quest-romance that is or became what we call Romanticism. It is the Colin Clout of Spenser's Book VI who is the father of Milton's *Il Penseroso*, and from Milton's visionary stem the later Spenserian transformations of Wordsworth's Solitary, and all of the Solitary's children in the wanderers of Keats, Shelley, Browning, Tennyson and Yeats until the parodistic climax in Stevens' comedian Crispin. Fletcher, in his

study of Spenser, *The Prophetic Moment*, charts this genealogy of introspection, stressing the intervention of Shakespeare between Spenser and Milton, since from Shakespeare Milton learned to contain the Spenserian elegiacism or “prophetic strain” within what Fletcher calls “transcendental forms.” In his study of *Comus* as such a form, *The Transcendental Masque*, Fletcher emphasizes the “enclosed vastness” in which Milton, like Shakespeare, allows reverberations of the Spenserian resonance, a poetic diction richly dependent on allusive echoings of precursors. *Comus* abounds in *apophrades*, the return of many poets dead and gone, with Spenser and Shakespeare especially prominent among them. Following Berger and Fletcher, I would call the allusiveness of *Comus* still “conspicuous” and so still Spenserian, still part of the principle of echo. But, with *Paradise Lost*, Miltonic allusion is transformed into a mode of transumption, and poetic tradition is radically altered in consequence.

Fletcher, the most daemonic and inventive of modern allegorists, is again the right guide into the mysteries of *transumptive allusion*, through one of the brilliant footnotes in his early book, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (p. 241, n. 33). Studying what he calls “difficult ornament” and the transition to modern allegory, Fletcher meditates on Johnson’s ambivalence towards Milton’s style. In his *Life of Milton*, Johnson observes that “the heat of Milton’s mind might be said to sublimate his learning.” Hazlitt, a less ambivalent admirer of Milton, asserted that Milton’s learning had the effect of intuition. Johnson, though so much more grudging, actually renders the greater homage, for Johnson’s own immense hunger of imagination was overmatched by Milton’s, as he recognized:

Whatever be his subject, he never fails to fill the imagination. But his images and descriptions of the scenes or operations of Nature do not seem to be always copied from original form, nor to have the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation. He saw Nature, as Dryden expresses it, *through the spectacles of books*; and on most occasions calls learning to his assistance....

... But he does not confine himself within the limits of rigorous comparison: his great excellence is amplitude, and he expands the adventitious image beyond the dimensions which the occasion required. Thus, comparing the shield of Satan to the orb of the Moon, he crowds the imagination with the discovery of the telescope, and all the wonders which the telescope discovers.

This Johnsonian emphasis upon allusion in Milton inspires Fletcher to compare Miltonic allusion to the trope of transumption or metalepsis, Puttenham’s “far-fetcher”:

Johnson stresses allusion in Milton: “the spectacles of books” are a means of sublimity, since at every point the reader is led from one scene to an allusive second scene, to a third, and so on. Johnson’s Milton has, we might say, a “transumptive” style....

Here is the passage that moved Johnson’s observation, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, 283–313. Beelzebub has urged Satan to address his fallen legions, who still lie “astounded and amazed” on the lake of fire:

He scarce had ceas’t when the superior Fiend  
 Was moving toward the shore; his ponderous shield  
 Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,  
 Behind him cast; the broad circumference  
 Hung on his shoulders like the Moon, whose Orb  
 Through Optic Glass the *Tuscan* Artist views  
 At Ev’ning from the top of *Fesole*,  
 Or in *Valdarno*, to descry new Lands,  
 Rivers or Mountains in her spotty Globe.  
 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;  
 Nathless he so endur’d, till on the Beach  
 Of that inflamed Sea, he stood and call’d  
 His Legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans’t  
 Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks  
 In *Vallebrosa*, where th’ *Etrurian* shades  
 High overarch’t imbow’r; or scatter’d sedge  
 Afloat, when with fierce Winds *Orion* arm’d  
 Hath vext the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves o’erthrew  
*Busiris* and his *Memphian* Chivalry,  
 While with perfidious hatred they pursu’d  
 The Sojourners of *Goshen*, who beheld  
 From the safe shore thir floating Carcasses  
 And broken Chariot Wheels, so thick bestrown  
 Abject and lost lay these, covering the Flood,  
 Under amazement of thir hideous change.

The transumption of the precursors here is managed by the

juxtaposition between the far-fetching of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Tasso, Spenser, the Bible and the single near-contemporary reference to Galileo, “the Tuscan artist,” and his telescope. Milton’s aim is to make his own belatedness into an earliness, and his tradition’s priority over him into a lateness. The critical question to be asked of this passage is: why is Johnson’s “adventitious image,” Galileo and the telescope, present at all? Johnson, despite his judgment that the image is extrinsic, implies the right answer: because the expansion of this apparently extrinsic image crowds the reader’s imagination, by giving Milton the true priority of interpretation, the powerful reading that insists upon its own uniqueness and its own accuracy. Troping upon his forerunners’ tropes, Milton compels us to read as he reads, and to accept his stance and vision as our origin, his time as true time. His allusiveness introjects the past, and projects the future, but at the paradoxical cost of the present, which is not voided but is yielded up to an experiential darkness, as we will see, to a mingling of wonder (discovery) and woe (the fallen Church’s imprisonment of the discoverer). As Frank Kermode remarks, *Paradise Lost* is a wholly contemporary poem, yet surely its sense of the present is necessarily more of loss than of delight.

Milton’s giant simile comparing Satan’s shield to the moon alludes to the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, XIX, 373–80:

... and caught up the great shield, huge and heavy next, and from it the light glimmered far, as from the moon.  
 And as when from across water a light shines to mariners from a blazing fire, when the fire is burning high in the mountains in a desolate standing, as the mariners are carried unwilling by storm winds over the fish-swarmed sea, far away from their loved ones; so the light from the fair elaborate shield of Achilleus shot into the high air.

(Lattimore version)

Milton is glancing also at the shield of Radigund in *The Faerie Queene*, V, v, 3:

And on her shoulder hung her shield, bedeckt  
 Upon the bosse with stones, that shined wide,  
 As the faire Moone in her most full aspect,  
 That to the Moone it mote be like in each respect.

Radigund, Princess of the Amazons, is dominated by pride and anger, like Achilles. Satan, excelling both in his bad eminence, is seen accurately through the optic glass of the British artist’s transumptive vision, even as Galileo sees what no one before him has seen on the moon’s surface. Galileo,

when visited by Milton (as he tells us in *Areopagitica*), was working while under house arrest by the Inquisition, a condition not wholly unlike Milton's own in the early days of the Restoration. Homer and Spenser emphasize the moonlike brightness and shining of the shields of Achilles and Radigund; Milton emphasizes size, shape, weight as the common feature of Satan's shield and the moon, for Milton's post-Galilean moon is more of a world and less of a light. Milton and Galileo are *late*, yet they see more, and more significantly, than Homer and Spenser, who were *early*. Milton gives his readers the light, yet also the true dimensions and features of reality, even though Milton, like the Tuscan artist, must work on while compassed around by experiential darkness, in a world of woe.

Milton will not stop with his true vision of Satan's shield, but transumes his precursors also in regard to Satan's spear, and to the fallen-leaves aspect of the Satanic host. Satan's spear evokes passages of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Tasso and Spenser, allusions transmuted by the contemporary reference to a flagship ("ammiral") with its mast made of Norwegian fir. The central allusion is probably to Ovid's vision of the Golden Age (Golding's version, I, 109–16):

The loftie Pyntree was not hewen from mountaines where it stood,  
In seeking straunge and forren landes to rove upon the flood.

Men knew none other countries yet, than where themselves did  
keepe:

There was no towne enclosed yet, with walles and ditches deepe.

No horne nor trumpet was in use, no sword nor helmet worne.

The worlde was suche, that souldiers helpe might easily be  
forborne.

The fertile earth as yet was free, untoucht of spade or plough,

And yet it yeelded of it selfe of every things inough.

Ovid's emblem of the passage from Golden Age to Iron Age is reduced to "but a wand," for Satan will more truly cause the fall from Golden to Iron. As earlier Satan subsumed Achilles and Radigund, now he contains and metaleptically reverses the Polyphemus of Homer and of Virgil, the Tancredi and Argantes of Tasso, and the proud giant Orgoglio of Spenser:

a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—  
an olive tree, felled green and left to season  
for Kyklops' hand. And it was like a mast  
a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam—  
a deep-sea-going craft—might carry:  
so long, so big around, it seemed.

(*Odyssey*, IX, 322–27, Fitzgerald version)

... we saw  
 upon a peak the shepherd Polyphemus;  
 he lugged his mammoth hulk among the flocks,  
 searching along familiar shores—an awful  
 misshapen monster, huge, his eyelight lost.  
 His steps are steadied by the lopped-off pine  
 he grips....

(*Aeneid*, III, 660–66; Mandelbaum version,  
 849–55)

These sons of Mavors bore, instead of spears,  
 Two knotty masts, which none but they could lift;  
 Each foaming steed so fast his master bears,  
 That never beast, bird, shaft, flew half so swift:  
 Such was their fury, as when Boreas tears  
 The shatter'd crags from Taurus' northern clift:  
 Upon their helms their lances long they brake,  
 And up to heav'n flew splinters, sparks, and smoke.  
 (*Jerusalem Delivered*, VI, 40, Fairfax version)

So grown great through arrogant delight  
 Of th'high descent, whereof he was yborne,  
 And through presumption of his matchlesse might,  
 All other powres and knighthood he did scorne.  
 Such now he marcheth to this man forlorne,  
 And left to losse: his stalking steps are stayde  
 Upon a snaggy Oke, which he had torne  
 Out of his mothers bowelles, and it made  
 His mortall mace, wherewith his foemen he dismayde.  
 (*Faerie Queene*, I, vii, x)

The Wild Men, Polyphemus the Cyclops and the crudely proud Orgoglio, as well as the Catholic and Circassian champions, Tancredi and Argantes, all become late and lesser versions of Milton's earlier and greater Satan. The tree and the mast become interchangeable with the club, and all three become emblematic of the brutality of Satan as the Antichrist, the fallen son of God who walks in the darkness of his vainglory and perverts nature to the ends of war-by-sea and war-by-land, Job's Leviathan and Behemoth. Milton's present age is again an experiential darkness—of naval warfare—but his backward glance to Satanic origins reveals the full truth of which Homer, Virgil, Tasso give only incomplete reflections. Whether the transumption truly overcomes Spenser's Orgoglio is more dubious, for he remains nearly as Satanic as Milton's Satan, except that Satan is more

complex and poignant, being a son of heaven and not, like the gross Orgoglio, a child of earth.

The third transumption of the passage, the fiction of the leaves, is surely the subtlest, and the one most worthy of Milton's greatness. He tropes here on the tropes of Isaiah, Homer, Virgil and Dante, and with the Orion allusion on Job and Virgil. The series is capped by the references to Exodus and Ovid, with the equation of Busiris and Satan. This movement from fallen leaves to starry influence over storms to the overwhelming of a tyrannous host is itself a kind of transumption, as Milton moves from metonymy to metonymy before accomplishing a final reduction.

Satan's fallen hosts, poignantly still called "angel forms," most directly allude to a prophetic outcry of Isaiah 34:4:

And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.

Milton is too wary to mark this for transumption; his trope works upon a series of Homer, Virgil, Dante:

... why ask of my generation?  
As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity.  
The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the fine timber burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning.  
So one generation of men will grow while another dies...  
(*Iliad*, VI, 145–50, Lattimore version)

thick as the leaves that with the early frost  
of autumn drop and fall within the forest,  
or as the birds that flock along the beaches,  
in flight from frenzied seas when the chill season  
drives them across the waves to lands of sun.  
They stand; each pleads to be the first to cross  
the stream; their hands reach out in longing for  
the farther shore. But Charon, sullen boatman,  
now takes these souls, now those; the rest he leaves;  
thrusting them back, he keeps them from the beach.

(*Aeneid*, VI, 310–19; Mandelbaum version,  
407–16)

... But those forlorn and naked souls changed color, their teeth chattering, as soon as they heard the cruel words. They cursed



God, their parents, the human race, the place, the time, the seed of their begetting and of their birth. Then, weeping loudly, all drew to the evil shore that awaits every man who fears not God. The demon Charon, his eyes like glowing coals, beckons to them and collects them all, beating with his oar whoever lingers.

As the leaves fall away in autumn, one after another, till the bough sees all its spoils upon the ground, so there the evil seed of Adam: one by one they cast themselves from that shore at signals, like a bird at its call. Thus they go over the dark water, and before they have landed on the other shore, on this side a new throng gathers.

(*Inferno*, III, 100–120, Singleton version)

Homer accepts grim process; Virgil accepts yet plangently laments, with his unforgettable vision of those who stretch forth their hands out of love for the farther shore. Dante, lovingly close to Virgil, is more terrible, since his leaves fall even as the evil seed of Adam falls. Milton remembers standing, younger and then able to see, in the woods at Vallombrosa, watching the autumn leaves strew the brooks. His characteristic metonymy of shades for woods allusively puns on Virgil's and Dante's images of the shades gathering for Charon, and by a metalepsis carries across Dante and Virgil to their tragic Homeric origin. Once again, the precursors are projected into belatedness, as Milton introjects the prophetic source of Isaiah. Leaves fall from trees, generations of men die, because once one-third of the heavenly host came falling down. Milton's present time again is experiential loss; he watches no more autumns, but the optic glass of his art sees fully what his precursors saw only darkly, or in the vegetable glass of nature.

By a transition to the "scattered sedge" of the Red Sea, Milton calls up Virgil again, compounding two passages on Orion:

Our prows were pointed there when suddenly,  
rising upon the surge, stormy Orion  
drove us against blind shoals....

(*Aeneid*, I, 534–36; Mandelbaum  
version, 753–55)

... he marks Arcturus,  
the twin Bears and the rainy Hyades,  
Orion armed with gold; and seeing all  
together in the tranquil heavens, loudly  
he signals....

(*Aeneid*, III, 517–21; Mandelbaum version, 674–78)

Alastair Fowler notes the contrast to the parallel Biblical allusions:

He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?

... Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.

Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south.

(Job 9:4, 8–9)

Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name....

(Amos 5:8)

In Virgil, Orion rising marks the seasonal onset of storms. In the Bible, Orion and all the stars are put into place as a mere sign-system, demoted from their pagan status as powers. Milton says “hath vexed” to indicate that the sign-system continues in his own day, but he says “o’erthrew” to show that the Satanic stars and the hosts of Busiris the Pharaoh fell once for all, Pharaoh being a type of Satan. Virgil, still caught in a vision that held Orion as a potency, is himself again transmuted into a sign of error.

I have worked through this passage’s allusions in some detail so as to provide one full instance of a transumptive scheme in *Paradise Lost*. Johnson’s insight is validated, for the “adventitious image” of the optic glass is shown to be not extrinsic at all, but rather to be the device that “crowds the imagination,” compressing or hastening much transumption into a little space. By arranging his precursors in series, Milton figuratively reverses his obligation to them, for his stationing crowds them between the visionary truth of his poem (carefully aligned with Biblical truth) and his darkened present (which he shares with Galileo). Transumption murders time, for by troping on a trope, you enforce a state of rhetoricity or word-consciousness, and you negate fallen history. Milton does what Bacon hoped to do; Milton and Galileo become ancients, and Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Tasso, Spenser become belated moderns. The cost is a loss in the immediacy of the living moment. Milton’s meaning is remarkably freed of the burden of anteriority, but only because Milton himself is already one with the future, which he introjects.

It would occupy too many pages to demonstrate another of Milton’s transumptive schemes in its largest and therefore most powerful dimensions, but I will outline one, summarizing rather than quoting the text and citing rather than giving the allusions. My motive is not only to show that the

“optic glass” passage is hardly unique in its arrangement, but to analyze more thoroughly Milton’s self-awareness of both his war against influence and his use of rhetoricity as a defense. Of many possibilities, Book I, lines 670–798, seems to me the best, for this concluding movement of the epic’s initial book has as its hidden subject both the anxiety of influence and an anxiety of morality about the secondariness of any poetic creation, even Milton’s own. The passage describes the sudden building, out of the deep, of Pandaemonium, the palace of Satan, and ends with the infernal peers sitting there in council.

This sequence works to transume the crucial precursors again—Homer, Virgil, Ovid and Spenser—but there are triumphant allusions here to Lucretius and Shakespeare also (as Fowler notes). In some sense, the extraordinary and reverberating power of the Pandaemonium masque (as John Hollander terms it, likening it to transformation scenes in court masques) depends on its being a continuous and unified allusion to the very idea of poetic tradition, and to the moral problematic of that idea. Metalepsis or transumption can be described as an extended trope with a missing or weakened middle, and for Milton literary tradition is such a trope. The illusionistic sets and complex machinery of the masque transformation scene are emblematic, in the Pandaemonium sequence, of the self-deceptions and morally misleading machinery of epic and tragic convention.

Cunningly, Milton starts the sequence with a transumption to the fallen near-present, evoking the royal army in the Civil War as precise analogue to the Satanic army. Mammon leads on the advance party, in an opening allusion to Spenser’s Cave of Mammon canto, since both Mammons direct gold-mining operations. With the next major allusion, to the same passage in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* I that was evoked in the Galileo sequence, Milton probes the morality of art:

Let none admire  
That riches grow in Hell; that soil may best  
Deserve the precious bane. And here let those  
Who boast in mortal things, and wond’ring tell  
Of *Babel*, and the works of *Memphian* Kings,  
Learn how thir greatest Monuments of Fame,  
And Strength and Art are easily outdone  
By Spirits reprobate, and in an hour  
What in an age they with incessant toil  
And hands innumerable scarce perform.

Milton presumably would not have termed the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid* “precious bane,” yet the force of his condemnation extends to them, and his anxiety necessarily touches his own poem as well. Pandaemonium rises in

baroque splendor, with a backward allusion to Ovid's Palace of the Sun, also designed by *Mulciber* (*Metamorphoses* II, 1–4), and with a near-contemporary allusion to St. Peter's at Rome and, according to Fowler, to Bernini's colonnade in the piazza of St. Peter's. *Mulciber*, archetype not only of Bernini but more darkly of all artists, including epic poets, becomes the center of the sequence:

Men call'd him *Mulciber*; and how he fell  
 From Heav'n, they fabl'd, thrown by angry *Jove*  
 Sheer o'er the Crystal Battlements: 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' *Aegean* Isle: 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 Towrs; nor did he scape  
 By all his Engines, but was headlong sent  
 With is industrious crew to build in hell.

The devastating “Erring” of line 747 is a smack at Homer by way of the *errata* of Lucretius (*De rerum natura*, I, 393, as Fowler notes). The contrast with Homer's passage illuminates the transumptive function of Milton's allusiveness, for Homer's Hephaistos (whose Latin name was Vulcan or *Mulciber*) gently fables his own downfall:

... It is too hard to fight against the Olympian.  
 There was a time once before now I was minded to help you, and  
 he caught  
 me by the foot and threw me from the magic threshold,  
 and all day long I dropped helpless, and about sunset  
 I landed in Lemnos....

(*Iliad*, I, 589–93, Lattimore version)

Milton first mocks Homer by over-accentuating the idyllic nature of this fall, and then reverses Homer completely. In the dark present, *Mulciber's* work is still done when the bad eminence of baroque glory is turned to the purposes of a fallen Church. So, at line 756, *Pandaemonium* is called “the high capital” of Satan, alluding to two lines of Virgil (*Aeneid*, VI, 836 and VIII, 348), but the allusion is qualified by the complex simile of the bees that continues throughout lines 768–75, and which relies on further allusions to *Iliad*, II, 87–90 and *Aeneid*, 430–36, where Achaian and Carthaginian heroes respectively are compared to bees. One of the most remarkable of Milton's

transumptive returns to present time is then accomplished by an allusion to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, II, i, 28ff. A "belated peasant" beholds the "Faery Elves" even as we, Milton's readers, see the giant demons shrink in size. Yet our belatedness is again redressed by metaleptic reversal, with an allusion to *Aeneid*, VI, 451–54, where Aeneas recognizes Dido's "dim shape among the shadows (just as one who either sees or thinks he sees ... the moon rising)." So the belated peasant "sees, or dreams he sees" the elves, but like Milton we know we see the fallen angels metamorphosed from giants into pygmies. The Pandaemonium sequence ends with the great conclave of "a thousand demi-gods on golden seats," in clear parody of ecclesiastical assemblies re-convened after the Restoration. As with the opening reference to the advance-party of the royal army, the present is seen as fallen on evil days, but it provides vantage for Milton's enduring vision.

So prevalent throughout the poem is this scheme of allusion that any possibility of inadvertence can be ruled out. Milton's design is wholly definite, and its effect is to reverse literary tradition, at the expense of the presentness of the present. The precursors return in Milton, but only at his will, and they return to be corrected. Perhaps only Shakespeare can be judged Milton's rival in allusive triumph over tradition, yet Shakespeare had no Spenser to subsume, but only a Marlowe, and Shakespeare is less clearly in overt competition with Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides than Milton is with Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Tasso.

Hobbes, in his *Answer to Davenant's Preface* (1650), had subordinated wit to judgment, and so implied also that rhetoric was subordinate to dialectic:

From knowing much, proceedeth the admirable variety and novelty of metaphors and similitudes, which are not possibly to be lighted on in the compass of a narrow knowledge. And the want whereof compelleth a writer to expressions that are either defaced by time or sullied with vulgar or long use. For the phrases of poesy, as the airs of music, with often hearing become insipid; the reader having no more sense of their force, than our flesh is sensible of the bones that sustain it. As the sense we have of bodies, consisteth in change and variety of impression, so also does the sense of language in the variety and changeable use of words. I mean not in the affectation of words newly brought home from travel, but in new (and withal, significant) translation to our purposes, of those that be already received, and in far fetched (but withal, apt, instructive, and comely) similitudes....

Had Milton deliberately accepted this as challenge, he could have done no more both to fulfill and to refute Hobbes than *Paradise Lost* already does.

What Davenant and Cowley could not manage was a complete translation to their own purposes of received rhetoric; but Milton raised such translation to sublimity. In doing so, he also raised rhetoric over dialectic, *contra* Hobbes, for his farfetchedness (Puttenham's term for transumption) gave similitudes the status and function of complex arguments. Milton's wit, his control of rhetoric, was again the exercise of the mind through all her powers, and not a lower faculty subordinate to judgment. Had Hobbes written his *Answer* twenty years later, and after reading *Paradise Lost*, he might have been less confident of the authority of philosophy over poetry.



F. T. PRINCE

*Milton's Minor Poems*

I

With the exception of the mature sonnets and some of the translations of the Psalms, Milton's minor poems belong to the first thirty years of his life and represent for the most part a sustained effort of self-education in writing English verse. It is not impossible, however, to distinguish between those which are predominantly deliberate exercises in poetry and those which have drawn also upon deeper sources of inspiration. Thus *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* and *Comus*—to take examples from the finest poems of this sort—are clearly written in what Keats called 'an artful or rather artist's humour'; while the hymn *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* and *Lycidas* seem to mark, not only stages in Milton's acquisition of technical skill, but also important advances in imaginative power.

It is natural that, in a process of self-improvement such as the minor poems represent, the poet should produce some work of a kind which he does not repeat, and that much should appear which does not appear in quite the same guise in his later verse. So, to examine the minor poems in order to trace the ways in which Milton assimilated the Italian poetry he admired, is to find that many of them more obviously illustrate other things. If one considers Milton's English verse as a whole up to 1638, it shows that his chief purpose was to assimilate as much of the English poetic heritage as he found

---

From *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse*. © 1954 by Oxford University Press.



worthy and capable of being turned to his own use. The poetry of this period attempts less to absorb Italian technique (except in a few important cases) than to plunder Shakespeare, Spenser, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson of treasures with which Milton could build a more lofty, polished, and condensed poetic style than had yet been achieved in English.

Spenser and Jonson are taken by Milton as his masters in the earliest English poems. The influence of Spenser prevails in the specifically religious pieces: *On the Death of a Fair Infant*, *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, and *The Passion*. Jonson's influence is stronger in the more secular or courtly: *At a Vacation Exercise*, *An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*, *On Shakespeare*, *On the University Carrier*. Milton's cultivation of English verse begins appropriately under the joint auspices of these two poets, for they alone among the great Elizabethans and Jacobeans held the lofty Renaissance ideal of a learned poetry; and they alone upheld and applied critical theories which Milton could respect.

Milton's direct recourse to Italian poetry for technical lessons is, however, apparent even among the first group of his youthful poems. It is possible to trace the workings of this idiosyncrasy and to distinguish the results from those of the more diffused Italian influence which comes through Spenser and his school. The hymn *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* illustrates this reflection of Italian form in the Spenserian tradition; the lines *Upon the Circumcision* show that at the same time Milton was willing to go directly to Tuscan poetry; and the lines *On Time* and *At a Solemn Musick* show the interplay of the two influences: they could not have been written as they were without Italian exemplars, but they indicate that Milton will henceforth prefer to follow only those Italian lyric forms which he can modulate in his own way.

In all the early poems, except the early sonnets, the following of Italian verse affects the prosody rather than the diction. Indeed, Milton's adaptation of devices of Italian diction, which is all-important to the understanding of his mature verse, does not begin until *Lycidas*, the last poem of his youth.

## II

A glance at the hymn *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* will show that what Italianisms we find in these youthful poems may be ascribed almost wholly to Milton's following of Spenser. The Spenserian quality of the language and the rhythms of the hymn is a commonplace of criticism. It appears in nothing more clearly than in the management of adjectives; and such usages as 'dark foundations deep', 'flowre-inwov'n tresses torn', and 'Timbreld Anthems dark', which Spenser derived from the Italians, Milton accepts as proven elements in English poetic diction. The stanza itself reveals the same origins.

The concluding alexandrine seals its Spenserian character, and both this and the preceding octosyllable would be impossible in any strict adherence to the methods of the Italian *canzone*. Yet the pattern and movement of the stanza, and the very notion of employing such a stanza for a solemn ode of this sort, could only derive from the tradition of the *canzone*. Spenser himself took similar liberties in the *Epithalamion* and the *Prothalamion*, which nevertheless remain his tribute to the power of the *canzone* form. Milton may well have considered that such variations as alexandrines and octosyllables, as well as occasional rhythms such as

And then at last our bliss  
Full and perfect is,

were desirable in an English adaptation of Italian prosody. And perhaps he was right, and may have been confirmed in his instinct by mature experience; for there is reason to believe that the much greater licence of the choruses of Samson represents his later version of the rhythmic complexity of Italian verse.

The confidence of the hymn *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* is often contrasted with the relative failure of two experiments which must have closely followed it: the lines *Upon the Circumcision* and *The Passion*. There can be little doubt that the young Milton, fired by the sense of self-discovery and of poetic power conferred by his celebration of the birth of Christ, set out to hail in the same way those feasts of the Church which recorded the chief events in the scheme of Redemption. The poet's acceptance of defeat in this plan came with his relinquishment of the poem on *The Passion*, which has nothing to tell us of his technical progress. But this unsuccessful experiment must have been preceded in the New Year by the lines *Upon the Circumcision*, which, within their narrow limits, provide interesting evidence of the poet's methods.

It has never yet been noticed that these two stanzas, each of fourteen lines, reproduce as closely as possible the stanza used by Petrarch in his *canzone* to the Blessed Virgin. The only modification Milton makes, and it is a modification only for the eye, is to make two lines out of the two sections into which Petrarch's last line falls. Petrarch's last line is linked to its predecessor by *rimalmezzo* (medial rhyme); Milton follows the rhyme-pattern, but changes the accepted Italian way of setting out the verse, no doubt because he decided that it would be unfamiliar and unpleasing to English readers.<sup>1</sup> A comparison between the first stanzas of the two poems makes the relationship clear and brings out other points.

Petrarch writes:

<i>Vergine bella, the di Sol vestita,</i>	a
<i>Coronata di stelle, al sommo Sole</i>	b

<i>Piacesti sì che'n to sua luce ascose;</i>	c
<i>Amor mi spinge a dir di te parole,</i>	b
<i>Ma non so 'ncominciar senza tu' aita</i>	a
<i>E di Colui ch'amando in te si pose.</i>	c
<i>Invoco lei the ben sempre rispose,</i>	c
<i>Chi la chiamò con fede.</i>	d
<i>Vergine, s'a mercede,</i>	d
<i>M'seria extrema de l'umane cose</i>	c
<i>Già mai ti volse, al mio prego t'inchina;</i>	e
<i>Soccorri a la mia guerra,</i>	f
<i>Bench'i' sia terra,—e to del ciel regina.<sup>2</sup></i>	(f) e

And Milton:

Ye flaming Powers, and winged Warriours bright,	a
That erst with musick, and triumphant song	b
First heard by happy watchful Shepherds ear,	c
So sweetly sung your joy the clouds along	b
Through the soft silence of the list'ning night;	a
Now mourn, and if sad share with us to bear	c
Your fiery essence can distill no tear,	c
Burn in your signs, and borrow	d
Seas wept from our deep sorrow,	d
He who with all Heav'ns heraldry whileare	c
Enter'd the world, now bleeds to give us ease;	e
Alas, how soon our sin	f
Sore doth begin	f
His Infancy to sease!	e

The lines *Upon the Circumcision* have the distinction of being Milton's only attempt to follow an Italian model in exactly this manner: that is to say, copying a complex stanza which must be repeated throughout the poem. Petrarch's *canzone* is 137 lines long, the fact that Milton, taking a stanza designed for a poem of this length, repeats it only once, may be a mere accident. There is nothing to indicate that his poem was intended to be longer than it is. But the brevity of the poem, and its unique fidelity to such a stanza-form, may well suggest that Milton's talent did not function easily on such a basis. The only stanza-form he continued to use was that of the sonnet, and then only in a manner which very considerably modified its stanzaic character.

The comparison between Milton's and Petrarch's stanzas shows also that Milton's are not articulated in the traditional manner. In the first stanza he does not observe the pause at the end of the sixth line which in Petrarch

marks the end of the fronte of the stanza and the beginning of the *sirima* or *coda*.<sup>3</sup> Either Milton at this time had not appreciated the significance of these divisions (which had indeed been blurred in many *canzoni* of the sixteenth century), and when he came to do so, decided against the attempt to imitate such complexities in English: or he found the attempt in this poem uncongenial and unsuccessful, and forswore such metres for ever.

For the two other pieces of this period are indeed sufficiently Italianate, but they take as their basis an Italian form, the madrigal, which is less exacting than the *canzone*, and which Milton can develop with characteristic power. *On Time* and *At a Solemn Musick* have a sonority, a sustained emphasis of statement, and a rhythmic weight which give an assurance that Milton is again on the right track, finding means of expression which will bring out his full powers. *On Time*, which the Trinity manuscript tells us was conceived as an inscription for a clock case, derives from a branch of Italian poetry much cultivated in the later sixteenth century by Tasso, Marino, and others: the madrigal, used to reproduce the Greek epigram. Like many of their originals, these madrigals drew their subjects from pictures or statues and preserved the link between epigram and inscription. Drummond of Hawthornden was the only poet writing in English who had closely imitated the madrigals and epigrams of Tasso and his followers; Milton was not likely to be impressed by his pedestrian versions of these witty trifles. Yet his own more ambitious use of the form follows its essential features. In both these poems he builds up a triumphant epigrammatic close, which is marked by an alexandrine; both have an element of 'wit-writing', though this is outweighed by a religious gravity and fervour.

The madrigal in its origin was as it were merely one stanza of a *canzone*—a stanza which was not repeated; and it shared with the *canzone* the metrical basis of hendecasyllables and heptasyllables which had proved useful in English verse. Milton preserves the general nature of the form, but modifies it significantly, not only in his concluding alexandrines, but in his handling of the shorter lines. The Italian heptasyllable had found its theoretic equivalent in English in a line of six syllables and three stresses. Milton experiments, not only with this accepted equivalent, but with lines of four stresses. These are slightly tentative in the lines *On Time*:

With an individual kiss;

and

Then all this Earthy grosnes quit,

but provide the first magnificent climax of the second poem:

With those just Spirits that wear victorious Palms,  
 Hymns devout and holy Psalms  
 Singing everlastingly; (*At a Solemn Musick*, II. 14–16.)

These modulations are indicative of a feeling on Milton's part that full sonority in these Italianate forms could not be attained by pedantic imitation, and that he for his part could achieve the effect he wanted rather by a certain disciplined improvisation. The significance of the two poems is increased when we notice how this disciplined improvisation has enabled Milton to develop the long and elaborate sentence which is to be a structural element in all his mature poetry. *At a Solemn Musick* in particular shows his resources:

That we on Earth with undiscording voice  
 May rightly answer that melodious noise;  
 As once we did, till disproportion'd sin  
 Jarr'd against natures chime, and with harsh din  
 Broke the fair musick that all creatures made  
 To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd  
 In perfect Diapason, whilst they stood  
 In first obedience, and their state of good.

The poet who can draw upon such a syntax and rhythm as this has little need of intricate rhyme or stanzaic form; at this point the poem slips into what we can scarcely call couplets, but what the Italians would call *rime baciata*, which are seldom used lavishly in Italian lyrics except as a sort of dizzy climax or conclusion (as in the *sonetto caudato*). The importance of *On Time* and *At a Solemn Musick* is that they point forward to *Lycidas* and the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*, and foreshadow Milton's exploitation of syntax as a structural element both in those later lyrics and in his blank verse.

In these youthful poems may be seen the deliberation with which Milton sets himself to learn what he needs from Italian verse. This deliberation is very marked also in his first sonnets, that is to say the Sonnet to the Nightingale, the sonnets in Italian, and the Sonnet on his twenty-third birthday. But these must be considered with the sonnets as a whole. Here it need only be remarked that after this first phase of serious imitation of Italian verse Milton turns to English poetry and drama, and makes a thorough investigation of what they have to offer him.

### III

The poems we associate with Milton's period of study at Horton display the results of this deliberate saturation in Elizabethan and Jacobean verse.

Shakespeare, Jonson, and Fletcher are Milton's chief literary inspiration in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*; the titles are there to remind us of his special leaning towards Italian, but the metre and diction of these poems owe little to Italian verse, except perhaps a certain solidity and resonance which might equally well be attributed to Milton's cultivation of Latin.

Jonson is the presiding influence in *Arcades*, and determines the fundamental structure even of *Comus*, though *Comus* draws impressively on so many other sources. In its plan and in the texture of its verse *Comus* is based firmly on English masques and dramas; its relation to Italian pastoral drama, to Tasso's *Aminta* and Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido*, is indirect and subordinate. That Milton knew *Aminta* and *Il Pastor Fido* goes without saying; but his own poem owes more to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, to Ben Jonson's masques and Shakespeare's plays, and to Spenser's blend of chivalry, pastoral and Renaissance philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

*Comus* is by virtue of its length and the variety of its verse one of the most important illustrations of Milton's art before his visit to Italy. In the blank verse dialogues there is much that remains apparent in his mature epic verse. But there is a distinction to be made between this blank verse and that of *Paradise Lost*, which may help to bring out the specifically Italian element in the latter. Dr. Johnson remarks in connexion with *Comus* that

Milton appears to have formed very early that system of diction,  
and mode of verse, which his maturer judgement approved, and  
from which he never endeavoured nor desired to deviate.

But the diction and the versification of the blank verse of *Comus* are not in fact identical with those of the great epics. Milton's feeling for the English language, the peculiar weight of his verse, these are of course fully present. We find his skill in constructing elaborate and extended verse paragraphs, and his delight in an overwhelming fullness of expression. Many passages convey a sense of discovery as well as achievement, a reaching out towards a new style:

Within the navil of this hideous Wood,  
Immur'd in cypress shades a Sorcerer dwels  
Of *Bacchus* and of *Circe* born, great *Comus*,  
Deep skill'd in all his mothers witcheries,  
And here to every thirsty wanderer,  
By sly enticement gives his banefull cup,  
With many murmurs mixt, whose pleasing poison  
The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,  
And the inglorious likenes of a beast  
Fixes instead, un moulding reasons mintage

Character'd in the face; this have I learn't  
 Tending my flocks hard by i'th hilly crofts,  
 That brow this bottom glade, whence night by night  
 He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl  
 Like stabl'd wolves, or tigers at their prey,  
 Doing abhorred rites to *Hecate*  
 In their obscured haunts of inmost bowres.

(*Comus*, II. 520–36)

This has Shakespeare's plenitude and weight, invaluable in dramatic verse. But it has these qualities to excess, because Milton's prime purpose is not dramatic but literary, and he is working towards the creation of a style essentially unsuited to drama. 'It is a drama in the epick style, inelegantly splendid', says Dr. Johnson. Milton's special preoccupation here is clearly to extend the limits of the sentence, as he is to find means of doing, more appropriately, in his epic verse.

Yet it is worth observing that the wonderful elaboration of this blank verse style in *Comus* is achieved with out making use of many of the devices of *Paradise Lost*. Astonishing periods are constructed almost entirely without the 'Miltonic inversions' to be derived later from Virgil and the Italian experiments in epic diction. Lines and sequences of lines may be found almost everywhere which could occur also in the later blank verse; there is no consistent difference in the prosodic basis, though certain 'liberties' appear, both here and in the dialogues of *Samson Agonistes*, which suggest that Milton distinguished between dramatic blank verse and blank verse in narrative poetry. It would be difficult to demonstrate that the blank verse of *Comus* is a different metre from that of the epics. But it is sung to a different tune, as it were; it has a different movement and pitch; it has behind it a different pattern. *Paradise Lost* has the movement and tone of Virgil, and it has the pattern of Italian *versi sciolti* of the sixteenth century. *Comus* observes the tone and movement of Shakespeare's blank verse, adapting also inflexions from lesser dramatists.

The lyrics of *Comus*, like those of *Arcades*, are related primarily to Jonson and Fletcher; if any affinities could be traced with contemporary Italian lyrics, they would probably be found to be due to the common musical tradition.

The importance of *Comus* for our study of the development of Milton's verse is that it illustrates copiously his relation to the Elizabethans and Jacobeans. It shows him consciously assimilating what he could of these native beauties. He had no Italian models in mind on this occasion; if he had had any idea of reproducing in English the special qualities of the Italian pastoral dramas, the result would assuredly have been very different from what we have.

## IV

*Lycidas* follows *Comus* and immediately precedes Milton's Italian journey; its formal significance is worthy of separate treatment. After its composition Milton abandons the study and assimilation of English poetry which he undertook, among many other labours, in the Horton period. Henceforth his poetry is to be planned entirely under the influence of the two classical literatures and of Italian, the authority of which he considers equal to theirs. This settled view of his is reflected in the tractate *Of Education*, which he first printed in 1644, and which was written after his return from the Continent.

In this plan of a complete intellectual equipment, Italian is the only modern language to be set beside Greek, Latin, and Hebrew ('whereto it would be no impossibility to add the *Chaldey*, and the *Syrian Dialect*'). Italian and classical poetry are to be studied in the light of sixteenth-century Italian criticism and its classical sources, Aristotle and Horace. Milton's imaginary pupils would thus learn 'what the laws are of a true Epic Poem, what of a *Dramatic*, what of a *Lyric*, what Decorum is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe'. And they would thus know what to think of their native literature: 'Thus would make them soon perceive what despicable creatures our common Rimers and Playwriters be, and skew them, what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of Poetry both in divine and humane things.'

This is where Milton stands at the end of his long experience of education and self-education; and from this point of view he conceives and finally carries out his mature work.

## NOTES

1. The last two lines are written as one in the Trinity manuscript, the reading of the printed text being proposed in a marginal correction.

2. *Il Canzoniere* (Milano, 1925), No. CCCLXVI.

3. See p. 84 (in original publication) for the significance of these terms.

4. Professor Mario Praz exaggerates when he writes: 'Si è molto parlato del carattere spenseriano del *Comus*, ma nessuno sembra essersi accorto che il modello reale è l'*Aminta* del Tasso'. *Rapporti tra la letteratura italiana e la letteratura inglese* (Milano, n.d.), p. 169.





WILLIAM EMPSON

*Heaven*

W e are often told nowadays that Milton's attitude to Satan must have been perfectly simple, but it is clear that when writing *Paradise Lost* he had plenty more evidence for God's connivance with Satan which he chose not to use. The reason why this game can be played, of course, is that the Old Testament is a rag-bag of material from very different stages of development; one would think Milton after his thorough study must have understood that, but his main allies were committed to relying on the text, to oppose the traditions of Rome. The furthest he went in writing was to conjecture that God allowed the text of his Word to become corrupt so as to force upon our attention the prior importance of our own consciences (*De Doctrina*, Chapter XXX).

No scholastic philosopher, said Sir Walter Raleigh, "could have walked into a metaphysical bramble-bush with the blind recklessness that Milton displays"; he seems to have been the first to make this very central point. But I do not think anyone who has read the *De Doctrina* will regard Milton's treatment as due to ignorance or stupidity. The effect is that of a powerful mind thrashing about in exasperation. Perhaps I should have recognized earlier a scholastic position which he would consider elementary; we are not to think that God forces the will of individuals merely because he foreknows what they will do. God's foreknowledge was universally admitted, even by believers in free will, such as Milton had become when he wrote the epic.

---

From *Milton's God*. © 1961 by Chatto and Windus, Ltd.

The idea in itself is not remote from common experience; many a mother has felt with horror that she can 'see' her son is going to take to bad courses. We find a greater difficulty in the case of a Creator, as was said in lapidary form by Aquinas:

Knowledge, as knowledge, does not imply, indeed, causality; but, in so far as it is a knowledge belonging to the artist who forms, it stands in the relation of causality to that which is produced by his art.

This too is not beyond our experience, especially if we firmly regard the Creator as a Father; who will often fear, without even blaming Mother, a recurrence of his own bad tendencies or perhaps those of the wicked uncles. Besides, an ancient tradition allows us to say that an author may be too inspired quite to foresee what he is producing by his art. But a parent who 'foresaw' that the children would fall and then insisted upon exposing them to the temptation in view would be considered neurotic, if nothing worse; and this is what we must ascribe to Milton's God.

Waldock, I think, first remarked that he seems anxious to prove he does not cause the Fall; "indeed, never to the end of the poem does he succeed in living down this particular worry". I had perhaps better document this argument. God says in his first speech:

*So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,  
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,  
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all  
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so  
I formed them free, and free they must remain,  
Till they enthrall themselves.* (III. 120)

All this upbraiding of them is done before they have fallen, and God again protests his innocence as soon as they have done it:

*no Decree of mine  
Concurring to necessitate his Fall,  
or touch with lightest moment of impulse  
His free will, to her own inclining left  
In even scale.* (X. 45)

Can it be the uneasy conscience of God or of Milton which produces this unfortunate metaphor of the scales, actually reminding us of the incident when he forced his troops to expose mankind to the tempter? Before the Creation, he gives what is perhaps a slightly different account of his power:

*Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill  
 Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.  
 Though I uncircumscribed 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.170)

This is one of the main bits used by M. Saurat to show the profundity, or the impersonality and pantheism, of Milton's God; and God's claims do feel better if we identify him with Fate and the Absolute and the primeval matter of Chaos. But surely the story we are reading inspires a simpler reflection. Chaos is also a person, and though he acts out of resentment, so that God would not need to tip him off about the situation, he does exactly what God wants of him; he lets Satan pass for the corruption of mankind. As for making Sin and Death the guardians of Hell Gate, Sir Walter Raleigh remarked with casual elegance:

No one has plausibly explained how they came by their office. It was intended to be a perfect sinecure; there was no one to be let in and no one to be let out. The single occasion that presented itself for a neglect of their duty was by them eagerly seized. (p. 108)

—though later he approves of the absurdity, because “they are the only creations of English poetry which approach the Latin in grandeur” (p. 238). Surely the explanation is very simple; God always intended them to let Satan out. Critics somehow cannot bring themselves to recognize that Milton does this steadily and consistently, after announcing that he will at the start. As a believer in the providence of God, Milton could not possibly have believed in the huge success-story of Satan fighting his way to Paradise. The chains of Hell, Sin, Death, Chaos and an army of good angels hold Satan back, but all this stage machinery is arranged by God to collapse as soon as he advances upon it, just as the fire cannot harm Siegfried when he has courage enough to walk through it to Brunhild. Chaos makes little of the heroic piece of space-travel when he directs Satan to the newly created world:

*If that way be your walk, you have not far.* (II. 1010)

(By the way, Yvor Winters could not have called this line ‘meaningless inflation’.) We have thus no reason to doubt that Milton also intended the final paradox of the series, after Satan has reached Eden, when God cheats his own troops to make certain that the Fall occurs. As to what God means by saying that none of his busy activity affects their free will, I suppose he

means that he does not actually hypnotize them, as Svengali did Trilby; though he lets Satan do to Eve as much as a hypnotist really can do.

A particularly impressive example of this poetic technique is given by a detail about the chains, which I think must have made Mr T. S. Eliot decide that the treatment of the chains is not sufficiently imagist. The first words of God in the poem insist that he cannot control Satan, and mention these chains as among the things that Satan has escaped from. We might indeed suppose that Milton has 'made a slip', forgotten his story and his theology, whether from lack of imaging or not. The reason why this will not do, I think, is that he is writing so frightfully well; his feelings are so deeply involved that the sound effects become wonderful. *Wide interrupt can hold* is like the cry of sea-mews upon rocks; it has what I think is meant by the term 'plangency'. We have to suppose it meant something important to him.

*Only begotten Son, seest thou what rage  
 Transports our adversary, whom no bounds  
 Prescrib'd, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains  
 Heapt on him there, nor yet the main Abyss  
 Wide interrupt can hold; so bent he seems  
 On desperate revenge, that shall redound  
 Upon his own rebellious head. And now  
 Through all restraint broke loose he wings his way  
 Nor far of Heav'n, in the Precincts of Light,  
 Directly towards the new created World,  
 And man there plac'd ...*

(III. 80)

The only consistent view, after the firm statement at I. 210 for example, is that this is the first of God's grisly jokes. The passage, I think, is the strongest bit of evidence for the view of C. S. Lewis, that Milton intended Satan to be ridiculous; but even so it does not feel very like a joke. Milton might have some wish to confuse his simpler readers, and God to confuse the loyalist angels, who have been summoned to hear him; one might think God could not want to look weak, but he may be wanting to justify his revenge. Nobody says that it is a joke, as the Son does after God expresses fear of losing his throne; but there is no opportunity, because what God goes on to say is so lengthy and appalling. His settled plan for punishment comes steadily out, and the verse rhythm becomes totally unlike the thrilling energy of this first sentence. In his first reply to the Son, we find him talking in rocking-horse couplets, using the of rhymes which were re-invented by Wilfred Owen to describe the First World War, with the same purpose of setting a reader's teeth on edge:

*This my long sufferance and my day of grace  
 They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;*

*But hard be hardened, blind be blinded more,  
That they may stumble on, and deeper fall.* (III. 200)

This is also where we get the stage-villain's hiss of "Die he or justice must". God is much at his worst here, in his first appearance; but he needs to be, to make the offer of the Son produce a dramatic change. I do not know what to make of his expressing the Calvinist doctrine that the elect are chosen by his will alone, which Milton had appeared to reject (185); it has a peculiar impact here, when God has not yet even secured the Fall of Adam and Eve. One might argue that he was in no mood to make jokes; and besides, the effect here is not a sardonic mockery of Satan, which can be felt in the military joke readily enough, but a mysterious and deeply rooted sense of glory. A simple explanation may be put forward; Milton felt that this was such a tricky bit to put over his audience, because the inherent contradictions were coming so very near the surface, that he needed with a secret delight to call on the whole of his power. This is almost what Shelley took to be his frame of mind; and it is hard to accept, with the *De Doctrina* before us, without talking about Milton's Unconsciousness. But we may be sure that there is a mediating factor; if he had been challenged about the passage, he would have said that he was following the Old Testament scrupulously, and allowing God to mock his foes.

This has often been said about the jokes of Milton's God, or at least about the one which can't be ignored because it is explained as a joke (V. 720); and you can make a rough check from the Concordance at the end of a Bible. The only important case is from Psalm ii; here again we meet the ancient document in which the King of Zion is adopted as the son of God:

Why do the heathen rage ...? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed.... He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision.

This is echoed in Psalms xxxvii. 13 and lix. 8, and perhaps in Proverbs i. 26, where Wisdom and not God mocks the worldly rather than a powerful aggressor; but after trying to look under all the relevant words I do not find that the Concordance ever ascribes the sentiment to the Prophets. It was thus an ancient tradition but one treated with reserve, as Milton would understand. Naturally his intention in putting so much weight on it has been found especially hard to grasp.

The views of M. Morand about the divine characters have been neglected and seem to me illuminating. In the same year as *De Comus A Satan* he published a pamphlet in English, *The Effects of his Political Life on John Milton*, concerned to show that a certain worldly-mindedness entered

Milton's poetry after his experience of government, politics, and propaganda. He thus accepted, as typical of the sordidness of such work, the story that Milton himself arranged the presence in the *Eikon Basilike* of the prayer, altered from one in Sidney's *Arcadia*, for which he then denounced the King in *Eikonoclastes*. Much of this, though lively, has been made out of date by an important book which claims to refute the story, F. F. Madan's *New Bibliography of the Eikon* (1950). He tries to refute it so hard that he becomes absurd.\* But his information does I think prove that any foisting, whether by Milton or not, must have been done before Milton got the official appointment. Sad and funny though it is for the denouncer of censorship to become a propaganda chief, Milton deserves respect, as Morand points out, for rejecting brutal methods in favour of guile (not only here). So I don't feel that the action is too bad for Milton; he would think the divine purpose behind the Civil War justified propaganda tricks, and need not have thought this a particularly bad one. The King was dead, and the purpose of the cheat was merely to prevent the people from thinking him a martyr. Also he hadn't written much of the book, and Milton suspected that at the time, so it was only a matter of answering one cheat with another. Milton must in any case have been insincere in pretending to be shocked at the use of a prayer by Sidney, given in the story as that of a pagan, but so Christian in feeling as to be out of period (it assumes that God may be sending us evil as a test or tonic for our characters, which even if to be found in Aeschylus or Marcus Aurelius is not standard for *Arcadia*). Milton might comfort himself with the reflection that he wasn't even damaging the man's character in the eyes of fit judges, only making use of a popular superstition—as Shelley expected on another occasion. However, M. Morand finds that this kind of activity brought about a Fallen condition, as one might say, in the mind of the poet, and such is what *De Comus A Satan* examines throughout the later poetry.

There is an assumption here that to do Government propaganda can only have a bad effect upon a poet's mind, and I feel able to speak on the point as I was employed at such work myself in the Second World War, indeed once had the honour of being named in rebuttal by Fritzsche himself and called a curly-headed Jew. I wasn't in on any of the splendid tricks, such as Milton is accused of, but the cooked-up argufying I have experienced. To work at it forces you to imagine all the time what the enemy will reply; you are trying to get him into a corner. Such a training cannot narrow a man's understanding of other people's opinions, though it may well narrow his own opinions. I should say that Milton's experience of propaganda is what makes his later poetry so very dramatic; that is, though he is a furious partisan, he can always imagine with all its force exactly what the reply of the opponent would be. As to his integrity, he was such an inconvenient propagandist that the Government deserve credit for having the nerve to appoint and retain him. He had already published the Divorce Pamphlets before he got the job;

well now, if you are setting out to be severe and revolutionary on the basis of literal acceptance of the Old Testament, the most embarrassing thing you can be confronted with is detailed evidence about the sexual habits of the patriarchs; it is the one point where the plain man feels he can laugh. Milton always remained liable to defend his side by an argument which would strike his employers as damaging; his style of attack is savagely whole-hearted, but his depth of historical knowledge and imaginative sympathy keep having unexpected effects. He was not at all likely to feel that he had forfeited his independence of mind by such work. M. Morand therefore strikes me as rather innocent in assuming that he was corrupted by it, but I warmly agree that it made his mind very political. Professor Wilson Knight has also remarked that Milton wrote a political allegory under the appearance of a religious poem, though he did not draw such drastic consequences from the epigram.

On the Morand view, God is simply a dynastic ruler like those Milton had had to deal with; Cromwell had wanted his son to inherit, no less than Charles. M. Morand does not seem to realize it, but the effect is to make Milton's God much better. His intrigues and lies to bolster his power are now comparatively unselfish, being only meant to transfer it unimpaired to his Son, and above all he feels no malignity towards his victims. His method of impressing the loyalist angels will doom almost all mankind to misery, but he takes no pleasure in that; it simply does not bother him. The hypocrisy which the jovial old ruffian feels to be required of him in public has not poisoned his own mind, as we realize when he permits himself his leering jokes. This does, I should say, correspond to the impression usually made by the poem on a person not brought up as a Christian, such as my Chinese and Japanese students. The next step is to regard the debate in Heaven, where the Son, but no angel, offers to die for man, as a political trick rigged up to impress the surviving angels; the Son is free to remark (III. 245) that he knows the Father won't let him stay dead, so that the incantatory repetition of the word *death* comes to seem blatantly artificial. (We find in the *De Doctrina* Chapter XII that Milton includes "under the head of death, in Scripture, all evils whatsoever" ...). Nobody is surprised at the absence of volunteers among the good angels, whereas Satan, during the parallel scene in Hell (II. 470), has to close the debate hurriedly for fear a less competent rebel put himself forward. Otherwise the two scenes are deliberately made alike, and the reason is simply that both are political:

Ce qui frappe, c'est le parallélisme des moyens employées, conseils, discours. Même souci de garder pour soi tout gloire. (p. 145)

On reaching *Paradise Regained*, M. Morand is interested to learn how the Son



grew up. In *Paradise Lost* he often seems half ashamed of the autocratic behaviour of his Father, because his role is to induce the subject angels to endure it; but when he is alone on the earth-visit which has been arranged for him we find he has merely the cold calculating pride which we would expect from his training. However, we already find this trait, decides M. Morand, at the early public moment when he offers his Sacrifice; he is unable to avoid presenting himself as solely interested in his own career (p. 169). As the Creation for which he was the instrument has already happened, he might at least speak as if he could tell a man apart from a cow, but he says that his Father's grace visits "all his creatures" (III. 230). Satan, on the parallel occasion, was at least genuinely concerned to get the job done, whoever did it; and M. Morand decides that the ringing repetition of ME in the speech of sacrifice of the Son is a little too grotesque, however perfectly in character. Milton

n'eût pas pensé à ce que peut contenir de ridicule ce martellement du moi.

De personnages extra-terrestres, le moins éloigné de la modestie est encore Satan. (p. 171)

This is at least a splendid reply to the argument that pride is the basic fault of all the characters who fall.

The Morand line of argument can be taken an extra step, to argue that the Son too is being cheated by the Father; and this excites a suspicion that there is something inadequate about it. He says nothing of the means of his death, and speaks as if he is going to remain on earth till the Last Day:

*Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life  
I offer; on mee let thine anger fall;  
Account mee man; I for his sake will leave  
Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee  
Freely put off, and for him lastly die  
Well pleas'd, on me let Death wreck all his rage;  
Under his gloomy power I shall not long  
Lie vanquisht; thou hast giv'n me to possess  
Life in my self for ever; by thee I live,  
Though now to Death I yield, and am his due  
All of me that can die, yet that debt paid,  
Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave  
His prey, nor suffer my unspotted Soul  
For ever with corruption there to dwell;  
But I shall rise Victorious, and subdue  
My Vanquisher; spoild of his vaunted spoil;*

*Death his death's wound shall then receive, and stoop  
 Inglorious, of his mortal sting disarm'd.  
 I through the ample Air in Triumph high  
 Shall lead Hell Captive maugre Hell, and show  
 The Powers of darkness bound. Thou at the sight  
 Pleas'd, out of Heaven shalt look down and smile,  
 While by thee rais'd I ruin all my Foes,  
 Death last, and with his Carcass glut the Grave:  
 Then with the multitude of my redeem'd  
 Shall enter Heaven long absent, and return,  
 Father, to see thy face, wherein no cloud  
 Of anger shall remain, but peace assur'd,  
 And reconcilment; wrath shall be no more  
 Thenceforth, but in thy presence Joy entire.*

(III. 240)

Our chief impression here, surely, is not that he is too little interested in mankind but that he does not know what is going to happen, except for a triumph at which he can rejoice. If the Jews had not chosen to kill him, he would presumably have remained on earth till the Last Day, making history less bad than the poem describes it as being; and what they will choose can be foreknown by the Father only. The Son expects to find no frown upon the face of God on Judgement Day, the *Dies Irae* itself, so we can hardly doubt that he expects things to turn out better than they do. His prophecy appears to be a continuous narrative: “not long lie ... rise victorious ... then ... then”, as if he will lead the blessed to Heaven very soon after the Resurrection. Among human speakers ‘lastly die’ is a natural way to express pathos, though a tautology; but a meaning which would make it a correct description of the career of the Son is hard to invent. It may be possible to interpret the whole speech as a true forecast, and Milton may have planned to leave this alternative open; but it is a more natural reading to suppose the Son ignorant, and Milton denies him foreknowledge in *De Doctrina* Chap. V.

We must compare the speech to what Michael tells Adam at XII. 410, not long after hearing it. The angel has now been told of the Crucifixion, and explains that soon after it, while ascending to Heaven, Christ will surprise Satan in the air and drag him in chains, then resume his seat at God’s right hand till the Second Coming. This clears up part of the Son’s narrative; and if he is to remain on earth after the Second Coming for the Millennium, finally returning with his Saints, that explains ‘long absent’. Milton seems rather doubtful about this doctrine, as Michael says that Christ will receive the faithful into bliss ‘whether in Heaven or Earth’. *De Doctrina* Chapter XXXIII says that the glorious reign of Christ on earth will begin at the start of the Last Judgement and ‘extend a little beyond its conclusion’; then the chapter goes on to name the thousand years, then it gives a still grander

interpretation. Only the blessed will be revived for the Millennium (Revelation xx. 5), which might explain why the Son expects no frown when he leads them to Heaven after a thousand years. At any rate, if he expects to labour so long for mankind, we can hardly agree with M. Morand that he betrays lack of interest in them.

It often happens with a formative piece of criticism that one needs to consider why it seemed so true, after apparently refuting it. The mere repetition of *me* when offering oneself for sacrifice cannot be enough to prove self-centredness, even in the style of Milton, because Eve does it in a speech of splendid generosity. Surely the reason why Milton's treatment here seems cold, compared to a Good Friday service which is the natural comparison, is that no one throughout the long 'scene in Heaven' ever mentions that the Son is to die by torture. Even Michael does not describe the Cross to Adam as painful, only as 'shameful and accurst'. Death for a day and a half any of us might proffer, but we would find slow torture worth mentioning even given a doctor in attendance who guaranteed recovery after unconsciousness had finally supervened. I do not know whether there is a standard explanation for this lack in the poem, and do not remember to have seen it noticed. The reason for it, surely, is that Milton would not dirty his fingers with the bodily horror so prominent in the religion. We need not be surprised, because all his heroes fiercely refuse to let the prospect of pain so much as enter their minds while deciding what they ought to do; his devils are so superior to pain that we actually cannot remember they are all the time in bodily agony. This steady blaze of moral splendour must I am afraid be called unreal but at least makes the religion feel a good deal cleaner. The son regularly talks like a young medieval aristocrat eager to win his spurs, and like him is not expected to mention pain. No doubt the singing angels (III. 375) would mention the Crucifixion if they had been told of it, but it could mean little to them as they have never experienced pain; God has only just invented it, and only applied it to rebels. Clearly God has given at least Michael further information before he speaks to Adam. But there is no dignified enough procedure by which God could tell the angels that he has made a huge increase in his demand upon the Son after accepting the Son's offer. To cheat his own Son into death by torture would be too bad even for the God of M. Morand; it would be bad propaganda. Thus I think we should apply here too the principle of Mr Rajan, that the correct interpretation is always the sublimest one: Milton considered death by torture such a trivial sacrifice that he thought the Son must have offered a longer mission than the Father decided to require of him. Even if the Son does not know about the Crucifixion, he knows a good deal about the consequences of his offer; if we suppose the Father to have told him this beforehand we must still picture them, as M. Morand does, hammering out in private the scene of propaganda dialogue which they will present to the assembled angels. But their

background is impossible for us to envisage, and the Father may simply put into the mind of the Son as much foreknowledge as he chooses on the instant, so that the Son acts, as we would call it, spontaneously. The process might let the Son presume the happier alternative for mankind, out of a bold confidence in his power to convert them; but, even so, he must be above feeling wronged when he finds that the Crucifixion has been incurred. We need not after that join M. Morand in blaming him for hoping to deserve praise. Milton if he intended this high detail would have to regard it as visible only to very fit readers, such as could cross-question his text like M. Morand; the broad literary effect is rather one of tactfulness in keeping the Crucifixion out of sight. The motive of the Father in crucifying the Son is of course left in even deeper obscurity.

Milton did however I think mean to adumbrate a kind of motive by his picture of the Last Things. Professor C. S. Lewis once kindly came to a lecture I was giving on the half-finished material of this book; and at question time, after a sentence of charitable compunction, recognizing that the speaker wasn't responsible for this bit, he said "Does Phelps Morand think God is going to abdicate, then?" I tried to explain that M. Morand regarded this as the way Milton's dramatic imagination worked, after it had been corrupted by his patriotic labours, not as part of his theological system. The answer felt weak, and soon afterwards another difficulty drove me back to the book of M. Saurat, which I had probably not read since I was an undergraduate; I thus suddenly realized, what M. Saurat was not intending to prove, that Milton did expect God to abdicate. At least, that is the most direct way to express the idea; you may also say that he is an emergent or evolutionary deity, as has been believed at times by many other thinkers, for example Aeschylus and H.G. Wells.

There has been such a campaign to prove that only the coarsely worldly Victorians would even want the world to get better that I had better digress about that, or I may be thought to be laughing at Milton. We are often told that *In Memoriam* is bad because Tennyson tries to palm off progress in this world as a substitute for Heaven. But he says in the poem that he would stop being good, or would kill himself, if he stopped believing he would go to Heaven; it is wilful to argue that he treats the progress of the human race as an adequate alternative. Indeed, he seems rather too petulant about his demand for Heaven, considering that *Tithonus*, written about the same time (according to Stopford Brooke) though kept from publication till later, appreciates so nobly the hunger of mankind for the peace of oblivion. But the underlying logic of *In Memoriam* is firm. The signs that God is working out a vast plan of evolution are treated as evidence that he is good, and therefore that he will provide Heaven for Tennyson. To believe that God's Providence can be seen at work in the world, and that this is evidence for his existence and goodness, is what is called Natural Theology; it is very

traditional, and the inability of neo-Christians to understand it casts an odd light on their pretensions. Tennyson has also been accused of insincerity about progress because in another poem he expressed alarm at the prospect of war in the air; but he realized the time-scale very clearly; while maintaining that the process of the suns will eventually reach a good end, it is only sensible to warn mankind that we are likely to go through some bad periods beforehand. At present, as mankind looks almost certain to destroy itself quite soon, we cannot help wincing at a belief that progress is inevitable; but this qualification seems all that is needed. I think that reverence *ought* to be aroused by the thought that so long and large a process has recently produced ourselves who can describe it, and other-worldly persons who boast of not feeling that seem to me merely to have cauterized themselves against genuine religious feeling. The seventeenth century too would have thought that so much contempt for Providence verged upon the Manichean. Milton claimed to get his conception of progress from the Bible; but, he would have found corroboration, one would think, in the *Prometheus*, which was well known. There is only one reference to the myth in the epic, and it is twisted into a complaint against women (IV. 720); but Mr R. J. Z. Werblowsky, in his broad and philosophical *Lucifer and Prometheus* (1952), may well be right to think that Milton tried to avoid direct comparison between Prometheus and his Satan.\*

At the point which seemed to me illuminating, M. Saurat was calling Milton 'the old incorrigible dreamer' (p. 165, 1944 edition), apparently just for believing in the Millennium on earth, though that only requires literal acceptance of Revelation xx; but he was quoting part of Milton's commentary in Chapter XXXIII of the *De Doctrina*, "Of Perfect Glorification", and no doubt recognized that Milton was somehow going rather further. Milton says:

It may be asked, if Christ is to deliver up the kingdom to God and the Father, what becomes of the declarations [quotations from Heb. i. 8, Dan. vii. 14, and Luke i. 33] "of his kingdom there shall be no end". I reply, there shall be no end of his kingdom ... till time itself shall be no longer, Rev. x. 6, until everything which his kingdom was intended to effect shall be accomplished ... it will not be destroyed, nor will its period be a period of dissolution, but rather of perfection and consummation, like the end of the law, Matt. v. 18.

The last clause seems to recall the precedent of an earlier evolutionary step, whereby the New Dispensation of Jesus made the Mosaic Law unnecessary; it is clear that the final one, which makes even the Millennium unnecessary, must be of an extremely radical character. The Father, I submit, has to turn

into the God of the Cambridge Platonists and suchlike mystical characters; at present he is still the very disagreeable God of the Old Testament, but eventually he will dissolve into the landscape and become immanent only. The difficulty of fitting in this extremely grand climax was perhaps what made Milton uncertain about the controverted time-scheme of the Millennium. The doctrine of the end of time, if one takes it seriously, is already enough to make anything but Total Union (or else Total Separateness from God) hard to conceive.

The question which Milton answers here is at least one which he makes extremely prominent in the speech of rejoicing by the Father after the speech of sacrifice by the Son (III. 320). The Father first says he *will* give the Son all power, then in the present tense “I give thee”; yet he had given it already, or at least enough to cause Satan and his followers to revolt. Without so much as a full stop, the Father next says that the time when he will give it is the Day of Judgement, and the climax of the whole speech is to say that immediately after that “God shall be All in All”. The eternal gift of the Father is thus to be received only on the Last Day, and handed back the day after. This has not been found disturbing, because the paradox is so clear that we assume it to be deliberate; nor are interpretations of it hard to come by. But Milton would see it in the light of the passage in the *De Doctrina*; there “God shall be All in All” ends the Biblical quotation which comes just before Milton’s mystical “reply”:

Then cometh the end ... but when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted which did put all things under him; and when all things are subdued unto him, then shall the Son himself also be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. (I Corinthians xv. 24–28)

St Paul is grappling with earlier texts here in much the same scholarly way that Milton did, which would give Milton a certain confidence about re-interpreting his results even though they were inspired because Biblical. After hearing so much from M. Morand about the political corruption of Milton’s mind, one is pleased to find it less corrupt than St Paul’s; Milton decided that God was telling the truth, and that he would keep his promise literally. At the end of the speech of the Father, Milton turns into poetry the decision he had reached in prose:

*The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring  
New Heav’n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell ...  
Then thou thy regal Sceptre shalt lay by,  
For regal Sceptre then no more shall need,*

*God shall be All in All. But all ye Gods  
Adore him, who to compass all this dies,  
Adore the Son, and honour him as me.* (III. 340)

I grant that the language is obscure, as is fitting because it is oracular; and, besides, Milton wanted the poem to be universal, so did not want to thrust a special doctrine upon the reader. But the doctrine is implied decisively if the language is examined with care. St Paul presumably had in mind a literal autocracy, but Milton contrives to make the text imply pantheism. The O.E.D. records that the intransitive use of the verb *need* had become slightly archaic except for a few set phrases; the general intransitive use required here belongs to the previous century—e.g. “stopping of heads with lead shall not need now” 1545. But a reader who noticed the change of grammar from *shalt* to *shall* could only impute the old construction: “Authority will then no longer be needed”—not, therefore, from the Father, any more than from the Son. There is much more point in the last two lines quoted if the Father has just proposed, though in an even more remote sense than the Son, that he too shall die. *All* is rather a pet word in Milton’s poetry but I think he never gives it a capital letter anywhere else, and one would expect that by writing “All in All” he meant to imply a special doctrine, as we do by writing “the Absolute”. Then again, this is the only time God calls the angels Gods, with or without a capital letter. He does it here meaning that they will in effect become so after he has abdicated. The reference has justly been used as a partial defence of Satan for calling his rebels Gods, but we are meant to understand that his claim for them is a subtle misuse of the deeper truth adumbrated here. Taking all the details together, I think it is clear that Milton wanted to suggest a high mystery at this culminating point.\*

There was a more urgent and practical angle to the question; it was not only one of the status of the Son, but of mankind. You cannot think it merely whimsical of M. Morand to call God dynastic if you look up the words *heir* and *inherit* in the concordance usually given at the end of a Bible. Milton was of course merely quoting the text when he made the Father call the Son his heir (as in VI. 705); but the blessed among mankind are also regularly called ‘heirs of God’s kingdom’ and suchlike. The word *heir* specifically means one who will inherit; it would be comical to talk as if M. Morand was the first to wonder what the Bible might mean by it. The blessed among mankind are heirs of God through their union with Christ; Milton’s Chapter XXIV is ‘Of Union and Fellowship with Christ and the Saints, wherein is considered the Mystical or Invisible Church’, and he says it is ‘not confined to place or time, inasmuch as it is composed of individuals of widely separated countries, and of all ages from the foundation of the world’. He would regard this as a blow at all priesthoods, but also regard the invisible union as a prefiguring of the

far distant real one. We can now see that it is already offered in the otherwise harsh words by which the Father appointed the Son:

*Under his great Vice-regent reign abide  
United as one individual Soul  
For ever happy* (V. 610)

As a means of achieving such unity the speech is a remarkable failure; but God already knew that men would be needed as well as angels before the alchemy could be done. When the unity is complete, neither the loyal angels nor the blessed among mankind will require even the vice-regency of the Son, still less the rule of the Father; and only so can they become 'heirs and inheritors of God's Kingdom'.

The texts prove, I submit, that Milton envisaged the idea, as indeed so informed a man could hardly help doing; but the poetry must decide whether it meant a great deal to him, and the bits so far quoted are not very good. Milton however also ascribes it to God in the one really splendid passage allotted to him. This is merely an earlier part of the same speech, but the sequence III. 80–345 is full of startling changes of tone. The end of the speech happens to let us see Milton's mind at work, because we can relate it to the *De Doctrina*, but the main feeling there is just immense pride; Milton could never let the Father appear soft, and, his deepest yielding must be almost hidden by a blaze of glory. Just before advancing upon thirty lines of glory, he has rejoiced that his Son:

*though thron'd in highest bliss,  
Equal to God, and equally enjoying  
God-like fruition, quitted all to save  
A world from utter loss, and hast been found  
By Merit more than Birthright Son of God,  
Found worthiest to be so by being Good,  
Far more than Great or High; because in thee  
Love hath abounded more than Glory abounds,  
Therefore thy Humiliation shall exalt  
With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne;  
Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign  
Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man,  
Anointed universal King; all Power  
I give thee, reign for ever, and assume  
Thy Merits; under thee as Head Supreme  
Thrones, Princedoms, Powers, Dominions I reduce:* (III. 305)

It is a tremendous moral cleansing for Milton's God, after the greed for



power which can be felt in him everywhere else, to say that he will give his throne to Incarnate Man, and the rhythm around the word *humiliation* is like taking off in an aeroplane. I had long felt that this is much the best moment of God in the poem, morally as well as poetically, without having any idea why it came there. It comes there because he is envisaging his abdication, and the democratic appeal of the prophecy of God is what makes the whole picture of him just tolerable.

I may be told that I am simply misreading; the Father is not giving Man his own throne, but the Son's, and Milton has made this clear just previously by recalling that the Son too is throned; indeed I think this is the only place in the poem where he is said to be 'throned' at the right hand of God. (When the Father tells the Son to rise and drive out the rebels, Milton mysteriously says that he addresses 'The Assessor of his Throne' VI. 680; but I can deduce nothing from that.) But the grandeur of the position of the Son needed emphasizing here in any case, and Milton is inclined to 'plant' a word in this way soon before it is used especially sublimely. The effect of repeating the word *throne* is not so obtrusive as to exclude the more tremendous meaning. Besides, the Father could not say that the Son will be exalted as a reward to the throne which the Son already occupies; and the sequence is "this throne ... here ... here ... Head Supreme", very empty rhetoric if it does not refer to the supreme throne. I grant that the meaning is not obvious unless one realizes how much support it is given later in the speech.

Wondering where to stop my quotation, I was struck by how immediately the passage turns from generosity to pride of power. The distinction is perhaps an unreal one; all the lines are *about* pride. God is generous to give his throne, but Milton exults in the dignity given to Man. The last line of my quotation, except that it omits the Virtues for convenience, gives the same roll-call of the titles of the angels as Satan does in his rabble-raising speech; no doubt this was the standard form in Heaven, but the effect is to make the reader compare the two offers. One must agree with M. Morand that it is all weirdly political; temporary acceptance of lower-class status is what the Son is being praised for, a severe thing in his mind, just as it is beneath Satan's class to become incarnate as a snake. As to torture, that might come your way in any class, and would only be a minor thing to boast about afterwards. But one dare not call this mode of thought contemptible, if it elevates, or makes proud enough to act well, all classes of the society in which it operates.

I can claim that this account gives the thought of the epic a much needed consistency. Thus it may be objected that Milton's own temperament, because of the pride so evident in his style, would be quite unattracted by an ideal of total union. But certainly; he presents it as very unattractive even to the good angels. Abdiel can only translate it into terms exasperating for Satan; and the blushing of Raphael now acquires

considerable point, which after all one would expect so bizarre a detail to have. Though capable of re-uniting themselves with God the angels do not want to, especially because this capacity lets them enjoy occasional acts of love among themselves. It is fundamental to Milton's system that angels, like all the rest of the universe, are parts of God from which God willingly removed his will; these highest forms of life, he finds it natural to suppose, have an approximation to the divine power among themselves, so that they can love by total interpenetration. Presumably God can gobble them up as soon as look at them, which would make him an alarming employer, and perhaps they are relieved that he never expresses any affection for them—though even interpenetration with God would not actually mean death; the Son, like Satan, doubts whether any life can be totally destroyed, III. 165; so does Milton, *De Doctrina* Chapter VII. Thus they put up a timidly evasive but none the less stubborn resistance to dissolving themselves into God, like a peasantry under Communism trying to delay collectivization; and here too the state has the high claim that it has promised eventually to wither away. God must abdicate, in the sense of becoming totally immanent or invisible, before the plan of Total Union can seem tolerable to them; and it is bitter for them that this transcendence cannot be achieved without stirring into the brew the blessed among mankind. Exactly why the angels are so inadequate that God's programme is necessary remains obscure; Milton quotes in *De Doctrina* Chapter VII from Job iv. 18 "he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly", which perhaps he felt to give authority to his picture. But it is intelligible that a stern period of training may be required before transcendence, and at any rate the story is a great boast for ourselves; we are not inclined to blame God for deciding that he needed us before he could abdicate conscientiously.

Thus, by combining the views of M. Saurat and M. Morand, the one attributing to Milton thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls and the other a harsh worldliness, we can I think partly solve the central problem about the poem, which is how Milton can have thought it to justify God. I think the 'internal' evidence of Milton's own writing enough to decide that he meant what I have tried to describe, because it makes our impression of the poem and indeed of the author much more satisfactory; but, even so, external evidence is needed to answer the objection that Milton could not have meant that, or could not have thought of it. I had best begin by saying what I learned from M. Saurat and where I thought his view inadequate. His chief interest, as I understand, was to show that the European Renaissance could not have occurred without an underground influence from Jewish mystics beginning two or three centuries before Milton; the main reason for supposing that Milton had read the *Zohar*, even after textual evidence had been found, was that he was a man who habitually went to the sources of the ideas which he had already found floating about. The doctrine that matter

was not created from nothing but was part of God M. Saurat considered fundamental to the Renaissance, because it allowed enough trust in the flesh, the sciences, the arts, the future before man in this world. Milton undoubtedly does express this doctrine, but it does not strike me as prominent in other poets of the time, except for the paradoxes of Donne's love-poetry. However, I want to answer a rebuttal of the Saurat position which I happened to come across in an informative and strictly philological work by G. N. Conklin, *Biblical Criticism and Heresy in Milton*, 1949. He says that Milton could not have been influenced by the *Zohar*, or by the mystics around him in the Commonwealth such as Fludd either, because he was "a Puritan, a logician, and, whatever else, assuredly no theosophist", and furthermore that it is mere justice to admit that Milton extracted his beliefs from the ancient texts of Holy Writ by scientific philological techniques, as he steadily claimed to do. Thus his crucial decision that matter was not created from nothing turned simply on an analysis of the Biblical words for *create*, chiefly but not only in Hebrew. Admittedly, this is what Milton claims in Chapter VII of *De Doctrina*, but he was accustomed to defend a position rhetorically, so as to convince other people, after arriving at it himself by a conscientious assessment of the evidence. The philological argument here is only, and could only be, that previous uses of the word had not meant this unique concept before the attempt at expressing it was allegedly made; thus the word in the Bible does not have to mean what theologians say, and is never redefined by the Bible in a phrase or sentence as meaning that. Milton goes on to give other reasons for his conclusion that 'create' in the Bible does not mean 'from nothing', and by doing so he has in effect enough sense to admit that his negative argument does not make a positive one. These problems about sources are often very subtle, because a powerful mind grabs at a hint of what it needs; admittedly, the *Zohar* was not the only possible source of these large mystical ideas; and one could explain the verbal correspondences found by M. Saurat by supposing that Milton got some other learned man to answer his questions about the *Zohar*, and read some crucial bits out to him, after he had become blind.

All the same, such ideas undoubtedly were floating about. The trouble with M. Saurat's position, I think, is that he welcomes the liquefaction of God the Father, making him wholly immanent in his creation, and argues that Milton intended that in his epic, without realizing that Milton and his learned contemporaries would think the liquefaction of all the rest of us a prior condition. The idea of the re-absorption of the soul into the Absolute does get hinted at a good deal in the literature, if only in the form of complete self-abandonment to God; whereas the idea that God himself is wholly immanent in his creation belonged mainly to the high specialized output of the Cambridge Platonists. Marlowe's Faustus, in his final speech, desires to return his soul like a rain-drop to the sea rather than remain

eternally as an individual in Hell, and this is a crucial image for grasping the Far-Eastern position; the same idea is quite noisy in the supposedly orthodox peroration of *Urn-Burial*: “if any have been so happy as truly to understand Christian annihilation ... liquefaction ... ingression into the divine shadow”. When Lovewit at the end of *The Alchemist* rebuffs a superstitious fool by saying “Away, you Harry Nicholas” (the founder of the mystical Family of Love which maintained that any man can become Christ), the now remote figure is presumed to be familiar to a popular audience. The ideas which Milton hinted at in the bits of his epic which I have picked out were therefore not nearly so learned and unusual as they seem now; indeed, he probably treated them with caution because they might suggest a more Levelling, more economic-revolutionary, political stand than he in fact took. But the Cambridge Platonists were not dangerous for property-owners in this way; they were a strand of recent advanced thought which deserved recognition in his epic; also they allowed of a welcome contrast to the picture of God which the Bible forced him to present, and gave a bit more body to the mysterious climax of the Fortunate Fall. The abdication of the Father was thus quite an important part of his delicately balanced structure, and not at all a secret heresy; and of course not ‘unconscious’ if it needed tact. At bottom, indeed, a quaintly political mind is what we find engaged on the enormous synthesis. Milton knows by experience that God is at present the grindingly harsh figure described in the Old Testament; after all, Milton had long been printing the conviction that his political side had been proved right because God had made it win, so its eventual defeat was a difficult thing to justify God for. But it was essential to retain the faith that God has a good eventual plan; well then, the Cambridge Platonists can be allowed to be right about God, but only as he will become in the remote future. It seems to me one of the likeable sides of Milton that he would regard this as a practical and statesmanlike proposal.

M. Saurat, on the other hand, wanted Milton to use the *Zohar* to drive the last remnants of Manichaeism out of Christianity, and therefore argued that God in the epic is already an ineffable Absolute or World-Soul dissolved into the formative matter of the universe. After a timid peep into one volume of a translation of the *Zohar*, I am sure that Milton would not find it as opposite from the Gnostics as black from white, which is what the eloquence and selection of M. Saurat lead us to suppose. Milton would regard it as further evidence that the Fathers had slandered the Gnostics, as he had been sure when he was young, just as Rome had behaved very wickedly to the Cathars; all these heretics probably had something to be said for them, though of course one must expect most of their stuff to be dead wood. And the Gnostics are reported as believing, no less than the Cabbalists of the *Zohar*, in an eventual reunion of the many with the One. The Saurat interpretation of the epic makes nonsense of most of its narrative, but that is

better than giving it an evil sense; the point where one ought to revolt comes when the interpretation drives poor M. Saurat into uneasy brief expressions of bad feeling. He praises God's jokes (p. 192, 1944 edition) because the only relation of the Absolute to its creation which a poet can present is 'irony', and here the protean word has to mean mean-minded jeering. M. Saurat deserves to be released from this position; the idea of God as the Absolute is genuinely present in the poem, but only when God is adumbrating the Last Things.

The well-argued view of M. Morand, that the purblind Milton described God from his experience of Cromwell, also allows of an unexpectedly sublime conclusion. Milton's own political record, as I understand, cannot be found contemptible; he backed Cromwell and his Independents in the army against the Presbyterians in Parliament because he wanted religious freedom, but always remained capable of saying where he thought Cromwell had gone wrong; for example, in refusing to disestablish the Church. However, on one point Cromwell was impeccable, and appears to be unique among dictators; his admitted and genuine bother, for a number of years, was to find some way of establishing a Parliament under which he could feel himself justified in stopping being dictator. When Milton made God the Father plan for his eventual abdication, he ascribed to him in the high tradition of Plutarch the noblest sentiment that could be found in an absolute ruler; and could reflect with pride that he had himself seen it in operation, though with a tragic end. Milton's God is thus to be regarded as like King Lear and Prospero, turbulent and masterful characters who are struggling to become able to renounce their power and enter peace; the story makes him behave much worse than they do, but the author allows him the same purifying aspiration. Even the lie of God "Die he or Justice must", we may now charitably reflect, is partly covered when Milton says that Satan

*with necessity*

*The Tyrant's plea, excused his devilish deeds.* (IV. 395)

It must be added at once that we cannot find enough necessity; the poem, to be completely four-square, ought to explain why God had to procure all these falls for his eventual high purpose. Such is the basic question as it stood long before Milton handled it; but he puts the mystery in a place evidently beyond human knowledge, and he makes tolerably decent, though salty and rough, what is within our reach.

This I think answers the fundamental objection of Yvor Winters, with which it seemed right to begin the chapter; Milton's poetical formula for God is not simply to copy Zeus in Homer but, much more dramatically, to cut out everything between the two ends of the large body of Western thought about God, and stick to Moses except at the high points which anticipate Spinoza. The procedure is bound to make God interesting; take

the case of his announcing to the loyal angels that he will create mankind to spite the devil. God must be supposed to intend his words to suggest to the angels what they do to us, but any angel instructed in theology will realize that God has intended throughout all eternity to spite Satan, so that when he presents this plan as new he is telling a lie, which he has also intended to tell throughout all eternity. No wonder it will be ‘far happier days’ after he has abdicated (XII. 465). Milton was well able to understand these contradictions, and naturally he would want to leave room for an eventual solution of them.

Perhaps I find him like Kafka merely because both seem to have had a kind of foreknowledge of the Totalitarian State, whether or not this was what C. S. Lewis praised as his beautiful sense of the idea of social order. The picture of God in the poem, including perhaps even the high moments when he speaks of the end, is astonishingly like Uncle Joe Stalin; the same patience under an appearance of roughness, the same flashes of joviality, the same thorough unscrupulousness, the same real bad temper. It seems little use to puzzle ourselves whether Milton realized he was producing this effect, because it would follow in any case from what he had set himself to do.

#### NOTES

p. 94. A reviewer objected that the rebel angels fell solely because they had a duty of obedience towards Satan, so that I had no ground for imagining them to feel a grudge against God. To realize the basic unscrupulousness of a worshipper of the Father, the sordidness of what he calls his morality, always comes as a shock. Raphael does at times try to tell the story like that, as my critic showed; but it would make God too unjust even for Milton. When God views the angels on parade and estimates how many have fallen (my p. 174) he cannot merely note the total absence of the Northern Command.

p. 121. See Appendix.

p. 132.

*I pitied mortal men, but being myself not thought*

*To merit pity, am thus cruelly visited—*

*A sight to fix dishonour on the name of Zeus.*

(*Prometheus Bound*, I, 240; trans. P. Vellacott)

“Whom I could pity thus forlorn / Though I unpitied” (IV. 375) is certainly an echo of this, because it echoes the whole situation as well as the words. My own mind often produces irrelevant echoes, so I am not sure that Milton meant a great deal by this one; but it helps to show that the speech was not merely a hurried attempt to make Satan adequately villainous.

p. 135. Milton would have been indignant if told that he believed God would abdicate. It had occurred to him that, after perfection was attained, God would never

issue another order; this would be a great relief, but in a philosophical sense God would be in power as never before. The text from I Corinthians is quoted again in *D.D.* chapters 5 and 15 and *P.L.* vi. 730; we may be sure that it had interested Milton, as indeed it had all the Radical Reformers. I am still sure I was right about the direction which Milton's thought was following, but I grant that in this case my phrasing is likely to be unhelpfully remote from what the author would have said himself, in his last years, if he had spoken out. But I have found no better way to phrase it; and maybe what he said would have been surprising.

THOMAS GREENE

*Milton*

I.

Most of the important epic poetry of the sixteenth century was written by Humanist authors working at a court or, like Spenser, under the long shadow of a court. Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso wrote for the dukes of Ferrara as Pulci had written for Lorenzo de' Medici. Ronsard, the very model of a court poet, received not only the encouragement of Charles IX and the benefice to afford him leisure, but found himself obliged to follow the royal preference for a decasyllabic line. D'Aubigné spent several years at the court of Henri III and remained the confidant of Henri IV until the latter's conversion. Even Sannazaro and Vida wrote with the patronage of the papal court. Camoens, to be sure, wrote much of *Os Lusíadas* in the Orient, but part of his youth was spent at court, and he received a small royal pension after his epic was published. In all these sixteenth century courts, with the possible exception of the papal, a balance of sorts was maintained between soldiering and learning, the camp and the library, a balance which naturally led the Humanist poet to subjects involving warfare. The ancient duality of *sapientia* and *fortitudo* was perpetuated, as Curtius has shown,<sup>1</sup> by the Renaissance coupling of "arms and studies." The courtly interest in epic action was thus not simply antiquarian. The immediate audience of the epic pursued an equilibrium of valor and refinement not utterly unlike the equilibrium

---

From *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity*. © 1963 by Yale University.



reflected in the *Odyssey*. The finest Christian epics of the sixteenth century—those of Tasso, Spenser, and d'Aubigné—mostly eschewed Biblical subjects in preference for those of interest to an educated professional soldier.

In seventeenth century France the military caste tended to detach itself from the court, although the separation never became complete. As early a poem as Marino's *Adone*, written at the court of Louis XIII, signaled the taste for subjects which had nothing to do with violence. But Marino's mythographical eroticism was not influential. Epic poetry in the succeeding decades was divided, as we have seen, between tired perpetuations of the quasi-military epic (Scudéry's *Alaric*, Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin's *Clovis*, etc.)—poems which really betray the growing gap between courtier-poet and soldier—and on the other hand, bourgeois Biblical epics in the tradition of Sannazaro, Vida, and Du Bartas. The Pléiade had experimented with Biblical poetry—as in Du Bellay's *Monomachie de David et de Goliath*, but had only shown *spasmodic* interest in it. Now, with the growth of a middle class reading public, a bastard form of Biblical epic enjoyed a wide popularity.<sup>2</sup>

The socio-literary development of England was very different. There a Humanist literary movement comparable to the continental explosion gathered force only after the court ceased to be a literary center. This fact is of great importance. The first thoroughgoing neoclassical epic in England—Cowley's *Davideis*—was not published before 1656, although it was probably written a decade or more earlier. In 1656, continental epic poetry was expiring, and there existed in England no audience devoted to “arms and letters,” no audience as variously accomplished as the court for which Spenser wrote. This meant that the nature of heroism represented in the English epic was obliged to change, to idealize the efforts of will comprehensible to a devout bourgeois public. In 1656, moreover, the wind of prosaic rationalism was beginning to blow strong, that wind which was soon to wither epic poetry. Gusts of it flutter the pages of Cowley's poem, and its steady draft altogether blights the decorous quatrains of Davenant's *Gondibert*. Given this milieu, great epic poetry in seventeenth century England was an historical anomaly. *Paradise Lost* is only less anomalous than the Arthurian epic Milton planned to write. That poem would have had no *raison d'être*, no fit audience at all. *Paradise Lost* still had the dwindling core of an audience, but only the massive, proud, and isolated independence of a Milton could have brought even this poem into being.<sup>3</sup>

In sixteenth century England a movement had arisen which opposed the imitation of classical modes in all genres, and which substituted in each case sacred subjects and modes. Rather than attempt the *mélange coupable* of classical and Christian, this program enforced a strict segregation which, in epic poetry, broke down completely only with Cowley and Milton.<sup>4</sup> It is not remarkable that the pious and pedestrian Quarles betrays so little classical influence in his Biblical narratives (*Job Militant*, *The Historie of Samson*), but

it is perhaps a little odd that a poet like Drayton (in his *Moses, David and Golia, Noah's Flood*) should not betray a great deal more. Giles Fletcher's underestimated *Christ's Victorie and Triumph* (1610), a poem somewhat more allegorical than Biblical, contains a celestial descent of sorts, in the passage of Mercie into Christ's breast (*Christ's Victorie on Earth*, 1–16), but for an extended conventional descent to represent the English epic before Cowley one would have to search out a forgotten poem by Thomas Robinson, *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* (1569).<sup>5</sup> In any case, the important landmark, historically if not artistically, is Cowley's *Davideis*.

The angelic descent in that poem is memorable chiefly because of the criticism by which Dr. Johnson singled it out. It appears oddly at the very end of a book—the second of the twelve Cowley planned and of the four he completed. David, while still a young man and before taking the throne, has been vouchsafed a prophetic dream by heaven, a dream which summarizes Jewish history from his own lifetime to the advent of Christ. The account of this dream, which occupies over three hundred lines, is tedious. But if the reader concludes it with pleasure, David awakes with doubt about its import, and Gabriel must descend to explain and reassure:

When Gabriel (no blest Spirit more kind or fair)  
 Bodies and cloathes himself with thickned ayr.  
 All like a comely youth in lifes fresh bloom;  
 Rare workmanship, and wrought by heavenly loom!       795  
 He took for skin a cloud most soft and bright,  
 That e're the midday Sun pierc'ed through with light:  
 Upon his cheeks a lively blush he spred;  
 Washt from the morning beauties deepest red.  
 An harmless flaming Meteor shone for haire,       800  
 And fell adown his shoulders with loose care.  
 He cuts out a silk Mantle from the skies,  
 Where the most sprightly azure pleas'd the eyes.  
 This he with starry vapours spangles all,  
 Took in their prime e're they grow ripe and fall.       805  
 Of a new Rainbow e're it fret or fade,  
 The choicest piece took out, a Scarf is made.  
 Small streaming clouds he does for wings display,  
 Not Vertuous Lovers sighes more soft then They.  
 These he gilds o're with the Suns richest rays,       810  
 Caught gliding o're pure streams on which he plays.  
 Thus drest the joyful Gabriel posts away,  
 And carries with him his own glorious day  
 Through the thick woods; the gloomy shades a while  
 Put on fresh looks, and wonder why they smile.       815

The trembling Serpents close and silent ly,  
 The birds obscene far from his passage fly.  
 A sudden spring waits on him as he goes,  
 Sudden as that by which Creation rose.  
 Thus he appears to David, at first sight 820  
 All earth-bred fears and sorrows take their flight.  
 In rushes joy divine, and hope, and rest;  
 A Sacred calm shines through his peaceful brest.  
 Hail, Man below'd! from highest heav'en(said he)  
 My mighty Master sends thee health by me. 825  
 The things thou saw'est are full of truth and light,  
 Shap'd in the glass of the divine Foresight.  
 Ev'n now old Time is harnessing the years  
 To go in order thus; hence empty fears;  
 Thy Fate's all white; from thy blest seed shall spring 830  
 The promis'd Shilo, the great Mystick King.  
 Round the whole earth his dreaded name shall sound,  
 And reach to Worlds, that must not yet be found.  
 The Southern Clime him her sole Lord shall stile,  
 Him all the North, ev'en Albions stubborn Isle. 835  
 My Fellow-Servant, credit what I tell.  
 Straight into shapeless air unseen he fell.<sup>6</sup>

I fear that nothing can be said for the flatness of Cowley's unheroic couplets; his use of them is reminiscent of the uninspired Joshua Sylvester, from whom he may well have taken his lead. One must equally regret the bland coyness of his manner:

Of a new Rainbow e're it fret or fade ...

the pleasantness substituted for energy:

Where the most sprightly Azure pleas'd the eyes ...

the empty neoclassical generality of the vocabulary:

All like a comely Youth in lifes fresh Bloom ...

the gloomy shades a while  
 Put on fresh looks ...

when, as in the use of *obscene* (817) to mean ill-omened, his vocabulary is not pedantically mannered. But it is graceless to belabor a dead author for the

immature failures of his youth, and I shall not dwell long upon those of Cowley's shortcomings which were peculiar to himself alone. Dr. Johnson's strictures on lines 796–807 can scarcely be improved upon:

This is a just specimen of Cowley's imagery: what might, in general expressions, be great and forcible, he weakens and makes ridiculous by branching it into small parts. That Gabriel was invested with the softest or brightest colours of the sky, we might have been told, and been dismissed to improve the idea in our different proportions of conception; but Cowley could not let us go, till he had related where Gabriel got first his skin, and then his mantle, then his lace, and then his scarf, and related it in the terms of the mercer and tailor.<sup>7</sup>

Cowley could not remember that epic poetry requires the subordination of part to whole; he constantly diverts the reader from his poem's main business by ornaments (like the fading rainbow or the lovers' sighs) for which, were they more truly witty, a lyric might find organic place, but which only clog heroic action.

This shortcoming is related to Cowley's lack of structural intelligence. For it is difficult finally to ascertain the "main business" of the poem at all, so divided is it into unlike episodes. In its unfinished form the plot has no shape or outline, and one wonders whether the completed poem would have acquired them. The poet explains in his preface that he intended to write the life of David only up to his elegy upon Saul and Jonathan, but it is evident from the text that he wanted to incorporate into his account most of Old Testament history. In this disastrous intent he was probably misled not so much by the older English history poems—Daniel's *Civil Wars* and Drayton's *Barons' Wars*—as by Vida and above all by Du Bartas' *Judit*,<sup>8</sup> a poem of undistinguished literary merit but great historical influence. Cowley's vast design was further weakened by his lack of dramatic sense, a shortcoming which led him to introduce this anticlimactic and superfluous descent of Gabriel with extended description. The account of the angel's preparations and the miraculous "sudden Spring" which attends him (inspired perhaps by Sylvester's *Fracostoro*<sup>9</sup>) would have befitted an event of high moment, but the effect of this descent is dissipated in its pointlessness.

Apart from Cowley's personal failings, the *Davideis* betrays other shortcomings—or as it seems to me, confusions—which are almost endemic to the Christian epic and with which Milton would also have to come to terms. The first of these involves the question of truthfulness. In the preface to his *Poems* (which included the epic), Cowley dwelt enthusiastically upon the Scriptures' unmined riches for poetry, and indignantly upon mythology's meretricious falsity:

When I consider this, and how many other bright and magnificent subjects of the like nature, the Holy Scripture affords and proffers, as it were, to Poesie, in the wise managing and illustrating whereof, the Glory of God Almighty might be joynd with the singular utility and noblest delight of Mankind; It is not without grief and indignation that I behold that Divine Science employing all her inexhaustible riches of Wit and Eloquence, either in the wicked and beggerly Flattery of great persons, or the unmanly Idolizing of Foolish Women ... or at best on the confused antiquated Dreams of senseless Fables and Metamorphoses.

There is not so great a Lye to be found in any Poet, as the vulgar conceit of men, that Lying is Essential to good Poetry.<sup>10</sup>

In the invocation to the *Dauidis* he underscores his poem's veracity as its highest originality:

But Thou, Eternal Word, hast call'd forth Me  
Th'Apostle, to convert that World to Thee;  
T'unbind the charms that in slight Fables lie,  
And teach that Truth is truest Poesie.

[I.39-42]

But in practice Cowley departs from the truth, or from his own beliefs regarding the truth, and records the departures in his exhaustive notes. Thus he follows a debate on the location of the Queen of Sheba's realm with the tell-tale confession: "In fine, whatever the truth be, this opinion makes a better Sound in Poetry."<sup>11</sup> And on the question of the harmony of the spheres he writes

In this, and some like places, I would not have the Reader judge of my opinion by what I say; no more than before in diverse expressions about Hell, the Devil, and Envy. It is enough that the Doctrine of the Orbs, and the Musick made by their motion had been received very anciently.<sup>12</sup>

The issue of epic truthfulness which troubled Cowley can be related to issues which had been subject to international critical controversy for decades when he penned these various opinions. Critics were not agreed as to whether the heroic action should be based on actual history, or how closely it should follow history, or with how much of the marvelous it might be colored. Despite continuing debate, the cause of historical fidelity was markedly gaining ground on the continent by the mid-seventeenth century, at the expense of the imagination. During Cowley's years in France with the

exiled Royalist party there appeared Scudéry's *Alaric* (1654) with its influential preface advocating a non-Biblical subject drawn from true Christian history. Four years earlier, the exchange between Davenant and Hobbes prefacing *Gondibert* laid stress on realism at the expense of machinery, fables, and fantasy.<sup>13</sup> The greater zeal for truth in Cowley's preface, as compared with his poem and notes (probably composed earlier), may reflect his tendency to change with his age. In the poem itself he is far from proscribing "machinery," but his treatment of it is so cool, so detached, so manifestly lacking in awe, that it already represents a step toward realism.

There are ulterior difficulties. The preface patronizes the poems of Quarles and Heywood,<sup>14</sup> as misguided efforts to write sacred poetry, but the imputed reasons for their failures are not altogether clear. Cowley has been speaking of the books of the Bible:

Yet, though they be in themselves so proper to be made use of for this purpose; None but a good Artist will know how to do it: neither must we think to cut and polish Diamonds with so little pains and skill as we do Marble. For if any man design to compose a Sacred Poem, by only turning a story of the Scripture, like Mr. Quarles's, or some other godly matter, like Mr. Heywood of Angels, into Rhyme; He is so far from elevating of Poesie, that he only abases Divinity. In brief, he who can write a prophane Poem well, may write a Divine one better; but he who can do that but ill, will do this much worse.<sup>15</sup>

Quarles is guilty of having turned Scriptural stories into rhyme with too bald a simplicity. What should he have done? Evidently he should have mastered first the skills of his *métier*, the skills one can learn from profane poetry. Among other things, presumably Quarles should have imitated the classics. Cowley himself imitated them on every page and employed all the epic conventions; his notes are stuffed with allusions to Virgil and other antique poets, allusions intended to justify his own poetic procedures. But in the same preface he refers to "those mad Stories of the Gods and Heroes" which "seem in themselves so ridiculous," and numbers himself as one of those "who deride their Folly, and are weary'd with their Impertinences."<sup>16</sup> Thus Cowley's whole relation to antique poetry constitutes a second crucial and symptomatic confusion. He refers in his poem to a revolt of giants against Baal and is obliged to annotate this mysterious mythology by appeal to comparative mythology:

For Baal is no other than Jupiter. *Baalsemen Jupiter Olympius*. But I like not in an Hebrew Story to use the European Names of Gods.<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere the poem alludes to Fates and the note must turn about in the contrary direction:

The Fates; that is, according to the Christian Poetical manner of speaking, the Angels, to whom the Government of this world is committed.<sup>18</sup>

If the notes to Gabriel's descent contain a reference to Revelation and to Aquinas, they contain as well three references to Virgil, two to Homer, others to Ovid, Servius, Pliny, Strabo, to "the Rabbies," and to certain unnamed "magical Books." To the Christian poem which may well have contributed to the descent (Sylvester's *Fracastoro*), there is no reference at all. How Christian should a Christian epic be? Quarles must have seemed an amateur indeed.

The third of Cowley's confusions we have already encountered in Marino and Hojeda;<sup>19</sup> perhaps it can be found less strikingly in Tasso as well. This is the confusion exemplified by these lines of Gabriel:

The things thou saw'est are full of truth and light ...  
Ev'n now old Time is harnessing the years  
To go in order thus; hence empty fears ...

The problem lies in the dream of which Gabriel is speaking; truthful it may have been, but scarcely orderly and scarcely filled with light, scarcely calculated to banish all fears. However the poet lays emphasis on the virtuous successors of David, however he rejoices in conclusion at Mary's conception of Jesus, he cannot conceal the patternless violence and suffering of the history he chooses to retail. He wanted to assert a pattern, and assert light and victory and joy, because he thought they were demanded by the genre and exemplified by the *Aeneid*. But he failed to make comprehensible poetically the "Sacred Calm" he meant to inspire. I fear that he inspires rather secular indifference. Perhaps we may thank the *Davideis* most cordially for having fulfilled its author's valedictory hope:

Sure I am, that there is nothing yet in our Language (nor perhaps in any) that is in any degree answerable to the Idea that I conceive of it. And I shall be ambitious of no other fruit from this weak and imperfect attempt of mine, but the opening of a way to the courage and industry of some other persons, who may be better able to perform it throughly and successfully.<sup>20</sup>

The report has survived that Cowley, with Shakespeare and Spenser, were Milton's favorites among the English poets.<sup>21</sup>

## II.

The convention of the celestial messenger is here concluded with the majestic descent of Raphael to Adam in Book Five of *Paradise Lost*. There is a propriety in this, since Milton concludes so very much more; the clangor of his high style sounds the closing of an immense door within the temple of history. His poem is the more moving because it seems almost to glimpse at instants its own momentous finality.

Milton's earlier poems contain fragmentary rehearsals of Raphael's descent: in the Attendant Spirit's soliloquy that opens *Comus*:—

Swift as the Sparkle of a glancing Star,  
I shoot from Heav'n to give him safe convoy ...

[80–81]<sup>22</sup>

in the flight of Fama concluding the *Quintum Novembris*,<sup>23</sup> and in the charming stanza of the *Nativity Ode* which pictures Peace descending to comfort Nature:

But he her fears to cease,  
Sent down the meek-eyed Peace,  
    She crown'd with Olive green, came softly sliding  
Down through the turning sphear  
His ready Harbinger,  
    With Turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,  
And waving wide her mirtle wand,  
She strikes a universall Peace through Sea and Land.

[45-52]

The outlines for projected tragedies in the Cambridge manuscript also contain at least two scenes involving the descent of an angel,<sup>24</sup> reflecting perhaps the influence of the Italian *sacre rappresentazioni* which commonly contained angelic epiphanies.<sup>25</sup> Milton alludes to the descent convention moreover in Book Three of *Paradise Lost*; when Satan feigns therein an appearance to deceive Uriel, he makes himself up to resemble the messenger we have encountered so frequently:

And now a stripling Cherube he appeers,  
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face  
Youth smil'd Celestial, and to every Limb  
Sutable grace diffus'd, so well he feignd;  
Under a Coronet his flowing haire  
In curls on either cheek plaid, wings he wore



Of many a colourd plume sprinkl'd with Gold,  
 His habit fit for speed succinct, and held  
 Before his decent steps a Silver wand.

[III.636–44]

Milton's own messenger is to be less carefully described, but will possess a maturity and presence beyond the reach of the conventional, Tasso-esque "stripling." Is there a faint touch of scornful pride in the bedecking of Satan in these worn lineaments of literary tradition?

Satan's pretty disguise misleads Uriel only for an hour; he is driven from paradise, and on the morrow Eve is quickly restored from the painful dream he has authored. Adam and Eve proceed to pray and to work, and so engaged attract the eye of God:

Them thus imploid beheld  
 With pittie Heav'ns high King, and to him calld 220  
*Raphael*, the sociable Spirit, that deign'd  
 To travel with *Tobias*, and secur'd  
 His marriage with the seav'ntimes-wedded Maid.  
*Raphael*, said hee, thou hear'st what stirr on Earth  
*Satan* from Hell scap't through the darksom Gulf  
 Hath raisd in Paradise, and how disturbd  
 This night the human pair, how he designs  
 In them at once to ruin all mankind.  
 Go therefore, half this day as friend with friend  
 Converse with *Adam*, in what Bowre or shade 230  
 Thou find'st him from the heat of Noon retir'd,  
 To respite his day-labour with repast,  
 Or with repose; and such discourse bring on,  
 As may advise him of his happie state,  
 Happiness in his power left free to will,  
 Left to his own free Will, his Will though free,  
 Yet mutable; whence warne him to beware  
 He swerve not too secure: tell him withall  
 His danger, and from whom, what enemie  
 Late fall'n himself from Heav'n is plotting now 240  
 The fall of others from like state of bliss;  
 By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,  
 But by deceit and lies; this let him know,  
 Least wilfully transgressing he pretend  
 Surprisal, unadmonisht, unforwarn'd.  
 So spake th'Eternal Father, and fulfilld  
 All justice: nor delaid the winged Saint

After his charge receivd; but from among  
 Thousand Celestial Ardors, where he stood  
 Vaild with his gorgeous wings, up springing light 250  
 Flew through the midst of Heav'n; th' angelic Quires  
 On each hand parting, to his speed gave way  
 Through all th'Empyrean road; till at the Gate  
 Of Heav'n arriv'd, the gate self-op'nd wide  
 On gold'n Hinges turning, as by work  
 Divine the sovran Architect had fram'd.  
 From hence, no cloud, or, to obstruct his sight,  
 Starr interpos'd, however small he sees,  
 Not unconform to other shining Globes,  
 Earth and the Gard'n of God, with Cedars crown'd 260  
 Above all Hills. As when by night the Glass  
 Of *Galileo*, less assur'd, observes  
 Imagind Lands and Regions in the Moon:  
 Or Pilot from amidst the *Cyclades*  
*Delos* or *Samos* first appeering kenns  
 A cloudy spot. Down thither prone in flight  
 He speeds, and through the vast Ethereal Skie  
 Sailes between worlds and worlds, with steddie wing  
 Now on the polar windes, then with quick Fann 270  
 Winnows the buxom Air; till within soare  
 Of Towing Eagles, to all the Fowles he seems  
 A *Phoenix*, gaz'd by all, as that sole Bird  
 When to enshrine his reliques in the Suns  
 Bright Temple, to *Aegyptian Theb's* he flies.  
 At once on th' Eastern cliff of Paradise  
 He lights, and to his proper shape returns  
 A Seraph wingd; six wings he wore, to shade  
 His lineaments Divine; the pair that clad  
 Each shoulder broad, came mantling ore his brest 280  
 With regal Ornament; the middle pair  
 Girt like a Starrie Zone his waste, and round  
 Skirted his loines and thighes with downie Gold  
 And colours dipt in Heav'n; the third his feet  
 Shaddowd from either heele with featherd maile  
 Skie-tinctur'd grain. Like *Maia's* son he stood,  
 And shook his Plumes, that Heav'nly fragrance filld  
 The circuit wide. Strait knew him all the Bands  
 Of Angels under watch; and to his state,  
 And to his message high in honour rise;  
 For on som message high they gessd him bound. 290

Thir glittering Tents he passd, and now is come  
 Into the blissful field, through Groves of Myrrhe,  
 And flouring Odours, Cassia, Nard, and Balme;  
 A Wilderness of sweets; for Nature here  
 Wantond as in her prime, and paid at will  
 Her Virgin Fancies, pouring forth more sweet,  
 Wilde above Rule or Art; enormous bliss.  
 Him through the spicie Forrest onward com  
*Adam* discern'd, as in the dore he sat  
 Of his coole Bowre ...

300

The verse of *Paradise Lost*, and pre-eminently such a passage as this, manifests as spacious and grandiose an imagination as we are privileged to know. If, as I have suggested, a perpetual expansiveness is the habit of the epic sensibility, then Milton was supremely endowed for epic. His most typical arrangements of space do not contain the crowded complexity typical of Virgil—are not, as it were, so busy, but they compose an immensity which shrinks the cosmos of Virgil by comparison. This immensity is effected here partly by the play of perspective and the stress on seeing, by the inconspicuous tininess of earth to Raphael's sight, and his loftiness from the vantage of towering eagles. The immensity is also effected by a certain careless disposal of the astral spheres, here not arranged according to the Ptolemaic system, nor catalogued in order as they are by Dante or Tasso. The earth is

Not unconform to other shining Globes ...

The randomness of Milton's heaven, the lack of tidy symmetry, somehow extends further its limits. We know as readers that his heaven *is* orderly in the fundamental respects, but when he writes

Down thither prone in flight  
 He speeds, and through the vast Ethereal Skie  
 Sailes between worlds and worlds ...

or when he writes earlier of Satan's descent

Down right into the Worlds first Region throws  
 His flight precipitant, and windes with ease  
 Through the pure marble Air his oblique way  
 Amongst innumerable Starrs ...

[III.562–65]

Milton's cosmos expands to a greater, more intractable vastness, wild like paradise "above Rule or Art."

The immensity of the poem moreover is not simply physical; that vastness is complemented by the learning which has wearied some readers and to others has wrongly seemed matter in itself for praise. No praise is due to pedantry, and pedantry there is occasionally in *Paradise Lost*. But on the whole it is confined to a few *loci molesti*; the wonder is that so much breadth of knowledge is saved from pedantry, so much history introduced with the natural ease of genius, so many allusions brought together without any yoking by violence. The grim, categorical, and narrow version of human history in Books Eleven and Twelve is supplemented by scattered allusions in the rest of the poem to a fuller, more various history—like the allusions above to Galileo and the pilot of the Cyclades.

If we consider only the Judaic-Christian elements in these eighty lines, their range is impressive: the original myth from Genesis; Isaiah's vision of the six-winged seraphim;<sup>26</sup> the homely and charming story of Tobit; echoes of the pseudo-Dionysius' angelology;<sup>27</sup> the late Latin poem *De Ave Phoenix* ascribed to Lactantius; the theology of Augustine, among others; the Christian epic of the Renaissance, and particularly Tasso. All of these elements appear without strain in this episode of classical derivation, because they seem to have co-existed harmoniously in Milton's sensibility with the fruit of his classical education. Lesser poets avoided the comparison with Mercury at all costs because they were too self-conscious and uncertain of their Christian Humanism. But Milton's sensibility was at peace with itself, and the uncomfortable divisions of his predecessors did not touch him. "Like Maia's son he stood," he writes of Raphael, just as he puts the Graces in Eden, and we read on untroubled. If the superb description of the angel's wings (277–85) imitates Isaiah (with a glance at Ezekiel 1, in the treatment of the second pair), the eccentricity and Asiatic remoteness of the Old Testament have been suppressed. The uppermost wings do not, as in Isaiah, cover Raphael's face, but come "mantling ore his brest with regal Ornament." In describing the angel's wings, Milton describes more than wings; he endows his creature with a grace and energy and poise and beauty beyond the concern of the prophet—qualities reminiscent rather of antique and high Renaissance sculpture. His speculative intellect may not have remained as serene, but his *intuitions* of antiquity and of Hebraic culture were so spontaneously fine that he achieved for once that miraculous fusion denied to the culture of England or of Europe as a whole.

The style of *Paradise Lost* is a product of analogous fusion. Intervolved, hypotactic, and compressed as it generally is, the style is still more flexible than it looks at first acquaintance, and while one critic may praise its classical simplicity, another speaks of its "verbal cleverness, grotesqueness and obscurity," its "primitive ... zest."<sup>28</sup> Both kinds of style, as well as others, can

be found in the poem. Their diversity springs not only from Milton's acute sense of decorum but from the several conceptions of language which had once lain in incipient conflict within his mind.

The first of these was the rhetorical conception Milton learned as a boy at Saint Paul's and from his tutor Thomas Young. The training in classics given at a Renaissance school was based upon the idea, descended from Isocrates and Cicero, that the perspicuous and accomplished use of language fosters the dignity, wisdom, and even the moral elevation of men. If, as I suggested in Chapter Two, the use of language always involves an implicit confrontation with the magical or demonic powers in words, then Humanist rhetoric took a middle position toward them. By stressing clarity and precision, and by systematically cataloguing tropes, rhetoric tethered the demonic elements with firm bonds while still not altogether paralyzing them. Language, according to this position, is a creature of the human mind which remains its docile but immensely productive servant.<sup>29</sup> The rhetoricians lived by the faith that language employed with discipline and study was an instrument for attaining truth, and the younger Milton bears witness in a score of passages to his participation in that faith.<sup>30</sup>

But he was also influenced by divergent conceptions of language less compatible with that faith than he realized. On the one hand, certain passages of his prose reflect sympathy with that current of Puritanism which distrusted all rhetoric or ornamentation, a current which professed to find Scripture bare of tropes and which sought to quell the demonic elements with a strait jacket of stylistic "purity."<sup>31</sup> Thus Milton in an early pamphlet refers to the "sober, plain, and unaffected stile of the Scriptures," and ridicules the prelates who seek refuge in church tradition from Scripture's accusing clarity:

They feare the plain field of the Scriptures ... they seek the dark,  
the bushie, the tangled Forrest, they would imbosk ...<sup>32</sup>

As he was forced to penetrate the tangled forest of controversy, forced to recognize the abuses of language by which his opponents (to his thinking) muddled truth, he became increasingly aware of the insidious deceptiveness of language, and lost a little of his rhetorical faith. In passage after passage of his prose, and even of his sonnets, he thunders against those perverse and barbarous manipulators of words who prostitute language for unworthy ends.<sup>33</sup> The preface to his *Art of Logic* warns with disillusion that art may blunt as well as sharpen nature "when it is employed too anxiously and too subtly, and especially where it is unnecessary."<sup>34</sup>

This conservative conception was at variance with still a third, which Milton entertained in his hopes of becoming a Christian poet-priest. This conception led him to a truer understanding of Old Testament language,

with its dense orchestration of imagery, its poetic abandon, its visionary fire, not more restrained, as some Puritans thought, but less restrained than classical poetry. The implicit theory of Hebrew prophecy was inspirationalist; it denied study and rational control; it regarded the poet as a man possessed or driven by God to speak things his rational will resisted; it released the demonic powers within the word and made of it a searing, blazing, uncontrollable thing, an antisocial explosive. Milton played with that conception when in *The Reason of Church Government* he spoke of his intention to write a great sacred poem; he quoted Jeremiah:

His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones.

and he alluded to the calling of Isaiah when he prayed to

that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases ...<sup>35</sup>

He was moved by the same ideal when he pictured the sacred poet “soaring in the high region of his fancies with his garland and singing robes about him.”<sup>36</sup> Other passages in the same tract make clear that he was far from rejecting many of his Humanist-rhetorical beliefs, but the phrases I have quoted show him radically modifying or extending them.

All of these conceptions—the rhetorical, the Puritan, the inspirational—contributed to the style of *Paradise Lost* and were there harmonized. Of these the first is the most commonly recognized. The debt of Milton’s style to classical Latin has become a truism, but the truism is meaningless if it fails to distinguish the effect of *Latin* poetry from the effect of *Latin* poetry in *English*. Milton enriched many English words by restoring to them their Latin meanings (like his use of *enormous*, in line 297 of Raphael’s descent, to mean “exceeding the rule”), but in thus roughening his language he did not imitate Virgil. Virgil allowed his language a certain shadowiness when he chose, but never so much as to dim its continuous clarity. Virgil’s language is seldom so *thick* as Milton’s. Moreover the deliberate rearranging of normal English word order may *remind you* of Latin, but it creates an effect quite unlike Latin. English does not commonly permit the rearrangement Milton attempted, so that he arrived at something very unlike the Virgilian style. By adopting Tasso’s theory of *asprezza* or “roughness” as a means to stylistic “magnificence,” Milton moved away from the correctness which a later generation would associate with Virgil. His liberties with language in *Paradise Lost* are actually far greater than those authorized by antique precedent or by his education. He did not surrender rational control to inspirational abandon, but he allowed the demons in his

language at least as much room as he allowed to those in his *dramatis personae*.

He had not, for all this, lost his conservative distrust of language, which had rather been deepening with the years. It affects both that style Milton accommodated to heaven and the other he accommodated to hell. In heaven it is reflected in the abstract and colorless speeches of God and the decorous choral hymns of the angels which aim at stark simplicity. Milton's own style in describing heaven (but not Raphael's style in describing the war) virtually eschews similes and his language, if elevated, is markedly less dense than elsewhere. Comparison is out of place in heaven, and even when poetry is descriptive, as in lines 247–6 of Raphael's descent, the visual brilliance is simply reported without ambiguity or metaphor or ulterior significance. We see few physical things in heaven, but those we see—such as the gate which opens to Raphael, or the angelic crowns strewn on the sea of jasper before God's throne (III.349 ff)—are shining and pure-colored and incapable of similitude to earthly copies. The style Milton used to describe heaven might well have pleased John Calvin.

In hell the distrust of rhetoric is reflected in just the opposite way. For the speeches of Satan and the other devils are brilliant textbook models of illogic, demagoguery, wrenched syllogisms, false conclusions, sleight-of-phrase, malicious abuse of words. The impressive description of Beelzebub at the Great Consult:

... with grave  
Aspect he rose, and in his rising seemd  
A Pillar of State; deep on his Front engraven  
Deliberation sat and publick care;  
And Princely counsel in his face yet shone ...

[II.300–04]

is a misleading portrait of the ideal Ciceronian orator-statesman which anticipates the pose of Satan at the climax of his temptation of Eve, like “som Orator renound in Athens or free Rome” (IX.670–71). Both deceptive poses are successful.

If the style which describes heaven is “pure,” that which describes hell is murkily accommodated to the darkness visible. We make out the dim, grey, physical forms through a fog of jagged syntax, deceptive similes, confusions of physical and abstract,<sup>37</sup> straight-faced but withering irony. In heaven Milton would have us see face to face the truth that makes us free, but in hell darkly the confusion which enslaves us. This is why the syntax of Satan's opening speech resists parsing, and the first statement about Death (II.666–70) is no statement at all but a noun followed by conditional clauses trailing off to leave the sentence incomplete. This is why Satan and Belial begin to pun during the war, “scoffing in ambiguous words.” It is this style

which leads Prince to speak of “cleverness, grotesqueness, and obscurity” in *Paradise Lost*.

Milton’s third style, that which is accommodated to earth, represents something of a mean between his celestial and infernal manners. Terrestrial vision after the fall is obscured by the:

sideral blast,  
Vapour, and Mist, and Exhalation hot,  
Corrupt and Pestilent ... [X.693–95]

and a pall of infernal confusion hovers correspondingly about the worried syntax of Adam’s soliloquy:

O miserable of happie! is this the end  
Of this new glorious World, and mee so late  
The Glory of that Glory, who now becom  
Accurst of blessed, hide me from the face  
Of God, whom to behold was then my highth  
Of happiness: yet well, if here would end  
The miserie, I deserv’d it ... [X.720–26]

All of Adam’s posterity will be pursued by that “Ev’ning Mist,” curling up in the poem’s closing lines, which

Ris’n from a River ore the marish glides,  
And gathers ground fast at the Labourers heel  
Homeward returning. [XII.630–32]

Human vision after the fall is dimmed; the mist will darken “the glass of Galileo” when it,

less assur’d, observes  
*Imagind* Lands and Regions in the Moon ..

and so the pilot’s sight is blurred when he

from amidst the Cyclades  
Delos or Samos first appeering kenns  
A cloudy spot.

The pilot’s uncertainty is imitated by the uncertain grammar, which leaves the reader peering to make out the construction. *Spot* might be considered as an appositive after *Delos* and *Samos*, taken as objects of *kenns*, but one could



also consider *spot* the object, and “Delos or Samos first appeering” a parenthetical absolute phrase.

Such clouded vision is the effect of the fall. But even before it, the appearances of this world are capable of misleading, and the style is a little less transparent than in heaven. Raphael’s own vision, to be sure, is faultless:

From hence, no cloud, or, to obstruct his sight,  
 Starr interpos’d, however small he sees,  
 Not unconform to other shining Globes,  
 Earth and the Gard’n of God, with Cedars crown’d  
 Above all Hills.

The detail of the cedars convinces us that he really does see the garden. But the syntax puts a strain on the act of vision, as soon as Raphael passes the gate of heaven, by confusing us momentarily with the absolute construction, “no cloud or ... starr interpos’d,” and by separating the adjective *small* so far from the nouns it modifies, *Earth* and *Gard’n*. But this strain is slight in comparison to the logical ambiguity surrounding the phoenix. Does Raphael literally take the form of this bird?

till within soare  
 Of Towing Eagles, to all the Fowles he seems  
 A Phoenix, gaz’d by all, as that sole Bird  
 When to enshrine his reliques in the Suns  
 Bright Temple, to Aegyptian Theb’s he flies.

If one stopped reading here, there would be no difficulty: Raphael is not flying to Thebes; he is carrying no relics; one could only read this passage as a simile in which the angel is tenor and the bird vehicle. But Milton continues:

At once on th’Eastern cliff of Paradise  
 He lights, and to his proper shape returns  
 A Seraph wing’d ...

If Raphael returns to his proper shape then he *has* assumed literally the form of a phoenix, however lacking its burden and destination. Or has his flight simply deceived the “Fowles” who take him mistakenly for a superior bird? The text seems rather to support the former reading, and it appears that we must accustom ourselves to a phoenix both within and without the simile. Milton in any case has been less than ingenuous with his readers, and the more one reads him, the more disingenuous he appears.<sup>38</sup> Why introduce a phoenix here at all, figurative or real? That too is unclear, but we remember at least the purpose of the angel’s descent:

By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,  
But by deceit and lies; this let him know ...

This world is vulnerable to deceit, and Milton subtly underscores the passage from heaven to earth by heightening the demonic insidiousness of his language. The fallen reader's imperfect reason must strain to make out relations as the pilot strains with his physical eyes, as Galileo strains with his telescope, as the fowls gaze with mistaken recognition on the angel, as Adam and Eve will fail to strain and so blur all our vision.

Thus if Milton enriched the classical style with unorthodox and audacious liberties, he also passed judgment in a sense upon those liberties, and in his most "exalted" scenes attempted to dispense with them. This latter procedure he carried even further in *Paradise Regained*, where the poetic treatment of Christ is comparably bare, and only the temptations make lovely but intermittent demands upon the senses.

### III.

*Paradise Lost* is the only epic to incorporate the celestial descent into a larger, and indeed a comprehensive pattern of imagery, a pattern which includes the poem's two major events—the falls of Satan and of Adam. Milton interweaves those events into a fabric of multitudinous references to height and depth, rising and falling, which appear on virtually every page and bind every incident of the narrative into a closer unity. Sometimes witty, sometimes ironic, sometimes simple and transparent, appearing now in an epithet, a phrase, a simile as well as in the sweeping lines of the action, the subtle workings of this pattern turn incessantly a moral or metaphysical mirror upon objective events, and conversely translate moral events into spatial terms.

Milton seems to have regarded this pattern—it might be called vertical imagery—as one of two patterns basic to his poem. The other is the ubiquitous imagery of light and dark. He couples them—and thereby associates his own creative act with the dramatic action—at the close of his first invocation:

What in mee is dark  
Illumin, what is low raise and support ...

[I.22–23]

He couples them again in describing Satan during the temptation of Eve:

Hope elevates, and joy  
Bright'ns his Crest ...

[IX.633–34]

And he seems to balance them in constructing Books Two and Three. Book Three is saturated with light imagery as Book Two is with vertical imagery. The hymn to light which opens Book Three is balanced by the opening of Book Two:

High on a Throne of Royal State ...  
 Satan exalted sat, by merit rais'd  
 To that bad eminence; and from despair  
 Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires  
 Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue  
 Vain Warr with Heav'n ... [II.1, 5–9]

Book Two ends with the punning verb *bies* as Book Three ends with the punning *lights*. In the rest of the poem the two patterns are mingled indiscriminately as they are in the first book, but the vertical imagery is perhaps the denser throughout.

Underlying this imagery is a paradox which had become a Biblical commonplace. Its most familiar forms are the prophecies of the second Isaiah:

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.<sup>39</sup>

and of Christ:

Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.<sup>40</sup>

But it takes many other forms: in the command to Ezekiel:

Exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high.<sup>41</sup>

in Mary's hymn of gratitude to God:

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.<sup>42</sup>

in the admonition of Peter:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.<sup>43</sup>

and in many other passages.<sup>44</sup> The paradox appears in the poetry of men as

different as Vaughan (“O let me climbe when I lye down”) and Du Bartas,<sup>45</sup> and it recurs in the prose of the paradox-loving Donne.<sup>46</sup> But it found its most sophisticated expression—and the most relevant to Milton—in Saint Augustine:

There is, therefore, something in humility which, strangely enough, exalts the heart, and something in pride which debases it. This seems, indeed, to be contradictory, that loftiness should debase and lowliness exalt. But pious humility enables us to submit to what is above us; and nothing is more exalted above us than God; and therefore humility, by making us subject to God, exalts us. But pride, being a defect of nature, by the very act of refusing subjection and revolting from Him who is supreme, falls to a low condition; and then comes to pass what is written: “Thou castedst them down when they lifted up themselves.” For he does not say “when they had been lifted up” as if first they were exalted, and then afterwards cast down; but “when they lifted up themselves” even then they were cast down—that is to say, the very lifting up was already a fall. And therefore it is that humility is specially recommended to the city of God as it sojourns in this world, and is specially exhibited in the city of God, and in the person of Christ its King; while the contrary vice of pride, according to the testimony of the sacred writings, specially rules his adversary the devil.<sup>47</sup>

*Paradise Lost* plays continually with the paradoxical duality of lowness—the lowness of humility and of moral degradation or despair—and with the duality of height—of spiritual eminence or exaltation and of pride. It plays also with the paradoxes of rising and falling, the abasement that exalts and the pride that abases. When Adam and Eve fall prostrate to the ground, confessing their sin with tears in humiliation meek, their prayers rise successfully to heaven. When the Son offers to descend to a mortal body, he is correspondingly elevated:

because in thee  
Love hath abounded more than Glory abounds,  
Therefore thy Humiliation shall exalt  
With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne ...

[III.311–14]

But when Satan’s ambition leads him to rebel, he enters a state of perpetual pride and thus continuous, progressive degradation. The bitterest ironies in hell are reserved for the devils’ attempts to deny their fall, to build up their

downcast pride and by so doing unwittingly to deepen their abasement. Here they are cheering themselves up:

hee his wonted pride  
 Soon recollecting, with *high* words, that bore  
 Semblance of worth not substance, gently *rais'd*  
 Thir fainted courage, and dispell'd thir fears.  
 Then strait commands that at the warlike sound  
 Of Trumpets loud and Clarions be *upreard*  
 His mighty Standard; that proud honour claimd  
 Azazel as his right, a Cherube *tall*:  
 Who forthwith from the glittering Staff unfurld  
 Th'Imperial Ensign, which full *high* advanc't  
 Shon like a Meteor streaming to the Wind ...  
 At which the universal Host *upsent*  
 A shout that tore Hells Concave ...  
 All in a moment through the gloom were seen  
 Ten thousand Banners *rise* into the Air  
 With Orient Colours waving; with them rose  
 A forrest huge of Spears ...  
 Anon they move  
 In perfet Phalanx to the Dorian mood  
 Of Flutes and soft Recorders; such as *rais'd*  
 To *highth* of noblest temper Hero's old  
 Arming to Battel ...

[I.527–53]

When earlier Satan cries:

... in this abject posture have ye sworn  
 To adore the Conqueror? ...  
 Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n.

[I.322–23, 330]

his irony is swallowed in a greater irony. Each of the speakers at the Great Consult is really concerned with regaining his former height by various means: Moloch by armed invasions; Belial, whose “thoughts were low,” by appeasement; Mammon, by attempting to “raise Magnificence;—and what can Heav'n shew more?”; Beelzebub, by corrupting man that the devils may “Joy upraise” in God's disturbance. This venture, says Beelzebub, “from the lowest deep will once more lift us up” (II.392–93). And Satan as he volunteers is one whom

now transcendent glory rais'd

Above his fellows, with Monarchal pride  
 Conscious of highest worth ...

[II.427–29]

The consult disbands with its leaders “rais’d by false presumptuous hope,” some of them to celebrate past deeds in song but others to retire to a hill, “in thoughts more elevate,” there to reason high of fate and freedom. The symbolic answer to all this is the metamorphosis in Book Ten:

They felt themselves now changing; down thir arms,  
 Down fell both Spear and Shield, down they as fast,  
 And the dire hiss renewd, and the dire form  
 Catchd by Contagion, like in punishment,  
 As in thir crime.

[X.541–45]

The descent of Raphael typifies that celestial condescension which is opposed to demonic aspiration. It is a minor instance of the solicitous compassion for man whose major instance is Christ’s sacrificial redemption. The episode’s opening words:

Them thus imploid beheld  
 With pittie Heav’ns high King ...

implicitly express the paradox of divine generosity. The epithet *high* is not perfunctory; it makes the necessary quiet contrast with *pittie*, God’s affective descent to earth which precedes the angel’s literal descent. Raphael is chosen in turn for that gracious mansuetude toward men which he will display again toward Tobias. That he deigns now to descend to extended conversation with Adam implies as well the height of man upon the scale of creation. When after the fall Michael descends to Paradise, Adam immediately remarks the severer aspect of his mien:

yet not terrible,  
 That I should fear, nor sociably mild,  
 As Raphael, that I should much confide,  
 But solemn and sublime ... [XI.223–36]

The fallen Adam will not be worthy then to receive the angel in “his shape Celestial” but “as Man clad to meet Man.” Raphael’s prelapsarian sociable mildness betokens both heavenly charity and human dignity.

That this height of dignity is threatened we are reminded by God’s references to

what enemie  
 Late fall'n himself from Heav'n is plotting now  
 The fall of others from like state of bliss ...

But for the moment the threat is muted; man remains the felicitous enjoyer of God's garden, "with Cedars crown'd above all hills," for whose welfare celestial emissaries post with zealous speed.

Down thither prone in flight  
 He speeds ...

The adverb is stressed by its position. Raphael's magnanimity is further underscored by the revelation of his eminence in the angelic hierarchy. He is one to whom the lesser angels pay homage warranted both by his rank and his errand:

Strait knew him all the Bands  
 Of Angels under watch; and to his state,  
 And to his message high in honour rise;  
 For on som message high they guessed him bound.

Adam too will pay homage, although not such as to compromise his own rank:

Mean while our Primitive great Sire, to meet  
 His god-like Guest, walks forth, without more train  
 Accompanied then with his own compleat  
 Perfections; in himself was all his state ...  
 Neerer his presence Adam though not awd,  
 Yet with submiss approach and reverence meek,  
 As to a superior Nature, bowing low,  
 Thus said ... [V.350–53, 358–61]

Both the rising of the angels and the bowing of Adam demonstrate the true and cheerful humility which, for Milton, remained consonant with self-respect and freedom.

The height of Adam's dignity before the fall is balanced by his abasement afterwards: first after Eve's sin when he "the Garland wreath'd for Eve down drop'd" (X.892–93); then in the false humiliation of pride-concealing despair, when

On the ground  
 Outstretcht he lay, on the cold ground, and oft

Curs'd his Creation ... [X.850–52]

and later in the true humiliation of repentance, when husband and wife

Repairing where he judg'd them prostrate fell  
Before him reverent ... [X.1099–100]

Despite the mercy earned by that act, they must leave Paradise, and the closing lines show them led “down the Cliff ... to the subjected Plaine” of suffering and death. This to be sure is not the ultimate conclusion; that will come only when

New Heav'n and Earth shall to the Ages rise,  
Or down from Heav'n descend. [X.647–48]

That is the conclusion the poem glimpses hopefully, but it remains in the distance. The true curve of the poem's major action follows the fallen couple down into the valley of humiliation.

In thus ending with a downward movement, *Paradise Lost* reverses the visionary ascent with which Milton almost habitually concluded his earlier poems. The youthful optimism of his Christian Humanism is reflected in the soaring visions of redemption which conclude *On Time*, *At a Solemn Musick*, *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*, *On the Death of the Bishop of Winchester*, *Manso*, *Damon's Epitaph*, *Lycidas*, and *Comus*. The same optimism informs the visionary conclusion of his first published prose work, *Of Reformation in England*. We can contrast that period of hope with the pessimism of twenty years later by noticing the downward movement with which *The Ready and Easy Way* concludes. The final words of that tract warn against the “precipice of destruction” to which the “deluge” of Royalist “epidemic madness would hurry us, through the general defection of a misguided and abused multitude.”<sup>48</sup> At the time these words were written, *Paradise Lost* was already well begun. The descent with which the epic concludes has none of the tract's desperate alarm, but their common movement downward is significant. In both works the poet struggles—as indeed he does in all the later works—to reconcile the high potentialities of man with his fallen perversity. The vertical imagery in *Paradise Lost* registers the progress of that noble and fearful struggle within a great man's moral imagination.

#### IV.

The richness of Milton's similes is unique in epic poetry. The finest of them are marvels of compression, and their relationship to their respective tenors



seems almost inexhaustible. They form thus a sharp contrast with the similes of the *Iliad* which, as we have seen, tend to provide relief from the narrative rather than commentary upon it. Virgil's similes do comment, in broad and generally moral terms, but they do not imitate the tenor in specific point after point; no ingenuity or wit has gone into their making. Milton's similes are immensely ingenious; they are little Chinese boxes of meaning. His conception of the simile may have been influenced less by the classical epics than by the theory and practice of George Chapman's translations. Chapman believed in the detailed correspondence between Homer's similes and their tenors, and tried to demonstrate his belief with desperate ingenuity in his translation as well as his notes.<sup>49</sup>

Certain of Milton's literary and historical allusions are in themselves incipient similes, like the Tobias allusion which precedes Raphael's descent:

Them thus imploid beheld  
 With pittie Heav'ns high King, and to him calld  
 Raphael, the sociable Spirit, that deignd  
 To travel with Tobias, and secur'd  
 His marriage with the seav'ntimes-wedded Maid.

Milton is implicitly comparing the two descents. The ostensible point of comparison is the sociability of Raphael discussed above, that quality by which he deigns "half this day as friend to friend" to converse with Adam just as he will deign to travel with Tobias. This is the ostensible point in common, but here as in most Miltonic similes, the ostensible point is not the most important. The purpose of Raphael's visit is to warn Adam against Satan, and we remember that in the Tobias story Raphael succeeds in bilking Satan. If we had forgotten it, an earlier allusion would have reminded us:

So entertaind those odorous sweets the Fiend  
 Who came thir bane, though with them better pleas'd  
 Then Asmodeus with the fishie fume,  
 That drove him though enamour'd, from the Spouse  
 Of Tobits Son, and with a vengeance sent  
 From Media post to Aegypt, there fast bound.

[IV.166–71]

Asmodeus or Satan has sexual designs upon Sara, the spouse of Tobias, just as Satan designs to seduce Eve. Raphael appears in Tobit as the protector of a marriage ("secur'd his marriage with the seav'ntimes-wedded Maid."), the role which he is about to play here. When God considers Adam and Eve "thus imploid ... with pittie," they stand as patterns of a perfect marriage.

They have first manifested their conjugal harmony in the morning hymn, and now their cooperative labor involves a second kind of wedding:

they led the Vine  
 To wed her Elm; she spous'd about him twines  
 Her marriageable arms, and with her brings  
 Her down th'adopted Clusters, to adorn  
 His barren leaves. Them thus imploid ...

[V.215–19]

They deserve pity because they exemplify marriage threatened by the devil. Raphael's solicitude in Tobit for the uniquely human institution also graces the domestic scenes in Adam's bower. But this spouse he cannot protect.

The phoenix simile—since it is at least partly a simile—remains more difficult to elucidate because the history of the phoenix legend is immensely complex, and because Milton helps less to focus his meaning by qualifying particulars. The meaning of such an image really has an open end, and no one can know precisely at what point to delimit it; we cannot even be absolutely sure how much comparative mythology Milton knew.<sup>50</sup> The texts most obviously in the background of the simile are Tasso's description of Armida (*Ger. Lib.*, 18.35), his beautiful *canzone*, *La Fenice*, and the simile from Vondel's descent which we noticed in the last chapter. All of these passages use the bird as an image of brilliance and beauty and *éclat*, qualities which Milton is at pains to confer upon his angel and which may in themselves have led him to the image. From the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* downward, the descent convention involved a bird simile, and what more natural than to choose for *Paradise Lost* the most fabulous of birds, the unique, indeed the legendary king of birds?<sup>51</sup>

Behind the Renaissance allusions lie the manifold descriptions in antique prose and verse. Among the fullest of these are the poems on the phoenix by Claudian and Lactantius, if the attribution to the latter is correct. In both of these poems much is made of the excitement engendered by the bird's arrival in Egypt, so precious and sacred was it considered to be. Not only is it greeted joyfully by men, but the very birds acclaim and escort it. Claudian's poem specifically names the eagle as a member of this escort, and the same poet returns to the image elsewhere in a passage strikingly close to Milton's:

So when by that birth in death the Phoenix renews its youth and gathers its father's ashes and carries them lovingly in its talons, winging its way, sole of its kind, from the extreme east to Nile's coasts, the eagles gather together and all the fowls from every

quarter to marvel at the bird of the sun; afar its living plumage shines, itself redolent of its father's fragrant pyre.<sup>52</sup>

A reader familiar with such a passage as this would recognize in Milton's allusion the note of religious and joyful momentousness.

Neither the poets of antiquity—Ovid, Claudian, Lactantius—nor the prose authors—Herodotus, Pliny, Tacitus, etc.—who speak of the phoenix describe it as a celestial messenger, but this role was anciently assigned to it, or a bird like it, in the Orient and Egypt. An English scholar writes as follows of Egyptian beliefs regarding birds:

The bird, of whatever kind, is the obvious choice for a messenger since it is essential to the whole idea of the reservoir of power that it should be unattainable by mere mortals. The traffic is both ways, the bird is the messenger from men to gods or, more exactly, the soul of the departed who traverses the boundary between the two worlds and the angel of the gods who comes from the divine numinous regions of power. In the latter case the message from the gods is the announcement of ineluctable fate, the reappearance of some temporarily absent physical phenomenon—a star, a season, an inundation of the Nile, or it can be the declaration of a new age or phase of good or evil luck.<sup>53</sup>

One bird singled out particularly for the role of messenger was the *Bn.w* bird, which seems to have been a mythographic ancestor of the phoenix.

On the whole the *Bn.w* bird is an angel, announcing stellar events or dates and, by an extension, the fate of mankind.<sup>54</sup>

Milton could not have known this belief in anything like its original form, but some derived version of it may conceivably have reached him. In any case the phoenix became an obvious symbol for a new age and for collective or individual renewal. Just as Vida had applied it to the resurrected Christ,<sup>55</sup> so Milton would use it as a great climactic symbol of Samson's regeneration.<sup>56</sup> It is suggestive that in his other verse reference to the phoenix, in the *Epitaphium Damonis*,<sup>57</sup> he represents it watching the dawn arise. And when in *Paradise Lost* God predicts the end of the fallen world, he uses language which recalls the phoenix legend:

The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring  
New Heav'n and Earth ... [III.334–35]

Raphael's discourse to Adam will record the end of that earlier age which was closed by the angels' revolt, as well as the beginning of the new in the majestic *allegresse* of creation. His descent is vitalized by the sense of fresh and hopeful life springing from a great cosmic renewal. Perhaps it does not strain excessively the subtlety of Milton's imagery to associate the phoenix' "reliques" with the history Raphael is charged to communicate.

The reference to these relics introduces another curious element of the legend. Most antique writers repeat that version by which the bird dies not in fire but in a ball of spices. This ball it is which the offspring bears to the temple of the sun in Heliopolis (or as Milton has it, Thebes). The offspring's plumage is itself fragrant with spices; this detail appears both in the above quotation from Claudian and with more emphasis in his poem on the phoenix.<sup>58</sup> It can be no coincidence that Raphael's wings also effuse fragrance:

Like Maia's son he stood,  
And shook his Plumes, that Heav'nly fragrance filld  
The circuit wide.

What are more curious are the subsequent references to spices in Paradise, references which Professor Bush also associates with the phoenix material:<sup>59</sup>

Thir glittering Tents he passd, and now is come  
Into the blissful field, through Groves of Myrrhe,  
And flouing Odours, Cassia, Nard, and Balme;  
A Wilderness of sweets ...

All four of the plants named here appear in Lactantius' *De Ave Phoenixe*, and three of the four in Ovid.<sup>60</sup> The resemblance is the more interesting when it is remembered that Lactantius and Claudian situated the birth and death of the phoenix in an oriental paradise protected from all evil. In this paradise Lactantius places the spices which also flourish in Milton's Eden. A favorite site for this other paradise was Arabia Felix, whose spicy fragrance has been compared to the odors of Eden in an earlier simile:

now gentle gales  
Fanning thir odoriferous wings dispense  
Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole  
Those balmie spoiles. As when to them who saile  
Beyond the Cape of Hope, and now are past  
Mozambic, off at Sea North-East windes blow  
Sabean Odours from the spicee shoare  
Of Arabie the blest ...

[IV.156–63]

I am far from sure that these tantalizing parallels can be fitted into a single coherent interpretation. It is possible that we have left interpretation behind and blundered into the psychology of poetic creation. But one unpretentious conclusion is surely justified. To the instructed reader, the phoenix simile intensifies the imagery of storied remoteness and oriental lushness with which Milton saturates his Paradise. If his story is the true, original, archetypal story which later history and myth fragment and distort, the poet must nonetheless employ those distorted fragments to reconstruct for us a living experience of the true.<sup>61</sup> Milton would have regarded the phoenix' paradise as such a distortion of the true, and he edges as much of it into his poem as he needs to enrich the great arch-image of the garden.

The spices contribute, quite apart from any legend, to a certain lulling heaviness in the atmosphere of Paradise, a Keatsian excess of pleasure which the ensuing lines intensify:

A Wilderness of sweets; for Nature here  
Wantond as in her prime, and plaid at will  
Her Virgin Fancies, pouring forth more sweet,  
Wilde above Rule or Art; enormous bliss.

The scented air and tangled flowers are not calculated to permit hard work much relevance. Thus the "Sabeian Odours" of the Arabia Felix simile invite the sailors to interrupt their work:

with such delay  
Well pleas'd they slack thir course ...

[IV. 163–64]

In Paradise as well the fragrance seems an invitation to indolence. It even suggests an incipient sexuality. Adam's account of his first sexual union with Eve will mention the same fragrance:

fresh Gales and gentle Aires  
Whisperd it to the Woods, and from thir wings  
Flung Rose, flung Odours from the spicee Shrub,  
Disporting ...

[VIII.515–18]

and as early a poem as the *Elegia Quinta* associates odorous breezes with seductiveness.<sup>62</sup> Indeed that poem's great central image—of Earth inviting and yearning for the embraces of Apollo—looks forward to Nature wanting in Paradise.<sup>63</sup>

But the nature of Paradise, redolent with a slightly drowsy sexuality, is not quite the nature of the rest of Milton's earth. From its first description, Paradise is a little enervating:

Another side, umbrageous Grots and Caves  
 Of coole recess, ore which the mantling Vine  
 Layes forth her purple Grape, and gently creeps  
 Luxuriant; mean while murmuring waters fall  
 Down the slope hills, disperst, or in a Lake,  
 That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crownd,  
 Her crystal mirror holds, unite thir streams.  
 The Birds thir quire apply; aires, vernal aires,  
 Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune  
 The trembling leaves ... [IV.257–66]

The waters murmur; the leaves tremble; the mantling vine creeps *gently*. One understands the artistic logic of this drowsiness. The loveliest paradise of our deepest fancy is of its essence dreamy. But Milton's nature as a whole, the nature without the garden, is *not* dreamy, before the fall or after it. The nature is vital, energetic, robust, dynamic, possessed of a Baroque joy in living movement. Such is the nature of the world whose creation is described in Book Seven. The creation is the setting in movement of a dance, the dance of jocund universal praise, wherein nothing is inert or heavy and nothing seems to rest. Its poetry is a poetry of verbs. The same vital dance is evoked—with what consistency is uncertain—by Adam and Eve in their great morning hymn:

Moon, that now meetst the orient Sun, now fli'st  
 With the fixt Starrs, fixt in thir Orb that flies,  
 And yee five other wandring Fires that move  
 In mystic Dance not without Song, resound  
 His praise, who out of Darkness calld up Light.  
 Aire, and ye Elements the eldest birth  
 Of Natures Womb, that in quaternion run  
 Perpetual Circle, multiform, and mix  
 And nourish all things, let your ceaseless change  
 Varie to our great Maker still new praise ... [V. 175–84]

Milton's language is a magnificent reservoir of heroic energy which, when he chooses, charges the world with the grandeur of God.

But Adam and Eve and the garden about them are not so charged. To man is given the life of reason and love gratified by a wilderness of sweets, but not the life of robust energy dancing in praise. Milton was concerned, perhaps too concerned, with dramatizing the loss of Eden; he wanted to overwhelm us with all that we might have had. And so he conceived his great arch-image to resemble the gardens of Alcinous in the *Odyssey*, the court of

Alcina in Ariosto, the island of Cupid in Camoens, Armida's garden in Tasso, Spenser's Bower of Bliss. But in these other poems the garden is represented as a place where heroic activity is interrupted or forgotten. None of those poets would have considered it dignified to remain forever there where Nature wantoned so wildly. But Milton represents it as dignified.

Raphael as he alights is brimming with divine vitality; it flows from Messiah as he wages heavenly war; Satan too retains it before it gradually drains from him in the later books. But to Adam, by art or accident, Milton denies this more potent glory. Adam's life is circumscribed by the walls of his garden, and his strength is not of that mobile or questing temper which would lead him beyond.

This limitation remains with him and his posterity after his fall. The heroism required of fallen man involves less active energy than the passive strength of fortitude and patience. The heroes in Michael's foreview of history—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Christ—are men whose wills govern nothing beyond themselves. The heroic will is no longer ambitious to extend its control. Milton's sarcastic dismissal of those heroic poems which dissect "with long and tedious havoc fabl'd Knights in Battels feignd" (IX.30–31) finds reinforcement in Michael's explanation of the Israelite itinerary after leaving Egypt:

the Race elect  
 Safe towards Canaan from the shoar advance  
 Through the wilde Desert, not the readiest way,  
 Least entring on the Canaanite allarmd  
 Warr terrifie them inexpert, and feare  
 Return them back to Egypt, choosing rather  
 Inglorious life with servitude; for life  
 To noble and ignoble is more sweet  
 Untrai'd in Armes, where rashness leads not on.

[XII.214–22]

Milton betrays something like contempt for human military prowess, although he admires angelic prowess. Perhaps it is also significant that the vigor of his language flags, for whatever reason, in just these two concluding books where human history is related and heroism exemplified. In the poignant last lines of the poem, exceptionally tender for Milton, the courage of Adam and Eve is qualified by an almost childlike hesitancy which the faltering verse rhythms underscore. The quietness and pathos of the close make a pointed, self-conscious contrast with the traditional epic.

This separation of energy and human heroism seems to me one of the most distinctive qualities of *Paradise Lost*. In part it has led to the Satanist misunderstanding. Satan is unquestionably more vital than Adam, but in the

end it is clear that he is less heroic—as the poem defines *heroic*. The only real question is whether such a definition, excluding the expansive, questing impulse of the ego, suppressing vital zest in favor of dogged, self-contained integrity—whether that definition is consonant with one’s idea of epic heroism or even of moral elevation. The great paradox of *Paradise Lost* lies in Milton’s withholding from his human characters that spacious power which ennobled his own imagination.

v.

There is no need today to stress the heterodoxy of Milton’s belief in the goodness of matter, the belief which led him to the mortalist heresy and the denial of creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>64</sup> It is more useful to examine the tensions which that belief heightened within his own mind. For he attempted to straddle, both theologically and artistically, two forms of religious experience which generally tend to oppose each other. The two forms have been described thus:

[Puritanism] was a return to the Augustinian tradition in which the relation between the individual soul and God is all that matters. This relationship has too often been taken as a purely intelligible affair to the exclusion of the senses. In this regard, Puritanism was what we might call a religion of the “ear,” i.e., the *bearing* and *understanding* of the Word and of doctrine—hence the profusion of great Puritan preachers—and not a religion of the “eye,” i.e., the seeing of the sensuous aspect of the world and the physical passion of Christ.<sup>65</sup>

Milton was typically Puritan in his neglect of the “physical passion,” but he was un-Puritan when he evoked “the sensuous aspect of the world.” His religion of the eye, however, did not really diminish the greater importance he laid upon the inner ear.<sup>66</sup> This latter emphasis becomes immediately apparent if we think of the real purpose of Raphael’s descent: to expound the truth. In this respect Milton’s celestial messenger represents a unique departure from the convention. For he is dispatched neither to prod nor to encourage nor to punish but to explain, almost indeed to lecture. The success or failure of his mission will lead to visible, objective consequences, but these are actually secondary; they serve only to manifest the crucial consequences which are interior. Milton welcomed the triviality in the act of eating an apple because that triviality demonstrates the primacy of interior action. For that action all the visible imagery serves mainly as metaphorical equivalent. We have already seen how easily the transference is made by such devices as the vertical imagery.



Milton's artistic withdrawal from the visible world is implicit in Michael's scorn for physical heroism (a scorn which several passages confirm),<sup>67</sup> as perhaps it is implicit in God's phrase to Raphael:

By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,  
But by deceit and lies ...

But the withdrawal is carried further than this. The poet's prayer must be taken seriously when he invokes the Celestial Light to shine inward

that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

[III.54-55]

The blind consciousness is drawn nostalgically to the beautiful sensuous world denied it, but driven back thence to the world of things invisible. Adam will allude uncategorically to the inferiority of outward things:

For well I understand in the prime end  
Of Nature her th'inferiour, in the mind  
And inward Faculties, which most excell ...

[VIII.540-42]

and Raphael later assures him that Eve, rightly governed, will to realities yield all her shows" (VIII.575). More telling than these is the impatient remark of Michael which betrays Milton's imaginative weariness:

Much thou hast yet to see, but I perceive  
Thy mortal sight to faile; objects divine  
Must needs impaire and wearie human sense:  
Henceforth what is to com I will relate ...

[XII.8-11]

Henceforth almost to the very end the eye is neglected for the ear. Michael's discourse moves, the whole poem moves, as Barker tells us all of Milton's thought moves, toward the "Paradise within thee happier far," the paradise one cannot see.

If all epics are concerned with cosmic politics, *Paradise Lost* is pre-eminently concerned with them, but like other lesser poems of its century, it alters the traditional form of political struggle. God is impervious to violence, but to disobedience he is not so obviously impervious; his victory has to come in the long run. The struggle works itself out in those terms which have meaning for a devout, sedentary, urban public. In thus fulfilling the



the epic between individual excellence and limitation falters because so little ground is left for excellence. The announced intent, to turn the note to tragic, risks failure because tragedy implies a standard of human greatness surviving in spite of misfortune and even corruption. Milton maintains that standard only shakily and intermittently after the disaster of the fall. And he makes clear that man can do nothing to achieve the one thing worth achieving—nothing at least beyond the act of faith:

his [Christ's] obedience  
 Imputed becomes theirs by Faith, his merits  
 To save them, not thir own, though legal works.  
 [XII.408–10]

This weakening of heroic prestige is abetted by the severing of the traditional bond between hero and community. It is true that the Son considered as hero is a benefactor of the widest possible community, and even Abdiel speaks in a sense for all the loyal angelic community in his defiance of Satan. But if we agree to limit heroic awe to the human sphere, then we must speak only of individual heroes, lonely men who mount the current of common perversity. Their goodness, as Milton describes them, stands over against the universal evil; no, more than this, it outweighs the evil. Adam's comment on the deluge is offensive and immoral but Milton did not so regard it:

Farr less I now lament for one whole World  
 Of wicked Sons destroyd, then I rejoyce  
 For one Man found so perfet and so just,  
 That God voutsafes to raise another World  
 From him, and all his anger to forget.  
 [XI.874–78]

By the standards of Milton's arrogant moral aristocracy, the damnation of the community matters less than the salvation of the few.

Although the anatomy of evil in the poem is so brilliant as to be unsurpassed in its kind, the dramatization of goodness fails. When Michael, anticipating Saint Paul, refers to charity as "the soul of all the rest" of the virtues, we can only protest that we have seen little of it in the poem. We miss it chiefly in those places where Milton asserts it to exist. When it is scrutinized, God's generosity in dispatching Raphael turns out to be not at all a true magnanimity but a petty legalistic self-righteousness. Adam must not be allowed to "pretend surprisal, unadmonisht, unforewarnd." The majesty of Raphael's descent can only be appreciated if the awkwardness of its motive remains half-forgotten.

The aristocratic doctrine which prefers the few to the many leads directly to Adam's *felix culpa* speech and God's imputed victory over Satan. The meaning of that victory is contained in Satan's lines at the outset:

If then his Providence  
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,  
Our labour must be to pervert that end,  
And out of good still to find means of evil ...

[I.162–65]

Satan has perverted the good of the angelic creation by revolt; out of that evil comes the good of the human creation. Satan will pervert that too, but he still loses the poem, Milton tells us, through the good accruing from the Incarnation and Atonement. It matters not, from this viewpoint, if the great mass of souls are damned, since for the saints

the Earth  
Shall all be Paradise, farr happier place  
Then this of Eden.

[XII.463–65]

It is possible doubtless to share Adam's joy at this outcome, but one's participation is increased if he can personally look forward to that felicity. In this respect, I fear, by the poet's own doctrine, his audience is few indeed. For the rest of us, Michael's depressing recital of our forebears' tribulations mars the perfection of God's victory. At this point *Paradise Lost*, like so many other Christian epics, falls into that ambivalence of joy and pain which plagued the genre, as it now seems, almost inevitably. Theologically its conclusion asks us to applaud, but dramatically it brings us to tears.

This conflict finds a local solution in the concluding expulsion which I have already had occasion to praise. Here for once Milton's compassion is unmixed, and all the constituent feelings—nostalgia, resolution, remorse, bewilderment, timidity, and hope—these make a peace which owes its harmony to the poet's wise pity. These last twenty-five lines go far toward saving the great uneasy poem they conclude. But the mending is the work of image, rhythm, tone, and mood, instruments of local efficacy; as soon as we free ourselves of their atmosphere to reflect on those more abstract planes which the poem also embraces, we rediscover its profound and destructive divisions.

Perhaps however in the last analysis it is pedantic to dwell too long upon those divisions. Even if one chooses, with Sir Walter Raleigh, to regard *Paradise Lost* as a monument to dead ideas, or contradictory or even offensive ideas, one need not return to it out of wonder alone for its magisterial and insidious art. Milton's enlightened reverence for the Bible permitted him to

entertain the possibility that his story was something like a myth. If we too consider it as that, in the fullest sense, if we read it with the detachment we bring to the myth of the *Iliad*, then we need not follow unmoved and unedified Milton's search for a measure and definition of human existence. The work in its plenary wholeness makes a richer definition than any one of its dogmatic parts. And just as Swift betrayed his concern for mankind by railing at it, Milton persuades us of his humanity even in his moments of passionate severity.

## NOTES

1. E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask (New York, 1953), pp. 178–79.

2. These poems are described at length in R. A. Sayce, *French Biblical Epic*.

3. J.B. Broadbent, in *Some Graver Subject* (London, 1960), pp. 47–65, discusses more fully the unpropitiousness of mid-century England for Christian epic. Broadbent remarks (p. 55) that "Milton's genius was irrevocably bent on a divine epic which the public no longer wanted."

4. This movement has been studied by Lily B. Campbell, *Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1959).

5. Thomas Robinson, *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene*, ed. H.O. Sommer (London, 1899), pp. 25–28.

6. Abraham Cowley, *Poems*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge, 1905), pp. 304–305.

7. *Works of Samuel Johnson*, Literary Club Edition, 3 (Troy, 1903), 330.

8. Translated by the indefatigable Sylvester as *Bethulia's Rescue* (1614).

9. The Italian Girolamo Fracastoro was a neo-Latin poet who left uncompleted a work entitled *Ioseph*, first published in 1555 and translated by Sylvester under the title *The Maidens Blush*. In the first book an angel descends to comfort Joseph after his brothers have thrown him into a pit. The passage which seems to have attracted Cowley reads thus in Sylvester's version:

Such was the speed of this Celestiall Bird  
(To prosecute, and execute the Word  
Of his great Master) towards Dothan Down,  
Alighting first upon Mount Tabor's Crown,  
Amaz'd to see his Groves so sodain green,  
And Lawns so fresh, with flow'ry tufts between.  
The Hill-Born Nymphs with quav'ring warbles sing  
His happy Well-Come: Caves and Rocks doe ring  
Redoubled Ecchoes; Woods and Winds withall,  
Whisper about a joyfull Madrigall.

*Complete Works of Joshua Sylvester*, ed. A.B. Grosart, 2 (Edinburgh, 1880), 108, ll. 343–52. Cowley's apparent debt to Sylvester was first pointed out by J. M. McBryde, "A Study of Cowley's *Davideis*," *JGP*, 3 (1901), 24–34. It is of course conceivable that

Cowley knew Fracastoro's Latin poem, but given his unquestionable familiarity with Sylvester, his indebtedness to the English version is much more likely.

10. *Poems*, pp. 12–13.

11. Book II, note 53.

12. Book I, note 24.

13. Thus Davenant, for example: "Though the elder poets, which were then the sacred priests, fed the world with supernatural tales, and so compounded the religion of pleasure and mystery, two ingredients which never failed to work upon the people, whilst for the eternity of their chiefs, more refined by education, they surely intended no such vain provision; yet a Christian poet, whose religion little needs the aids of invention, hath less occasion to imitate such fables as meanly illustrate a probable Heaven by the fashion and dignity of courts, and make a resemblance of Hell out of the dreams of frightened women, by which they continue and increase the melancholy mistake of the people." Preface to *Gondibert*, reprinted in Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, 2, 5. See also Hobbes' "Answer to Davenant" in the same volume, especially pp. 61–62.

14. Cowley was referring to Thomas Heywood's *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels*, published in 1635.

15. *Poems*, p. 14–16.

16. *Poems*, p. 13.

17. Book III, note 45.

18. Book II, note 60.

19. See above, chapter 8, pp. 237–8, 251.

20. *Poems*, p. 14.

21. This report appears in Bishop Newton's edition of *Paradise Lost* (1749) and is there ascribed to hearsay conversations of the long-lived third Mrs. Milton. It is quoted in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. F. A. Patterson, et al., 18 (New York, 1931–38), 390. All quotations from Milton's prose will be taken from this Columbia edition, hereafter referred to as C.E.

22. The text of all verse quotations from Milton is from *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire, Oxford Standard Authors (1958).

23. Lines 204–19. Milton may have remembered one line in this passage:

Nec mora, iam pennis cedentes remigat auras ...

when he wrote of Raphael:

then with quick Fan

Winnows the buxom Air.

An archaic meaning of *buxom* was equivalent to *cedentes*. A. W. Verity compares the latter phrase to a line in Fairfax's Tasso: "With nimble fan the yielding air she rent" (18.49). The Italian original is not so close.

24. The fourth draft of *Adam Unparadiz'd* opens: "The angel Gabriel, either descending or entring, shewing since this globe was created, his frequency as much on earth, as in heavn, describes Paradise." C.E., 18, 231.

In the notes for *Sodom Burning*: “In the last scene to the king & nobles when the fire thunders begin aloft the Angel appears all girt with flames which he saith are the flames of true love & tells the K. who falls down with terror his just suffering ...” *Ibid.*, 234.

25. George R. Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre* (Chicago, 1944), p. 66.

26. “Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.” Isaiah 6:2.

27. The word *Ardors* in line 249 refers to the seraphim, the highest of the nine angelic orders, associated by the pseudo-Dionysius and later angelologists with a fervent and burning love of God.

28. F.T. Prince, *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse* (Oxford, 1954), p. 129n. B. Rajan, in his *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader* (London, 1947), is a recent critic who lays particular stress on the classicism of Milton's style.

29. “Io ho per fermo, the le lingue d'ogni paese ... siano d'un medesimo valore, & da' mortali ad un fine con un giuditio formate; the io non vorrei the voi ne parlaste come di cosa dalla natura prodotta; essendo fatte, & regolate dallo artificio delle persone & beneplacito loro.” Sperone Speroni, “Dialogo delle Lingue,” in *Dialoghi* (Venice, 1596), pp. 122–23.

30. One might cite the *Areopagitica* virtually passim in illustration, as well as large parts of the Seventh Proclusion and *Of Education*. Consider for example Milton's remark after sketching his proposed study of the trivium: “From hence, and not till now, will be the right season of forming them to be able writers and composers in every excellent matter, when they shall be thus fraught with an universal insight into things.” C.E., 4, 286.

31. Haller cites the following passage as typical: “Whereas men in their writings affect the praise of flowing eloquence and loftiness of phrase, the holy Ghost ... hath used great simplicities and wonderful plainness, applying himselfe to the capacities of the most unlearned ... and under the vaile of simple and plaine speech, there shineth such divine wisdom and glorious majestie, that all the human writings in the world though never so adorned with the flowers of eloquence, and sharpe conceits of wit and learning cannot so deeply pearce the heart of man.” John Downname, *Christian Warfare*, pp. 339–40. quoted by William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1957). p. 130. This Puritan attitude toward language resembles in certain respects the attitude of scientific rationalists like Hobbes and Sprat, although the two attitudes are based on very different presuppositions.

32. C.E., 3, 35.

33. C.E., 3, 34; 5, 5; 14, 5; etc. Compare Sonnets XI, XII, XV, and “On the new forcers of Conscience.”

34. C.E., 11, 3.

35. C.E., 3, 241. The quotation from Jeremiah appears at 3, 231.

36. C.E., 3, 235. Milton echoes the conventional classical expression of a comparable, but less “sincere,” inspirationalist attitude in the opening of his *Elegia Quinta*.

37. See Maynard Mack, introduction to *Milton* volume of English Masterpieces (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1961).

38. Compare the following passage in Book Four, where Satan as tiger seems to stray into a simile while still remaining outside it:

Down he alights among the sportful Herd  
Of those fourfooted kindes, himself now one,  
Now other, as thir shape servd best his end  
Neerer to view his prey ...

... about them round

A Lion now he stalkes with fierie glare,  
Then as a Tiger, who by chance hath spi'd  
In some Purlieu two gentle Fawnes at play,  
Strait couches close, then rising changes oft  
His couchant watch ...

(IV.396–99, 401–06)

39. Isaiah 40:4.

40. Matthew 23:12. Compare Luke 14:11; 18:14.

41. Ezekiel 21:26.

42. Luke 1:52, 43.

43. I Peter 5:5–6.

44. Job 24:24. Ezekiel 31:10–18. Micah 7:8. Matthew 11:23. James 1:9–10. Ephesians 4:9–10. Philippians 2:5–10.

45. *La Premiere Sepmaine*, Premier Jour, 557–74; 669–70. The line from Vaughan is from “The Morning Watch.” Compare Milton’s line from the verses “At a vacation exercise”: “Yet being above them, he shall be below them” (l. 80).

46. See *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation #21: “I am readier to fall to the earth, now I am up, than I was when I lay in bed ... Even rising is the way to ruin!” “Now I am up, I am ready to sink lower than before.” See also Sermon XV, Folio of 1640, preached at Whitehall, March 8, 1622.

47. *City of God*, Book XIV, chapter 13.

48. C.E., 6, 149.

49. See for example Chapman’s *Iliad*, 2.72 ff., and his commentary on this passage.

50. I am indebted to my colleague Geoffrey Hartmann for valuable bibliographical information on the phoenix in antiquity. The most useful single study is by J. Hubaux and M. Leroy, *Le Mythe du Phénix dans les Littératures Grecque et Latine* (Liege, 1939).

51. Milton may have taken a hint from Marino who, in his *Gerusalemme Distrutta*, compared all the angels in heaven to phoenixes (Zirardini, ed., p. 493). Another extended description of the bird can be found in Du Bartas (*Premiere Sepmaine*, Cinquiesme Jour, 551–98), although Milton did not follow the common association of the phoenix with Christ found there.



52. Claudian, "On Stilicho's Consulship," trans. M. Platnauer, Loeb Classical Library, 2 (London and New York, 1922), 414–20.

53. R.T. Rundle Clark, "The Origin of the Phoenix," *Birmingham Historical Journal*, 2 (1949–50), 132.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

55. Cranwell edition, pp. 354–55.

56. *Samson Agonistes*, 1699 ff.

57. 185 ff.

58. divino spirant altaria fumo  
Et Pelusiacas productus ad usque paludes  
Indus odor penetrat nares completque salubri  
Tempestate viros et nectare dulcior aura  
Ostia nigrantis Nili septena vaporat.

59. *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition*, p. 281.

60. The fourth, *Balme* or balsam, is related to the fourth plant, cinnamon, in Ovid. The three in Ovid also appear in Du Bartas.

61. See Isabel MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost as "Myth"* (Cambridge, 1959). Mrs. MacCaffrey's book seems to me one of the freshest and most seminal studies of Milton in many years, and I am happy to acknowledge my indebtedness to her.

62. ll. 57–60, 67–69.

63. The coincidence may be worthy of note that in both the poems of Lactantius (l. 34) and Claudian (l. 62) as well as in the passage from Du Bartas (l. 581), Nature is semi-personified as she is in Milton. This appears to be additional evidence that the passage following the phoenix simile was influenced by memories of the phoenix literature.

64. Milton's faith in the goodness of matter underlies not only the profusion of Paradise but also the unconventional refusal to follow Tasso, Marino, and Cowley in dressing up his angel with a temporary body. Raphael needs to make no elaborate toilette like Cowley's Gabriel because he already has a "material" body. We see him in "his proper shape." Apparently Michael must assume a feigned appearance because the fallen Adam is no longer privileged to see him as he looks in heaven.

65. John E. Smith, "Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy," *Review of Metaphysics*, 9 (1955), 260.

66. Allen is surely in the right when he refutes the aspersions of Macaulay and Eliot upon Milton's visual imagery. *Paradise Lost* makes a great and subtle appeal to the eye, as I myself have argued. When I speak of Milton's greater emphasis on the ear, I am not of course thinking of his "verbal music" or any such thing, but of his appeal to the inner ear of understanding.

67. VI.817 ff.; XI.689 ff.; XII.386 ff.

ANGUS FLETCHER

*The Transcendental Masque*

That *Comus* is no ordinary masque has long been felt. In dedicating the published work to John, Lord Viscount Brackley, Lawes said that although *Comus* was “not openly acknowledged by the author, yet it is a legitimate offspring, so lovely, and so much desired, that the often copying of it hath tired my pen to give my several friends satisfaction, and brought me to a necessity of producing it to the public view.”<sup>1</sup> These friends found an excellence posterity has confirmed. Yet beyond the eloquence of the “series of lines,” to use Johnson’s phrase, *Comus* has presented a problematic aspect in both theme and form.

The extraordinary bulk of critical commentary on the Miltonic treatment of chastity, a critique as subtle as it is learned—much if not all of it leading into the mysteries of Christian or Neoplatonic theology—will bear witness to the ambiguity of themes in *Comus*. We may perhaps be impatient with the questions, proofs, and counterproofs of thematic criticism. But we cannot dismiss the crisis implied in this lore. No simple way out of tangled Miltonic image and theme will be forthcoming, and if a formal approach to *Comus* is proposed, it should be constantly attuned to the complications of theme which have made the work so tantalizing to its readers.<sup>2</sup> What needs to be done, following Robert M. Adams’ lead,<sup>3</sup> is to explain the doubts of critics about *Comus*, yet without explaining them away. Generations of critics are never, taken as a whole, wrong. They are responding to something, and

---

From *The Transcendental Masque: An Essay on Milton’s Comus*. © 1971 by Cornell University.

the historical critic in his turn should respond to this continuity of critical awareness. In dealing with *Comus* there is no need to deny its dramatic force. *Comus*, naively viewed, is a markedly dramatic piece. But how so? Perhaps it would be useful to take Dr. Johnson seriously and ask if, as he called it, *Comus* is not “a drama in the epic style.”

Woodhouse wisely referred criticism of *Comus* to the remarkable passage of *An Apology for Smectynnuus* where Milton recounts the progress of his almost obsessive concern with idea of chastity.<sup>4</sup> Among several striking personal reminiscences there runs a key motif: Milton set the problem of chastity in the context of a largely literary experience. He began his education in purity in the poetic world of “the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura,” and proceeded in due time (“whither my younger feet had wandered”) to “those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings,” and thence “from the laureate fraternity of poets, riper years and the ceaseless round of study and reading led me to the shady spaces of philosophy, but chiefly to the divine volumes of Plato and his equal, Xenophon.” Throughout the account we sense not only the pursuit of the “abstracted sublimities” of knowledge and virtue, but in the course of this pursuit, the sublimation of thought into character, so that we can well believe the poet when he announces his early won creed: “that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praiseworthy.” This is not hermetic pretension, though there is a smell of the magus about the poet as sublime poem; Milton here betrays that characteristically total involvement of his whole self with his thought, an involvement mediated by his poetic vocation. For through the poetic second voice, he would discover the self defined by all the prior patterns and compositions of the best and most honorable things.

The Johnsonian epithet comes into focus. A drama written in epic style would first of all flow like a narrative poem, and secondly it would be a drama raised above the requirements of realistic decorum to a level of inspired, prophetic, or epic voice, that is, raised to the vehement level of style described in Longinus’ famed treatise. Johnson did not clarify the distinction between the usual dramatic genres and the epic drama, but Thomas Warton did, when in his edition of *Milton* (1791) he said that “*Comus* is a suite of Speeches, not interesting by discrimination of character; not conveying a variety of incidents; not gradually exciting curiosity; but perpetually attracting attention by sublime sentiment, by fanciful imagery of the richest vein, by an exuberance of picturesque description, poetical allusion, and ornamental expression.” The prime mover of the drama in epic

style would seem to be the “sublime sentiment,” with its usual picturesque accompaniments.

In *Comus*, therefore, Milton is “unfolding those chaste and high mysteries” which, in conjunction with the Holy Scriptures, veil and reveal the secrets of divine wisdom. In the terms of Pico della Mirandola the poet is at once both magus and *interpretes*. Chastity must be envisioned in the most sacred languages, and, by conversion, the language of the poet, arising in the devotion to the ideal of the chaste, must achieve sublimity if it is to equal the transcendental challenge. Milton writes about chastity continuously, in tracts on marriage, love, and divorce—even on freedom of speech and thought—and in his major poems, all of which deal with virtue as an effluence of chastity. The *Apology* suggests something even more radical about the Miltonic career: that it was the literary enactment of one vast, many-sided *personal* struggle for the comprehension of the idea of the chaste mystery, and therefore that as a career the life of Milton indeed has the prime requisite of a poem: namely, it has a hero. Milton becomes a poet-poem in this heroic manner. The idea of chastity is for him a burning, luminous, radiant core of energy, and the recurrent theme of temptation, on which Frye has commented so eloquently, is but the dramatic trial of the chaste vision.<sup>5</sup> For chastity, like grace (if that is in any ordinary sense a “virtue”), metaphorically permits only perfect motion: that is, motion which redeems the wandering, mazy, labyrinthine error of ordinary life. Chastity finds its model of movement in the circular form of the Ptolemaic universe; it is perfect, like a sphere, with no beginning and no end. How then express its forms and implications? This is the mystery that Milton wished to suggest, and went so far as to describe, in the *Apology*.

Milton imagines himself living and acting on heroic lines. Frye has pointed out the difference between his “radical, revolutionary temperament” and the conservative temperament of Spenser.

The radical or revolutionary artist impresses us, first of all as a tremendous personal force, a great man who happened to be an artist in one particular field but who would still have been a remarkable man whatever he had gone into. His art has in consequence a kind of oratorical relation to him: his creative *persona* reveals his personality instead of concealing it. He does not enter into the forms of his art like an indwelling spirit, but approaches them analytically and externally, tearing them to pieces and putting them together again in a way which expresses his genius and not theirs. In listening to the Kyrie of the Bach B Minor Mass we feel what amazing things the fugue can do; in listening to the finale of Beethoven’s Opus 106, we feel what amazing things can be done with the fugue. This latter is the

feeling we have about *Comus* as a masque, when we come to it from Jonson or Campion. Because the art of the revolutionary artist follows a rhythm of personal development external to itself, it goes through a series of metamorphoses: the revolutionary artist plunges into one “period” after another, marking his career off into separate divisions.<sup>6</sup>

The continuous revelation of a giant personality behind the mask is crucial to the work of an artist like Milton. But in assessing the work itself, we need a notion like “the transcendental.” The formal peculiarity of this style of work is again finely suggested in Frye’s distinction between the conservative and revolutionary aspects of poetry.

The revolutionary aspect of Milton also comes out in that curious mania for doing everything himself which led him to produce his own treatise on theology, his own national history, his own dictionary and grammar, his own art of logic.... Both kinds of genius may seek for an art that transcends art, a poetry or music that goes beyond poetry or music. But the conservative artists finds—if this metaphor conveys anything intelligible to the reader—his greatest profundities at the centre of his art; the radical artist finds them on the frontier.... Milton, like Beethoven, is continually exploring the boundaries of his art, getting more experimental and radical as he goes on.<sup>7</sup>

*Comus* fits into this radical experimentation; it transcends by formal pressures on the normal boundaries of the masque. It “transcends art” in this sense precisely, and I would hold that the other transcendence, of which Frye rightly speaks, is only the fulfillment of the more limited possibilities of classical selectivity and repose. There is, perhaps, a further distinction to be made, though it does not really contradict Frye’s notion, between the transcendence of the radical style and the perfectionism of the conservative style. The former issues, as Frye suggests, in a revolutionary attitude toward tradition, the latter in a neoclassic piety toward rules—at least if the energy of creation is not coequal with the energies of self-expression.

*Comus*, should it fit this broad view of Miltonic creativity, can be only partially illuminated by historical “sources” which are supposed to explain its power and its complexity. To argue that Milton had various models is to repeat the obvious, unless one further asks, What was his experimental attitude toward those models? For the transcendental re-creation of an inherited form is always so new and revolutionary in feeling and form that it will yield none of its secrets to the critic who is, at bottom, unconcerned with the radical mentality bringing such a work into being. In the case of *Comus*,

as we shall see, the obvious use of a whole, range of magic devices, persons, and scenes provides the setting for the radical encounter with masque as genre. Milton picks exactly the theme and variations which will permit him to exercise a virtuoso control over his masque.

( ... )

#### THYRSIS: THE ORPHIC PERSONA

Orpheus had been a central character in Campion's *The Lords Maske* (1613) where he served a purpose rather similar to the Daemon's purpose in *Comus*.<sup>43</sup> Both figures command the powers of song and can summon the agents of perfect incantation. But while the singing magician is the happier version of Orpheus, he has another, less happy side, in line with other myths of the culture bringer. Besides "building the lofty rime" he can suffer the Orphic death, and Adonis-like, become the sacrificial victim whose highest parallel is Christ—a similitude Milton draws upon for *Lycidas*, which he significantly designates a monody. The Orphic persona thus has a double valence, which complicates and deepens his use for the utterance of the poet's "second voice." In commenting on the importance of the Orphic legend for Virgilian creativity, Berger has stressed the phrase from the *Aeneid*, Book IV, describing the loss of Euridice: *Orpheus respexit* ("Orpheus looked back"). "Here *respicere* means to look back unguardedly, in longing, toward the object of love. The poet must learn to look back at the beloved past without destroying its life, or his own happiness and control. *Respicere* can also mean to look back, in the sense of reflecting on, or, to look again, in the sense of revising."<sup>44</sup> In *Comus* we find a parallel situation: here the "looking back," is conveyed, as we shall see, in sonorous form, in the resonating mirror of the echo song. In both cases we are dealing with a deep irony in the culture bringer's passion. What he values is never to be directly his, since to possess the loved object would be to destroy it; it can only be his if it is reflected, recreated, resonated. The Orphic design is, in this light, a myth of resonance. Fulfillment is an echo.

The mystery of repetition is the secret of the Virgilian *respicere*. Kierkegaard asked, Is repetition possible? The myth of Orpheus embodies one set of answers to that question. It is thus significant that Orpheus was the hero of heroes for early opera, that most expressive art form. John Arthos has recently argued for an affinity between Monteverdi's operatic work and *Samson Agonistes*.<sup>45</sup> Gretchen Finney has shown operatic analogies between *Comus* and the *Catena d'Adone*.<sup>46</sup> These parallels are haunting chiefly because in the Orphic aspect of Thyrsis, Milton seems to be projecting a mythic meaning that was strongly projected by the first operas. Kerman has described their mythic basis:

The myth of Orpheus, furthermore, deals with man specifically as artist, and one is drawn inevitably to see in it, mirrored with a kind of proleptic vision, the peculiar problems of the opera composer. Initially Orpheus is the supreme lyric artist. In the classic view he is the ideal of the prize-winning *kitharista*—or, in Christian allegory, the evangelical psalmist who charmed the melancholy Saul. To the fourteenth century, he is the minstrel who exacts his boon from the Fairy King; to the sixteenth, perhaps, the madrigalist; to the nineteenth, proud Walther who persuades the German pedants. The eighteenth century painted him, tremulously, as the amiable singer of Metastasio's faint verses who entranced the King of Spain. But for Orpheus the lyric singer, the crisis of life becomes the crisis of his lyric art: art must now move into action, on to the tragic stage of life. It is a sublime attempt. Can its symbolic boldness have escaped the musicians of 1600, seeking new power in the stronger forms of drama? Orpheus' new triumph is to fashion the lament that harrows hell out of his own great sorrowing emotion—this too they must have specially marked, wrestling as they were with new emotional means, harrowing, dangerous to manage. But the fundamental conflict of the myth transcends that time and this medium, and extends to every artist. It is the problem of emotion and its control, the summoning of feeling to an intensity and communicability and form which the action of life heeds and death provisionally respects. All this Orpheus as artist achieves. But as man he cannot shape his emotions to Pluto's shrewd decree; face to face with the situation, he looks back, and fails. Life and art are not necessarily one.

Kerman goes on to show that the mythic failure of Orpheus is by no means clear or self-evident in its significance. Yet the failure is a great operatic crux. "To be sure, this 'problem of control' is an abstraction; few artists, and certainly not Monteverdi or Gluck, have drawn so clean and scientific an issue. Nor did Orpheus, in the simple, unelaborated myth. It is the dramatist's task to clarify the issue for Orpheus."<sup>47</sup> And we can say, with Milton in mind, it is the masque maker's task to clarify the Orphic failure by treating the masque as "defense and resource."

Barber has said that if *Comus* fails, "it fails by a failure of rhythm ... mere vehemence, mere assertion ... and where our imagination is allowed to rest on the merely literal or merely intellectual contest, the defense of chastity lacks the final cogency of pleasure." Barber finds this vehemence in Collins himself—perhaps according to Milton's design. Barber would seem to support the view of song as liberating spell: "It is notable that the images

which suggest a benign sexual release refer to song.”<sup>48</sup> Milton has accorded success to his benign magician, the Attendant Spirit. But evidence of the Attendant Spirit’s power is not apparent in a mere reading of his imagery. We have to scan his rhythms, and besides, we have to make use of our surviving musical manuscripts of *Comus* in order to discover the metrical style Milton and Lawes together created. For here will be the antidote to all false vehemence and spurious assertiveness. To restate Barber’s question, the masque has to achieve the natural grace of its own chosen *metron*. Compared with the use of verse and music, the use of dance is minimal, even negligible.

It may even be misleading to suggest that *Comus* has much in common with the earlier dance-drama of the typical court masques. Unlike them, *Comus* could be presented without dances—a loss which would obliterate many earlier masques—although the spectacle and the meaning do in fact profit, in due measure, from the two dances that Milton did allow. Whereas the earlier models, Jonsonian especially, carried a weight of meaning in their dances and spectacle, Milton’s work has displaced this burden and given it to the imagery of the speeches and the recitative music of their declamation.

Seeking the source of this “musical” style in the mythography of the work, we would associate expressivity with the Orphic voice. Orpheus sings in suffering. The music he makes is not instrumental: in *Ad Patrem*, Milton praises to his father the true Orphic bard (the *vates*), who sang at ancient festal occasions. He asks: “In brief, of what use is the idle modulation of the voice if it lacks words and sense and rhythmical speech? That kind of music suits woodland singers, not Orpheus, who by his song, not his lyre, held back rivers, gave ears to the oak trees, and by his singing drew tears from the shades of the dead. Such fame he owes to song” (ll. 50–55). This distinction Ficino had made.

In his treatise on divine madness, he states that the human soul acquires through the ears a memory of that divine music which is found first in the eternal mind of God, and second, in the order and movements of the heavens. There is also a twofold imitation of that divine music among men, a lower one through voices and instruments, and a higher one through verse and metre. The former kind is called vulgar music, whereas the latter is called by Plato serious music and poetry.<sup>49</sup>

Milton was to espouse the higher music in his own works, where he forged “willing chains and sweet captivity.” *At a Vacation Exercise* makes perfectly clear the equation in Milton’s mind between music and the verse of his native language, which remains independent of any strictly musical accompaniment. Even when he praises the singing of Leonora Baroni, the great Roman singer, he does so in terms that place the standard of beauty in



a celestial frame. God or the Holy Ghost, he tells her, “moves with secret power in your throat—moves with power, and graciously teaches mortal hearts how they can insensibly become accustomed to immortal sounds. But, if God is all things and interpenetrates all, in you alone he speaks, and in silence holds all else” (ll. 5–10). The second epigram to Baroni confers on her the power of reanimating the dead Pentheus, the archetypal victim of maenadic bacchic rage. To give Pentheus life is to make harmony the means of salvation. Milton imagines this sublime sacrificial act in ambivalent terms, for it was Orpheus whom the maenads tore to pieces.

Perhaps only in *Samson Agonistes* and its choral inventions did Milton control the full flood of this ambivalence. There the Orphic voice is committed equally to salvation and self-destruction. An unwitting yet half-chosen suicide rewards the singer who descends into the underworld. It is not clear how much of a sense of this descent is left in *Samson Agonistes*; this is a skewed myth, but Samson’s doom elicits pure outcries. Samson is the ultimate Orphic hero; his blindness drives him into a totally auditory world of hearing and speaking. As for persona, it is not unwarranted to question the parallels between the hero and his poet. The choice of Samson as tragic voice, for all its risk of dramatizing the stasis of tragic energy rather than its motions, is still the most daring of Milton’s choices. Now he can fully utter the drama of an entangled self-consciousness; now it is proper for the hero to be in part the poet himself, and equally proper for the poet to voice his absolute command of the poetic medium. The final twist in this triumph of a rational self-awareness (and its mystery) is the invention of the Chorus, for this Chorus is planned on the principle of echo, to give resonance—to provide a resonating surface and mirror—to the second voice of the poet.

The particulars of every Miltonic work differ, but common to them all is a penchant for enclosed vastness. That the poet understood his own will to encompass may be seen throughout his writings, since he is generally so conscious of what, as a writer, he is attempting. No better example could be given than the encomium upon Cromwell in *The Second Defence of the People of England*, where, expanding on a traditional rhetorical topic, Milton uses the terminology of enclosure and expansion:

It is not possible for me in the narrow limits in which I circumscribe myself on this occasion, to enumerate the many towns which he has taken, the many battles which he has won. The whole surface of the British empire has been the scene of his exploits, and the theatre of his triumphs; which alone would furnish ample materials for a history, and want a copiousness of narration not inferior to the magnitude and diversity of the transactions.<sup>50</sup>

Later, observing that “the title of king was unworthy the transcendent majesty of your character,” Milton defines the problem of naming the surpassing glory: “Actions such as yours surpass, not only the bounds of our admiration, but our titles; and, like the points of the pyramids, which are lost in the clouds, they soar above the possibilities of titular commendation.” Cromwell had to let himself be called Lord Protector because it was “expedient, that the highest pitch of virtue should be circumscribed within the bounds of some human appellation.” In *Tetrachordon*, Milton describes the practical problem of “the abundance of argument that presses to be utter’d, and the suspense of judgement what to choose, and how in the multitude of reason, to be not tedious.”<sup>51</sup> It is the trial of superabundance, of genius conscious that it generates.

Johnson was right. It was in Milton’s character always to choose subjects “on which too much could not be said, on which he might tire his fancy without censure of extravagance.” Inheriting a large literary capital, Milton put this imagistic wealth to work. The capitalistic analogy is hardly a metaphor here. Milton treats literary tradition like an entrepreneur, investing one work in another, continuously making “mergers.” This parodistic takeover particularly colors the Ovidian elements of *Comus*, which show that myth is a currency convertible from one generation to another. *Comus* the seducer replays Leander’s sermons of love to Hero. Suddenly, the poem of *Hero and Leander* rises like an apparition, staring *Comus* in the face. We shall need to speculate further on this mirroring.

Then, too, Milton has the power of extreme concentration. He holds a whole tradition of exegesis suspended in the little speech on haemony, where Thyrsis knowingly refers to “that Moly / Which Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave.” It was to this moly that the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes applied an early allegorical gloss, perhaps about 200 B.C. (and in transcribing Cleanthes’ view, Apollonius the Sophist made what may be the earliest use of the term *allegoria*): “Cleanthes the philosopher says that Reason is indicated allegorically, by which the impulses and passions are mollified.”<sup>52</sup> Haemony is more than moly, as scholars have labored to show. It acts magically in the framework of a dramatic action. But it has the effect of a *logical* power as well. It is entangled in a kind of witchcraft, the verbal spell, for as Milton would know from the *Remedia Amoris*, Ovid had said: “If anyone thinks that the beneficial herbs of Haemonia and the arts of magic can avail, let him take his own risk. That is the old way of witchcraft; my patron Apollo gives harmless aid in sacred songs.” One can no longer tell if haemony is a drug or a word. *Comus* is full of such terms. Extravaganza without extravagance results. The richness of commentary on the *Maske* itself suggests that wealth is one aim of transcendental form.

## NOTES

1. As in the 1645 edition, in Douglas Bush, *The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton* (Boston, 1965), 113. This work is hereafter referred to as *PW*.

2. A wealth of allusion to learned articles, and so forth, in John Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition*, should not obscure the limits of Demaray's argument, which seems to depend upon the notion that dance defines the masque as Milton evolves its genre in *Comus*, an assumption that would force one to equate *Arcades* with *Comus*, or even to argue that *Arcades* is the more perfect masque. Yet the most obvious thing about *Comus* is that it has almost no dances; they have none of the formal iconographic import and intricacy usually given to court-masque choreography. They sufficed on the occasion of the original performance, but since a printed libretto can also, if its author chooses, yield a dance-drama, we should begin with the fact that this libretto fails to do so.

3. *Milton and the Modern Critics* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966), repr. from *Ikon: John Milton and the Modern Critics* (Ithaca, 1955).

4. A. S. P. Woodhouse, "The Argument in Milton's *Comus*," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, II (1941), 46; the passage will be found in John Milton, *Prose Selections*, ed. Merritt Hughes (New York, 1947), 156–159. Bush (*PW*, 110) says, "That all-important passage ... needs to be read and reread," and quotes George Sandys' commentary on Ovid's Circe: "Men whose appetites 'revolt from the sovereignty of reason (by which we are only like unto God, and armed against depraved affections)' can never 'return into their country (from whence the soul deriveth her celestial original) unless disenchanting and cleansed from their former impurity.'"

5. Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (Toronto, 1965), 9, 126 ff. Most problematic is the Miltonic idea of "temptation to premature action."

6. *Ibid.*, 90–91. *Speaking of The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Frye observes that, as a revolutionary thinker, "Milton will appeal to precedent only with the greatest reluctance."

7. *Ibid.*, 91–92.

43. *The Lords Maske* includes the figure of Entheus, or Poetic Fury, whom Orpheus (l. 84) identifies with Phoebus Apollo.

44. Berger, "Archaism, Vision, and Revision," 32.

45. *Milton and the Italian Cities* (London, 1968), Part II, "Milton and Monteverdi," 129–206. See also Arthos, *On "A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle"* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1954).

46. *Musical Backgrounds*, 175–194.

47. *Opera as Drama*, 27–28.

48. "'A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle,'" in Summers, ed., *The Lyric and Dramatic Milton*, 65. This essay is reprinted in Diekhoff, *A Maske at Ludlow*, with an interesting response to questions which Summers had posed in the earlier book.

49. P.O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, II, 157–158.

50. *Selected Prose*, ed. Hughes, 349. See also Douglas Bush et al., eds., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (New Haven and London, 1966), IV, 668.

51. *Complete Prose Works*, II, 614.

52. Quoted by R. P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event* (London, 1959), 37, from *The Fragments of Zeno and Cleanthes*, ed. A.C. Pearson (London, 1891).



JOHN HOLLANDER

*Echo Schematic*

We might dwell for a moment on one of the most famous fragments of broken refrain in our literature, the nonce burden in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" following the mention of the "perilous seas in fiery lands forlorn" (70). The next strophe begins "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self!" (71-72). The echoing repetition returns, as has often been observed, another sense of the word forlorn, as if some of the perils of the seas lay in the fragility of the vision which they helped compose. The word is, even here, Miltonic, with its resounding of a literal and a figurative meaning. It recalls Adam's sense of life without Eve in Paradise: "To live again in these wild Woods forlorn" (*Paradise Lost* IX, 910), where the last word trails away in a cloud of sad prophetic irony: "these wild Woods forlorn" are not the wilderness of fallen nature. Adam thinks he means Eden figuratively, but he is, alas, literally invoking both the fallen world and the lost unfallen one: his trope of the place of loss is an unwittingly literal designation of the loss of place. Keats' "forlorn" is like a very echo from within his text, but it reaches back to another voice behind it.

The scheme of refrain is likewise linked to the echo of affirmation and acknowledgment that we have already remarked in Hesiod, pastoral tradition, and so forth, in the mythopoeic account of its origination in *Paradise Lost*. The First Hymn (V, 153-208) invokes heavenly powers for aid in amplification of its praising voice, even as the Lady invokes Echo's

---

From *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*. © 1981 by The Regents of the University of California.

amplification in *Comus*. But the unfallen hymn of praise transcends the *anaphora* and catalogue of its precursor Psalm 148 by seeming to generate its refrain—indeed, the very idea of refrain—during the course of its unfolding. Before moving on from echoing schemes to ad hoc tropes of echo, we might examine the Original Refrain in detail.

Adam and Eve (V, 147-52) are in Paradise

to praise

Thir Maker, in fit strains pronounc't or sung  
 Unmeditated, such prompt eloquence  
 Flow'd from thir lips, in Prose or numerous Verse,  
 More tuneable than needed Lute or Harp  
 To add more sweetness

—or, as we might continue, to add more of the significance which Schopenhauer felt, and Nietzsche quoted him as feeling, accompanying instrumental music gave to utterance and action. Adam and Eve's language, we are implicitly told, needed no supplementary ethos or pathos, and certainly none of the logos which, for romantic thought, purely instrumental music came to embody as well.

In this total a capella song, classical and unfallen, the original pair first observe—echoing, *sotto voce*, Psalm 19—that even God's "lowest works" "declare / Thy goodness beyond thought, and Power Divine" (V, 158–59). Then they move into the imperative, hortatory mode of the hymn which follows. They call for the "Sons of Light" to "speak," thus reversing the great pattern of fallen praise (in Pindar's first Pythian Ode, and in the myth of the statue of Memnon) in which light strikes a figurative echo in literal sound from a body, instead of merely casting a shadow: "Thou Sun, of this great World both Eye and Soul, / Acknowledge him thy Greater, sound his praise / In thy eternal course" (V, 171–73).

This is the hymn's own primary voice. Its first *Nachklang* is picked up tentatively, across an enjambment which cuts the amplifying echo, the distant *epistrophe*, in half:

Moon, that now meet'st the orient Sun, now flit  
 With the first Stars, fixt in thir Orb that flies,  
 And yee five other wand'ring Fires that move  
 In mystic Dance not without Song, resound  
 His praise, who out of Darkness call'd up Light.  
 (V, 175–79)

Adam, who will soon himself call up Sound out of Silence, then establishes

the formula / (verb) + “his praise” / in the second half of the significantly varied end-stopped lines that grow into the refrain of the remainder of the hymn:

Air, and ye Elements of eldest birth  
 Of Nature’s Womb, that in quaternion run  
 Perpetual Circle, multiform, and mix  
 And nourish all things, let your ceaseless change  
 Vary to our great Maker still new praise.

Ye Mists and Exhalations that now rise  
 From Hill or steaming Lake, dusky or grey,  
 Till the Sun paint your fleecy skirts with Gold,  
 In honor to the World’s great Author rise,  
 Whether to deck with Clouds th’uncolor’d sky,  
 Or wet the thirsty Earth with falling showers,  
 Rising or falling still advance his praise.

His praise ye Winds, that from four Quarters blow,  
 Breathe soft or loud; and wave your tops, ye Pines,  
 With every Plant, in sign of Worship wave.  
 Fountains and yee, that warble as ye flow,  
 Melodious murmurs, warbling tune his praise.

Join voices all ye living Souls; ye Birds,  
 That singing up to Heaven Gate ascend,  
 Bear on your wings and in your notes his praise;

Yee that in Waters glide, and yee that walk  
 The Earth, and stately tread, or lowly creep;  
 Witness if I be silent, Morn or Even,  
 To Hill, or Valley, Fountain or fresh shade  
 Made vocal by my Song, and taught his praise.

(V, 180–204)

This is not glossed by the narration as “the First Refrain,” but such, indeed, it is. Like the famous “*cras amet qui numquam amavit, quiquam amavit cras amet*” line of the *Pervigilium Veneris* (“tomorrow those who have never loved will love, and those who have will love tomorrow”), the broken echo concludes, and builds up, “stanzas” of various lengths, summing up the essential qualities of the different choral voices. The elements “vary” the praise, as the rest of the hymn will “vary” the refrain. Thus, the “Mists and Exhalations,” “Rising or falling still advance his praise” (with an echo of



“still” from line 184); then the lovely anadiplosis of line 192, where the winds pick up the motion of the clouds, transmit it to the visible waving of the trees, and complete a traditional symphony of the *locus amoenus* with the warbling of the water’s eloquence, followed by the bird song.<sup>6</sup>

The final stanza (200–204) returns to the singers themselves. A *tornata* that, like the conclusion of *Lycidas*, frames as well as completes, it is self-referential. Its self-reference is like that of the prayer, which concludes in a kind of caudal or meta-prayer for its own efficacy (and which, in Herbert’s poems in *The Temple*, is frequently disposed throughout the main text in a constant figurative undersong). In addition, it invokes the primary world of pastoral. The sounding landscape is “made vocal” by poetry by means of that primary animation which, for Vico, is the “most luminous” of tropes, in that it makes fables of the inanimate by giving “sense and passion” to things, here both embodied in voice. The authenticity of the hymn itself is here avowedly confined to a realm of figure: all that can bear witness to unfallen man’s praising voice are the stock fictions of pastoral fable, “taught” his praise. This echoes Virgil’s first eclogue, “*formosam resonare dotes Amaryllida in silvas,*” even as they are both reechoed, in fallen modulations, in Adam’s forlorn cry in Book X (860–62):

O Woods, O Fountains, Hillocks, Dales and Bow’rs,  
 With other echo late I taught your Shades  
 To answer, and resound far other Song.

Adam here is already like Virgil’s Tityrus and the “starv’d lover” of Book IV, line 769. Even the Original Song is full of echoes, although in *Paradise Lost*, an internal *Nachklang* frequently generates a proleptic *Vorklang*, or preecho. In the poem’s pattern of unfallen organization, we must take this hymn to be the true *locus amoenus* (Milton’s *locus classicus*) of pastoral echo, and its rhetoric to be that of pastoral praise, not loss.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the scheme of echoing refrain here is that it is employed tropically. The first “echo” of the series which increases, rather than diminishes, in signficatory volume is itself a metaphor of the reflection of light. The sun (as Conti says, “author of light to the other stars”) “sounds / His praise”; the other heavenly bodies “resound / His praise” in echo, and in conceptual parallel to their return of solar light.

The Original Hymn, then, manifests not only the First Refrain, but the First Echo.<sup>7</sup> Even the angelic choir’s “sacred Song” in Book III (372–415) has no refrain, nor indeed any other echoing schemes. It is like sung doctrine, and requires the accompaniment of “Harps ever tun’d, that glittering by thir side / Like Quivers hung”—that is, aside from the shade of pun on “quaver” as musical ornament, harps with strings like the glittering arrows of erotic putti. It concludes with the neoclassical lyric formula “never

shall my Harp thy praise I Forget.” The only natural acoustical echoes occurring previously in *Paradise Lost* are in the demonic regions of Book II, where they are used in carefully turned figures to describe the nature of damned assent. The fallen angels agreeing with Mammon after his speech produce a sound likened to that of winds stored in hollow rocks, played back later “with hoarse cadence” to “lull” anchored ships (284–90). But we must remember that this concord will only lead to the full disclosure of its own acoustic nature in the transformed hisses later on (Book X). And so, too, with the assent given to Satan’s words further on:

If chance the radiant Sun with farewell sweet  
 Extend his ev’ning beam, the fields revive,  
 The birds thir notes renew, and bleating herds  
 Attest thir joy, that hill and valley rings.

(II, 492–95)

(Here, too, light strikes forth sound, and “herds” half-echo “birds.”) But this very simile, his epic need to use it, and its lamentable success in the poem cause Milton to interject, in one of those rare moments of intrusion, his revulsion. In Book IV, he cries out “Honor dishonorable” in disgust at the notion that postlapsarian *pudeur* about nudity was present in Paradise. Here in Book II, he cries out: “O shame to men! Devil with Devil damn’d / Firm concord holds, men only disagree.” Both this damnable echoing and the unechoing, unfigured music of the heavenly choir in Book III, then, are recalled and transcended in their echoes in the First Hymn. They are cancelled and transformed in a process analogous in Milton to what Hegel calls *Aufhebung*.

The Original Hymn not only originates refrain, but interprets the scheme as a trope of echo—as assent, consent, concert, consonance, approval, and witness. Moreover, its relation to older utterances of the trope is itself resonant. This affirmative aspect of echo’s figure completely obliterates a negative, mocking one, which appears in a starkly literal way earlier, again in the demonic milieu of Book II. Sin’s account to Satan of her parturition of Death concludes as her son, “he my inbred enemy,” “forth issu’d, brandishing his fatal Dart / Made to destroy.” The following lines are strongly Ovidian: “I fled, and cri’d out *Death*; / Hell trembl’d at the hideous Name, and sigh’d / From all her Caves, and back resounded *Death*” (II, 787–89).

This is an instance of a negation more profound than even the reductive mockery which Milton draws upon, and Sin anticipates for fallen human poetry. She cries out her son’s name in a blend of erotic fear and mother love; she names him directly and screams out the general human alarm (as in “Murder!”). Hell’s return of the word is the sound of revulsion

from caves whose hollowed emptiness has now for the first time been (1) employed as a physical locus of echo, and (2) figuratively identified with negation, nonbeing, and death. And yet the whole event uses the materials of pastoral affirmative echo, perverted in the Satanic mode of eternally twisted tropings. "The forest wide is fitter to resound / The hollow Echo of my carefull cries" says Spenser's Cuddie in his sestina (*Shepheardes Calender*, "August," 159–60), thus importing the hollowness of the nymph's abode into the sound of all the body she has left.<sup>8</sup> But most poetic echoes are far from hollow; rather are they crowded with sound and rebound or, like Milton's echo of "Death," with dialectic. Never again would negative echo resound so immediately and so clearly. In American poetry from Emerson through Whitman, Frost, and Stevens, the seascape or landscape will only be able to utter the word *death* in a barely decipherable whisper.

The comic or satiric echo song depends for its force, then, on the dramatic irony sustained by the primary voice's not "hearing," as it were, the nasty synecdochic echo (else it would surely, we feel, shut up after a couplet or two). An even stronger dramatic irony is generated when the speaker is made inadvertently to echo a prior voice: dramatic form is an implicit echo chamber in this respect. (One has only to think of the role of words like *natural* and *nature* in *King Lear* or *honest* in *Othello*, whose reboundings define the tragic contingencies of those who give them voice. The operation of the trope of dramatic irony in such cases seems dialectical. Is it because of the anterior enunciations of such words that a tragic hero is known to all but himself as an echoer, rather than as a propounder? Or does the classical analysis of the dramatic irony as an inadvertent foreshadowing, an un-self-comprehended prophecy, reveal the more central twisting of the ironic machine?) In the narrative realm, such instances abound in *Paradise Lost*. "Or when we lay," argues Belial, invoking recent pains (II, 168–69), "Chain'd on the burning Lake? that sure was worse," unaware that he is echoing the narrator's previous description of the nature of Satan's vastness: "So stretch out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay / Chain'd on the burning Lake" (I, 209–10). The echo, which includes the enjambed "lay," is of a voice Belial has never heard, an epic narrator possessed of some "Foreknowledge absolute." The reader is reminded again how Belial is limited by his ignorance of the script written for him (once he has surrendered his freedom by choosing Satan and the fiction of self-createdness). Even as the modern reader hears a secondary echo, in this and other instances of repeated phrase throughout *Paradise Lost*, of the classical formulaic epithet, he implicitly surveys the distance between fallen angels such as Belial and the Homeric personages who are both his poetic forbears and, in the remodeled mythological history of *Paradise Lost*, his historical descendants.

In general, when Milton's poem echoes itself, whether from nearby or at a great distance, there is no ironic shift of voice, as in the previous case. In

its wordplay, for example, *Paradise Lost* favors the echoing sort, rather than the compact form of the single word: *antanaclasis* rather than strict pun. In the rhetoric of wit, this is usually the weaker form (imagine, for example, “Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York’s / Own son”), where the repetition has the plonking quality of self-glossing in the worst way. In many cases in Shakespeare’s sonnets, or in lines like Donne’s “When thou hast done, thou hast not done,” the antanaclastic repetition embodies a compact pun (so that in order to gloss itself, the line would have to end “thou hast not done [Donne],” and it is only the second “done” which is being played upon). It is likely that the excessively unfunny antanaclasis with which Satan sneaks into Paradise, when “in contempt, / At one slight bound high overleap’d all bound / Of Hill or highest Wall” (IV, 181–82), is mimetically bad—even if Satan’s leap is as graceful as that of the winner over the tennis net, the epic voice, in describing it, must change its notes to corny. At such close range, echoing repetition controls the ironies that inhere in the relation of the punning meanings, rather than those dramatic ironies that change of time and place will make literal.

More typical in *Paradise Lost* is the slightly deformed antanaclasis which Abraham Fraunce in *The Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588) reserved for the usual term *paranomasia* (which he also calls “allusion,” interestingly enough, from the *ludus* of wordplay): thus Satan in Book I sneers at the benign rule of the King of Heaven (whom he has just accused of being *tyrannos* rather than *basileus* anyway), who “still his strength conceal’d, / Which tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall” (I, 641–42). Milton has given Satan the advertent wordplay here, as Adam is given the gentler and more loving wit, the beautiful and beautifully complex invocation to Eve in Book IV (411): “Sole partner and sole part of all these joys.” (Here, as Alistair Fowler points out, the two meanings of *sole*—“only” and “unrivalled” are also at work.) But love commands more intricate wit than hate does, and the way in which we are reminded that *part* is part of *partner*—an echo of stem rather than of suffix—is one worthy of George Herbert.

Closely related to Belial’s echo of the voice of the narration—indeed, a kind of antitype of it—is Satan’s echo of an earlier formula in his speech on Mt. Niphates (IV, 42–45). At a strange moment of inadvertent admission of a truth about his relation to God that he had previously (and publicly) denied, he avers that

he deserv’d no such return  
From me, whom he created when I was  
In that bright eminence, and with his good  
Upbraided none ...

This is the Satan who, enthroned at the beginning of Book II in a fierce but

inauthentic splendor—its description may itself echo Spenser's representation of the throne of Lucifera (*Faerie Queene* I. iv. 8)—“exalted sat, by merit rais'd / To that bad eminence” (II, 5–6). The memory of the “bright eminence” echoes the reader's earlier apprehension of the bad one, but the dramatic irony is softer here than it was in the case of Belial. An even more poignant echo of the inexorable narrative voice occurs in Book IX, where Satan is at one of his most moving moments in the poem.

He has just made his second mistake about Paradise. (The first is in Book IV, 505–8, where he attributes to the unfallen Adam and Eve, as they make love in a sight to him “hateful” and “tormenting,” the necessity for the consolations and errors of fallen eroticism. He says of them that they were “Imparadis't in one another's arms / The happier Eden.” Satan is wrong because they are “imparadis't” indeed in Paradise; the notion that an erotic embrace is a bower of bliss is a desperate, lovely fiction of fallen humanity.) A complementary mistake also results from Satan's being smitten with beauty in Paradise: addressing Earth (IX, 99ff), Satan praises the scene before him, feels the need of rhetorical elevation, then rationalizes the hyperbole: “O Earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferr'd / More justly, Seat worthier of Gods, as built / With second thoughts, reforming what was old!” Then comes a second order of rationalization: Earth is better because it is the newer model, “For what God after better worse would build?” Again, *le pauvre*, Satan can only respond in fallen human terms of work, enterprise, and progress. It reciprocates for the mistake about love in Book IV. From the beauty of Earth and the nobility of its inhabitants (“Growth, Sense, Reason all summ'd up in Man”—a purely humanist notion), Satan moves to the deep pleasure yielded by landscape, pleasure unfallen yet, for humanity or for the seventeenth century, into the declensions of Beautiful, Picturesque, and Sublime, but summing them all up:

If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange  
Of Hill and Valley, Rivers, Woods and Plains,  
Now Land, now Sea, and Shores with Forest crown'd,  
Rocks, Dens, and Caves; but I in none of these  
Find place or refuge ...

(IX, 115–19)

“Rocks, Dens and Caves ...” Satan finds no refuge in these, and particularly in the dialectic of array and design in pictures and spectacles of them. The reader will remember that the adventurous Drakes and Magellans of Pandemonium in Book II passed “O'er many a Frozen, many a Fiery Alp, / Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of Death” (II, 620–21). That famous line of monosyllables over which the steps of prosodic theorists have for so long tripped is immediately echoed in the next line, “A Universe

of death....” Not only is Satan’s longing catalogue of the joys of contemplated landscape bound to conclude in the places of retreat and darkness, prefiguring the meaning of shadiness that will eventually become attached to dark places after Adam and Eve first guiltily hide themselves there. He is, moreover, echoing the narration’s understanding of the proleptically fallen relation, in Book II’s prophetic vision of human culture, of rocks and dens and caves with death.

Adam’s reflex of this kind of Satanic echoing—echoing of what has already, and in just those words, been propounded—can be heard in his patently rhetorical antanaclasis at IX, 1067. The first words he says to Eve after they awaken, “as from unrest,” from their first fallen fucking in a “shady bank, / Thick overhead with verdant roof imbower’d” (IX, 1037–38) are: “O Eve, in evil hour thou didst give ear / To that false Worm...” (IX, 1067–68). This is the same rhetorical Adam of the “sole partner and sole part,” affirming the new fallen phenomenology of Eve’s name: it no longer echoes “even,” “eve,” “evening,” but now, as henceforth, “evil.” In addition, he, like Satan, is echoing the narration. Less than three hundred lines before, Eve had stretched out her hand “in evil hour I Forth reaching to the Fruit” (IX, 780–81). Adam speaks almost with a tone of “indeed, Milton was right in saying that it was ‘in evil hour’ that this occurred,” a tinct of wisdom never given to Satan. It is only the poetry of fallen man that will need to employ tropes and fables, similes, echoes, and allusions, in order to represent Truth. We somehow know that Adam is far less mocked by the dramatic irony of the narrative echo than Satan is, tortured ironist though he may be.

The chorus of echoes which accompanies the scenes of loss and regret surrounding the Fall is completed by the narration’s own playback of an already resounding phrase. It occurs in the digression on the nature of the fig leaves with which human nakedness—the fallen form of nudity, ever to require clothing, as nudity itself, if concealed, is always to be veiled by visionary *drapery*—first hides itself (“Honor dishonorable!”). The fig tree is associated with a benign primitive role in a Rousseauian nature: the “Indian Herdsman shunning heat / Shelters in cool” (IX, 1108–9). It is this exotic tree, benevolent and protective in the more exotic and childlike of human cultures, that

spreads her arms  
Branching so broad and long, that in the ground  
The bended Twigs take root, and Daughters grow  
About the Mother tree, a Pillar’d shade  
High overarch’t, and echoing walks between.

(IX, 1103–7)

Shade in Paradise is a lovely variation from sunlight; this “Pillar’d shade,”

and that of the “shady bank / Thick overhead with verdant roof imbrow’d” have already been imprinted with the shadowy type of death. In Book I, 301–3, the famous and heavily allusive image of the fallen legions of the rebel “Angel Forms” shows them as lying “Thick as autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks / In Vallombrosa, where th’ Etrurian shades / *High overarch’t* imbower” (my italics). The specific verbal echo accompanies the shadows cast by the earlier text on the futurity of all shady places. And, as elsewhere in Milton, the rhetorical echo calls up the literal acoustical event: “echoing walks between.”

There is something like a dramatic irony in a character’s inadvertent echo of the narrative voice by which even his own utterance is recounted. There is also, as we have been seeing, a kind of allusive typology in the more possibly self-aware echo of an earlier moment in Miltonic narration by a later one. We might compare these two conditions with the different kinds of irony revealed by the sense of unwitting literalness. In a phrase like Miranda’s “O brave new world . . .,” the audience recognizes an allusion to a literal hemisphere, of which the speaker is ignorant. Much more like Miltonic allusive irony is Abraham’s remark to Isaac, in response to the boy’s question about what lamb will be used for the sacrifice. “God will provide his own lamb,” replies the Kierkegaardian religious hero; the dramatic irony is again generated by the unwitting literalness of what had been propounded as a trope, here a trope of evasion. But the Christian reading of this episode (not the *akeda* of the Hebrew Bible, but the first figurative sacrifice foreshadowing the trope of Christ as lamb), gives the literalness another dimension. What Abraham offers figuratively, the narrative literalizes when the ram is discovered entangled in the thicket. But the literalization is only a movement into the fullness of antitype: the foreshadowing will be literally fulfilled in the typological completion of the episode in the New Testament when the Lamb of God is finally provided by, and of, him.

It is this kind of dramatic and typological irony that is at work in so many of those highly charged rhetorical moments in *Paradise Lost*. It lurks in the contortions of Satan’s manipulations of the literal and the figurative, the local and the general (“Evil be thou my Good” completed by the whining of “All good to me becomes / Bane” in Book IX, for example). Indeed, we might learn from the shadows of the unwitting in Satan’s rhetoric, and in that of Adam when he echoes Satan in syntax and tone (as in IX, 755–75), how central to dramatic irony this question of inadvertent literalness can be. (Kafka’s great parable *On Parables* also sheds fierce light on this.) Dramatic irony is often a matter of an utterance striking an unwitting *Vorklang*, as it were, of an eventual echo, of a situation to which it will turn out to have alluded. It might be redefined in terms of manifest rhetorical figuration turning out, horribly, to have been literal. Certainly, Satanic rhetoric provides an origination of this.

One kind of self-echo in Milton occurs in the almost leitmotivic reappearance of phrases and cadences in *Paradise Lost* to which sophisticated critical attention of the past few decades has been so attentive. These form a subclass of their own. As echoes, their voices do not come from afar, or from absent places, so much as from a memory of the poem's own utterance. Their region of origin is usually schematically related to that of the echoic answer: thus, in Book V, the Son sits "Amidst as from a flaming Mount, whose top / Brightness had made invisible" (V, 598–99); the reversal of "No light, but rather darkness visible" (I, 63) points up the radically different character of the flaming. But such patterns are quite basic to the fabric of *Paradise Lost*, and might be considered as elements in what seems to be the poem's memory of itself.<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES

6. A historical origination of literary refrain is to be found in that locus of echo, pastoral tradition. Theocritus' *Idyll* I generates a refrain which, in its successive versions, grows self-reflexive: "Begin a country-song, dear Muses, begin to sing" changes to "Begin a country-song, Muses, again begin to sing" and, finally, to "Leave off your country-song, Muses, leave off your singing." For the role of repetitive form in pastoral, see the excellent discussion in Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1969), 93–95.

7. But not the first mocking echo: see *Paradise Lost* II, 789. The blending of echo into refrain or refrainlike repetition can be seen in the strange hexameters of Abraham Fraunces's *The Third Part of the Countess of Pembroke's Yvychurch* (1592). Here is part of the metamorphosis of the nymph Echo:

Yea, very bones at last, were made to be stones: the resounding  
 Voyce, and onely the voyce of forelorne *Eccho* remaineth:  
*Eccho* remaineth a voyce, in deserts *Eccho* remaineth,  
*Eccho* noe-where seene, heard every where by the deserts.

(Ei<sub>v</sub>)

8. The sestina is, as we have seen, a most resounding form, and Cuddie's expressly so; consider how the lines quoted above (from strophe 2) echo the opening lines of the first strophe: "Ye wastefull woods beare wnesse of my woe / Wherein my plaints did oftentimes resound"—as those plaints indeed just have resounded in the alliterations of the previous lines: "Ye careless birds are privie to my cries / Which in your songs were wont to take a part." Spenser continually glosses his echoes by identifying them with meaningful sound.

9. Like the deferred naming of the muse Urania, this whole pattern of self-echo in *Paradise Lost* probably derives from *The Faerie Queene*. Whether in the immediately repeating punning figures (e.g., Mercilla's sword, "Whose long rest rusted the bright steely brand") or the long-ranging memories (e.g., "Poore Colin Cloud, (who knowes not Colin Clout?)" of VI. 10. 16 and "Of Arlo-hill (Who knowes not Arlo-hill?)" of



VII. 6. 36), Spenserian echoing is a most complex matter. Where, and why, this sort of thing happens in Spenser is worth studying.

PETER M. SACKS

*Milton: "Lycidas"*

In reading "Lycidas," one might well begin by recognizing how many different yet mutually reinforcing "works" the poem performs. Admittedly, a great many circumstances converged on the genesis of the poem; but it was Milton's extraordinarily ambitious imagination that so thoroughly amplified the complexity of his occasion. At least two characteristics of Milton's temperament, apart from his ambition, fitted him for seizing the occasion in this way: his combative spirit, in which the desire to write was never more strongly aroused than by some obstacle or challenge; and his closely related fascination with loss, where, again, his desire and imagination seemed to stir most powerfully against deprivation or constraint. Indeed, Milton's motto might have been "So much the rather..." I shall speak of this more concretely during what follows, but for the moment we may agree that another way of inquiring into the occasion of "Lycidas" is to ask what adversaries in addition to death—what circumstances, powers, even traditions—Milton chose to range himself against, and to surpass.

We have already remarked on the decline of the pastoral elegy during the three decades preceding "Lycidas," a decline confirmed by the fact that Milton was conspicuously alone among more than a score of elegists in his choice of what by 1637 was regarded as an unconvincing, even trivial, form for a poem of mourning. Milton was no doubt excited by the opportunity to reconquer the ground lost by the genre and to carry the tradition onward to

---

From *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. © 1985 by the Johns Hopkins University Press.

unprecedented greatness. Here occurs one of the convergences that so distinguish the creation of this poem. For Milton himself was at this time straining to herald his future career as an epic poet by mastering and surpassing the pastoral mode. The historical needs of the declining genre thus interlocked with the personal needs of a rising poet.

This interlocking is, however, far more profound, for Milton's ambition was not merely to write a consummate pastoral poem but to secure immortality. In the often-cited letter to Diodati, written in September, two months before "Lycidas," Milton wrote, "You ask what I am thinking of? So may the good Deity help me, of immortality!"<sup>1</sup> Now what could agitate that desire for immortality more urgently than death itself, which in the year of King's death had already carried off not only Ben Jonson, the reigning poet, in whose wake men spoke of poetry's demise, and not only numerous victims of the plague (some even in Milton's village of Horton), but also, in April, Sara Milton, mother of the poet? And what could appease that same desire for immortality more fully than a work that was itself not merely a promise of approaching fame but a poem designed precisely to create a figure for what surpasses death?

None of Milton's earlier elegies are strictly pastoral, and it was not until King's death that Milton had a subject truly suited to that form. An obvious suitability is the fact that Milton and King both had been "nursed upon the self same hill" of Cambridge. This allowed the pastoral fiction of a shared locale and common pursuits. The convention of mourning a fellow shepherd was now legitimate, and what is more important, Milton's relative closeness to King (compared to his remote relation to previously elegized figures) provoked the poet's defense against his own mortality more strongly than had hitherto been the case.

Furthermore, King died at an age (25 years) that lent itself to an association with the martyred vegetation deities, an association augmented by King's having been both a poet and a clergyman, two roles well suited to the allegorical conventions of the genre. Here was a set of circumstances that permitted Milton to attempt an elegy, which, unlike his earlier exercises, could be measured against a definable and hence surpassable series of works. Joining company with Theocritus, Virgil, Sannazaro, and Spenser, Milton was now where he felt most at home and most inspired: in the arena with and against the tradition he had so carefully absorbed.

By reflecting on the abrupt death of a young clergyman (who had in fact died en route to his first parish, in Ireland), Milton also saw his chance to exploit fully the pastoral elegy's potential for theological criticism or political satire. This tradition was not new, having had strong practitioners in Mantuan and Spenser, to name only two of whom Milton was aware. But no elegy had ever mounted an attack so magisterially swingeing and so menacingly prophetic as the speech of Saint Peter in "Lycidas." Here

again, we face a convergence of personal and historical forces in Milton's poem.

What, then, was the historical context in which Milton mourned the death of a young member of an oppressed minority of good clergymen? While most critics have noted Milton's antagonism toward Roman Catholicism, and more especially toward the tyranny and corruption of the high Anglican clergy, few have examined the situation as closely as they might.

During the years preceding 1637 the courts of James I and Charles I had severely increased their repression of Puritanism. Archbishop Laud, Primate of England since 1633, had extended the power of the High Commission Court and had added that vigorous instrument of nationwide surveillance and suppression, the Metropolitan Visitation. At the same time, the church exercised absolute rights of censorship, preventing or punishing the publication of any seditious works. To clinch his reactionary campaign, Laud prescribed certain elements of ceremony in all services and proscribed the Puritan practice of sermons or lectures, hence denying Milton a potential source of income, leaving him "church-outed by the prelates" ("and shove away the worthy bidden guest").

It was partly in reaction to this dramatic extension of church tyranny that the nation began to reassert liberty of conscience and expression; and a reader of "Lycidas" should be aware that 1637 was indeed the first year of the so-called revolutionary epoch. In this year, Scotland rebelled against the *Book of Common Prayer*, Hampden's ship-money case drove in a wedge against authority, and in June, in the presence of vast numbers of outraged sympathizers in the palace yard at Westminster, the Puritans Prynne, Bastwick, and Burton were cut and branded for sedition.

These men had written and circulated an outspoken attack entitled *A Breviate of the Prelates intollerable usurpations, both upon the Kings Prerogative Royall, and the Subjects Liberties*. In this work they decried the abrogation of the rule of law and the perversion of the entire fabric of justice by churchmen who had "crept up above all." They denounced the wolfish clergy for preying upon instead of nourishing their congregations, and they prophesied the vengeance of God upon the nation. The language and the stance prefigure part of Milton's poem, and the fate of the three men must have harshly sealed their influence on the poet.

Milton may actually have been in London in late June on one of the periodic visits he is known to have made from Horton. Even were he not among the crowds at Westminster, he would certainly have heard of the events and of the eloquent orations made from the pillory, since a sympathetic *Relation* of the entire procedure, together with a report of the speeches, was rapidly circulated. What is significant for us is the *manner* in which the victims and their supporters perceived the event. For the *Relation*

is marked by a combination of denunciatory, vengeful anger, together with a sense of martyrdom, ceremony, and grace.

The account speaks of the three “Servants of Jesus Christ ... having their way strawed with sweet hearbes from the house out of which they came to the Pillory, with all the honour that could be done unto them.”<sup>2</sup> They might have been the subjects of an elegy or of a funeral procession. And their own language on the pillory has a ring that we hear again in Milton’s poem written only five months later. Here is Dr. Bastwick, moments before his ears were hacked off: “If the Presses were as open to us, as formerly they have beene, we would shatter his Kingdome about his eares.” And here is Prynne after he had been cut and branded: “The more I am beate down, the more am I lift up.”<sup>3</sup> These phrases happen to coincide with words and figures in “Lycidas,”<sup>4</sup> but beyond them, the entire drama, with its currents of wrath and resilience and its fervid revolutionary appeal to a retribution and consolation that derive from beyond this world, is part of what we must recognize as Milton’s chosen occasion.

King’s death was an accident—there was no one to blame. And yet Milton, no doubt realizing that he needed some actual target for his anger, chose to rage against the conspiracy of those “perfidious” forces that strike down the good while leaving the wicked in triumph. It is this channeling of wrath outward to revenge that contributes so fully to his resolution of the question of justice, and to his completion of the work of mourning. Our appreciation of this should be especially keen after the study of revenge tragedies above, and we shall recognize how Milton stages a displaced, verbal revenge, while also managing to conjure a transcendent context in which such vengeance is sanctified.

We have not yet quite exhausted the complex nature of the occasion. Another set of problems was provoked by King’s having died so young and so abruptly, just as he was literally making his passage from years of diligent preparation to what may have been years of fruition. Milton’s preparation for his own work and for his future claim to immortality was even now just coming to an end after several years of ascetic self-discipline. In a letter to Diodati, Milton spoke of his undistracted labors: “Whereas my genius is such that no delay, no rest, no care or thought almost of anything, holds me aside until I reach the end I am making for, and round off, as it were, some great period of my studies.”<sup>5</sup> The very rhythm and balance of his phrasing suggest the dogged purposiveness of his drive, while the goal is expressed in a conventional figure of sublimation. As he writes in his next letter, “And what am I doing? Growing my wings and meditating flight; but as yet our Pegasus raises himself on very tender pinions. Let us be lowly wise.”<sup>6</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that before writing “Lycidas,” Milton had already made a rather decisive deflection of desire, channeling it not into such enjoyments as the blithe Diodati suggested but rather into projects of a more

spiritual elevation. Not a little energy must have been bound to this pursuit, and the effect of King's sudden death was, therefore, to cut the entire knot of Milton's intended transaction. He would now have to question and renegotiate the supposed exchange by which renunciation buys its own reward and self-sacrifice defends against mortality.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, he would have to retain control of the energy itself, which must have threatened to come unbound as the justification for its constraint was so abruptly threatened. As we have seen, these are tasks crucial to the work of mourning. By confronting them at their most pressing, Milton forced his poem to its particular intensity.

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more  
 Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never sere,  
 I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,  
 And with forc'd fingers rude,  
 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
 Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,  
 Compels me to disturb your season due:

(1-7)

I have already said much about the elegiac "Yet once more," so I will not repeat the earlier account of the various functions of repetition. In Milton's case, the statement has an obvious literal as well as rhetorical meaning in that he is writing yet another elegy within his own career, as well as within the career, so to speak, of pastoral elegy itself. (It is typical of Milton to associate the careers in this way.) One may be sure, therefore, that the repetition itself deliberately repeats such usages in Theocritus, Virgil, Sannazaro, and others, this being but the first of many indications that Milton is not only adding to but recapitulating the tradition. As one reads on, one realizes how fully the assembly of allusions and echoes in this poem allows the poet to gather up the genre as though to carry it forward in his own poem.<sup>8</sup>

The mention of laurels, myrtle, and ivy is another obvious use of the conventional symbols, and Milton's phrasing, too, recalls a specific line from Virgil's "Eclogue II". "Et vos, o lauri, carpam, et te, proxima myrte." But in these lines Milton already extends what he inherits. At least two elements should be dwelt on briefly: (1) he contrives both to quicken the original meaning of the old symbols and at the same time to widen their reference; and (2) he begins immediately to exploit the rhetorical power of the vocative mood, which so distinguishes this poem.

Laurels, myrtle, and ivy are of course ancient tokens of poethood, but by using them as figures for poetic offerings, Milton adds his personal urgency regarding the question of his own ripeness as a poet. Related figures

had marked his anxiety previously in sonnet 7: "But my late spring no bud or blossoms show'th ... inward ripeness doth much less appear." It is a common device, but Milton's real achievement is to associate the prematurity of the unmellowed King's death with the possibly premature verse of the elegist, thereby confronting the possibility that he himself and his career may be as mortally vulnerable as King.

Furthermore, by subjecting the figures to a curious literalization, Milton allows a reemergence of latent symbolic meanings. We are shown not the immutable, conventional tokens but leaves and berries, which may be shattered or plucked—the action is jarringly physical, as though the figurative status of these plants were itself breaking in the poet's hands. We recall Spenser's similar literalization of the *Astrophel* flower, his rejection of its traditionally consoling symbolism, allowing the flower to be "untimely cropt." And it is interesting to note that Milton's original version of these lines in the Trinity Manuscript reads "and crop your young" in place of the later "shatter your leaves." Milton's effect is similar to Spenser's, for it, too, literally breaks the traditional figures of compensation in order to prepare a substitution of more spiritualized "plants." He shatters the brittle signs of a merely earthly fame in order to make way for the higher variant that "lives and spreads aloft" in heaven.

The harsh, emphatically physical violation of the plants evokes a further meaning, one whose implications are underscored by the language of reluctance and compulsion ("Forc'd fingers," "constraint," "compels me"). As previously suggested, the work of mourning involves a castrative moment of submission to death and to a necessary deflection of desire. The way in which the poet here is being forced to a bitter shattering and plucking of leaves and of berries "harsh and crude" is not unlike the compulsion to an act of symbolic castration, which the subsequent images of the decapitated Orpheus and the abhorred shears confirm. And it is against the cluster of this and other related imagery that the consolation of a resurgent yet displaced and spiritualized sexual energy will have to triumph.

In addition to his revision of the familiar plant symbols, I mentioned Milton's intense use of the vocative mood, which extends throughout the poem, and it is important to see how the energy of the poem is braced from the outset by being directed to some kind of addressee. The poem is thus tautened by a sinew of address, a compelling tone of engagement. The near-magical manner in which Milton keeps changing fictive addressees is also crucial to the development of the poem, for the long passage from the personified laurels to the Genius of the shore may be read as an intensifying exercise in making up or evoking a presence where there is none—a fundamentally elegiac enterprise. So, too, the repeated vocative mood not only palliates the solitude of the bereaved but grips the reader as though he, too, were being continually addressed.

For *Lycidas* is dead, dead ere his prime,  
 Young *Lycidas*, and hath not left his peer:  
 Who would not sing for *Lycidas*? he knew  
 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
 He must not float upon his wat'ry bier  
 Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
 Without the meed of some melodious tear.

(8–14)

I referred earlier to the repetitive calling of the dead by name. Certainly the ceremonial practice of invocation and the psychological *anáklisis*, or propping, are at work here, but in a flexible and unobtrusive way. The mourner calls, but his call is worked into his discourse, and once again Milton reveals his nuance and control, his way of allowing the conventions to function even as he subordinates them to his personal manner.

The opposed images in lines 11–14 initiate the contrast between entire clusters of images throughout the poem. While individual elements of this contrast have been noted by several critics, the “cluster” aspect, the close relation between apparently different kinds of images, has not been stressed.<sup>9</sup> This is largely due to the neglect of the more original meanings of such figures and of their relation to the energy and consciousness of the griever. For example, the purposeful, ultimately consoling elevation of the “lofty rhyme” opposes the random and desolate horizontality of a “wat’ry bier,” a contrast repeated in several versions and culminating in that between the guarded mount and the risen soul on the one hand and the whelming tide and far-flung corpse on the other. But what is the relation of this contrast to that between a consoling, invigorating liquid and a barren, parching wind, or between reward and an almost punitive neglect?

What does a cluster such as that of elevation, poetry, liquid, and reward imply? We have spoken of consolation as the achievement of a deflected sexual assertion, of a trope for a procreative force that outlasts individual mortality. The erection of tombs or stelae or indeed of a survivors verse may be seen, therefore, as understandably associated with images of an invigorating liquid. The dew that Colin Clout sought to inherit from the dead Tityrus was such a liquid—an originally sexual power allegorized as poetic creativity. In “Lycidas” the imagery of a saving and surviving liquid, the figure for ongoing desire and creativity, hence of successful mourning, is even included in mythological form in the Arethusa-Alpheus legend (also present in Virgil’s “Eclogue X”), as well as in the form of the swift Hebrus who bears the gory visage of continuing song to the Lesbian shore. These are the liquids that, unlike the barren diffusion of the sea, retain a direction and a continuing force, associated as they must be with the melodious tear and



the lofty rhyme. It is in no way surprising, therefore, that Milton immediately associates his inspiration with the sacred well.

Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,  
That from beneath the seat of *Jove* doth spring,  
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.  
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,  
So may some gentle Muse  
With lucky words favor my destin'd Urn,  
And as he passes turn,  
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.

(15–22)

Significantly, the sacred well “springs” (reinforcing the suggestion of lofty rhyme and of an originally seminal power) from Jove’s seat, as though this were somehow his liquid power. The line alludes not only to the opening of Hesiod’s *Theogony*:

With the Heliconian Muses let us start  
Our song: they hold the great and godly mount  
Of Helicon, and on their delicate feet  
They dance around the darkly bubbling spring  
And round the altar of the mighty Zeus.<sup>10</sup>

It also alludes to the barely Christianized version in Revelation 22: “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”<sup>11</sup> Almost like Alpheus, this liquid will surface again at the end of the poem in images of those “other streams” and that “Nectar pure.”

Furthermore, the presence of the Sister Muses deepens our recognition that the poet is asserting a residually sexual poetic power, particularly as he urges, “Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,” as though this were indeed an erotic relationship. We notice how the vocative has shifted to an imperative mood, a clue to Milton’s desire to control the personages of his poem. Nor is this imperiousness a matter of chance as he addresses the Muses. The very echo in “somewhat loudly” of Virgil’s *paulo maiora* alerts us to the fact that Milton has his eye on Virgil’s “Eclogue IV,” with its move from pastoral to prophetic utterance.

After this summons, the poet suddenly confesses much of his motivation, his desire for a defense against his own obliteration, in short, for immortality, a power that, after death, may yet compel a later poet to turn to him in homage and benediction. Milton seems to wrestle with the timing of this statement. The urgency of his need is, I think, at odds with his tact.

What results is an uneasy compromise: on the one hand the undeniably abrupt admission, as though the expressed intention could not be restrained a moment longer; on the other the clever ambiguity of the "so may," which tempers the boldness of purpose (so meaning "in order that") by the more neutral possibility of a mere analogy (*so* meaning "just as").

The expression of personal motive and anxiety increases the urgent intimacy of the poem, carrying us forward into the prolonged identification of the mourner with his lost friend and predisposing us to recognize the degree of self-mourning that gathers in the following lines. The past and its landscape, together with the figure of the dead shepherd, are, after all, versions of a lost self.

For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,  
 Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.  
 Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd  
 Under the opening eyelids of the morn,  
 We drove afield, and both together heard  
 What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,  
 Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
 Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning, bright  
 Toward Heav'n's descent had slop'd his westering wheel.  
 Meanwhile the Rural ditties were not mute,  
 Temper'd to th'Oaten Flute;  
 Rough *Satyrs* danc'd, and *Fauns* with clov'n heel  
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,  
 And old *Damaetas* lov'd to hear our song.

(23–36)

Only a few features of these lines need be remarked here. The figure of nursing suggests the benevolent, nourishing mother, the loss of whom I have claimed to be an inescapably recapitulated element of any mourning. By attachment to the mother I mean attachment to a unity that seems to precede a sense of individuation and of separate mortality. Figures for this matrix could be the flowery lap of Nature or the Muse. In this poem, written a mere seven months after Milton had lost his own mother, that grief is overwhelmingly important, as we shall see. In keeping with the evocation of life in the presence of the mother, time and place are described as strangely seamless, both encompassed by an unbroken circle of natural routine, a kind of rhythmic browsing. The poem's larger temporality (a day's song) will enlarge and repeat this particular figure of the diurnal round, healing, in fact, the "heavy change" which suddenly comes to rob the inset, recollected pastoral of its perfection.

The high lawns repeat the motif of elevation, which is brought into

significant association now with eyes and morning, both figuring the virile, watchful sun, a symbol of paternal power and of totemic immortality. Here the young sons set off *before* that power has fully risen. They are still close to a nursing nature, as yet evading, one might say, the father's fully opened eyes, the pure eyes of all-judging Jove which the poet will come to know more intimately through loss.<sup>12</sup>

While the songs of this idyllic day are equally unmarked by loss or even by a more than momentary absence, Milton does contrive to insinuate the idea of loss, as the double negatives allow the possibility of deprivation to surface in consciousness: "were not mute ... would not be absent long." The effect is reminiscent of Spenser's almost subliminal warnings in "Astrophel": "Both wise and hardie (too hardie alas!) ... He vanquisht all, and vanquisht was of none," signals preparing and cushioning the mind against a sudden loss. Milton's narrative timing, like Spenser's and like that of many elegists in the tradition, is carefully designed to situate the recollected idyll after the mere statement of loss but before the fuller narration and elaboration of that loss. The reader is, therefore, somehow both prepared for loss and yet forced to reexperience its reality. The mourned subject is made to die again.<sup>13</sup>

Even were the idyll not explicitly framed by loss, it has an unmistakable air of unreality, a vulnerable, fictive quality, as though the recollection were a wish-fulfilling dream. Hence the curiously self-englobed temporality, a perfect wheel of time made to revolve within the larger narrative. Hence, too, the way in which the idyll concludes with an unobtrusive clue to its own fictionality. For while the conventional pastoral fiction (shepherds for poets, the hill for Cambridge) can be reduced to its literal referents, the mention of satyrs and fauns introduces a further, less reducible level of fictionality; and from here the entire idyll seems to be retrospectively illuminated by the brightened light of unreality. It is a subtle version of the poet's later, more explicit admissions of fond dream or false surmise, and it is difficult to imagine a more superb and gentle manner of both indulging and yet distancing one's recollections of the past and of the dead.<sup>14</sup>

The idyll concludes with a mention of Damaetas's approval, and it is fitting that this period of innocent nursing, of small rural ditties, and of proximity to nature, should be unthreatened by any truly powerful figure of authority. Unlike that of all-judging Jove, Damaetas's approval is not contingent upon sacrifice or loss. Yet old Damaetas does, however mildly, prefigure the later judge. And our understanding of the genre and of the work of mourning makes us appreciate why a mention of this figure terminates the recollected idyll. So, too, we are less unprepared to follow this first mention of an older figure of authority by what might otherwise, despite the fictionality of the idyll, appear to be a surprisingly abrupt turn to the confrontation of disastrous loss.

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,  
 Now thou art gone, and never must return!  
 Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,  
 With wild Thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,  
 And all their echoes mourn.  
 The Willows and the Hazel Copses green  
 Shall now no more be seen,  
 Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft lays.  
 As killing as the Canker to the Rose,  
 Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,  
 Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,  
 When first the White-thorn blows;  
 Such, *Lycidas*, thy loss to Shepherd's ear.

(37-49)

Here is the harshly elaborated loss of that ideal, recollected world, whose images of freshness and nurture have given way to those of insidious disease and of a specifically premature ruin. While Milton's use of the pathetic fallacy is conventional, he nevertheless modulates the passage away from fallacy into extended simile, thereby adding a measure of sophistication (he declares the figurative nature of such comparisons) and control (he uses the similes to define the precise nature of the loss). In fact, as though it were moving toward a single destination, the entire passage accumulates and converges upon a center of loss, the shepherd's ear. This emphatic focus deserves more interpretation than it has received, and some elements of our theoretical approach may be of help.

It is not enough to say merely that the ear has been deprived of what it used to hear. That is not the exact nature of its loss. Rather, as the tenor of the similes urgently suggests, the ear is itself an object of ruin as Canker (cankerworm, a caterpillar that destroys leaves) kills the rose, as Taint-worm invades the weanling herds, and as frost destroys the flowers, so this loss assaults the ear. The worm imagery is especially well chosen, the worm's motion being so perfectly menacing to the labyrinth of the ear.<sup>15</sup>

We may, therefore, regard the loss as not only to but of the shepherd's ear. At a simple level we can point, as anthropologists and psychologists might, to the practice whereby a mourner isolates a part of his body as the locus of pain—the synecdoche allowing him to localize an otherwise diffuse hurt. But beyond this is the crucial practice of symbolic self-injury or castration in relation to the work of mourning. Just as the child performs a voluntary symbolic castration to avoid death or what he fears as actual castration, and just as the vegetation deity suffers a particularly castrative martyrdom so that the phallic principle of fertility may be renewed, so, too, the griever wounds his own sexuality, deflecting his desire, in order to erect

a consoling figure for an ongoing, if displaced, generative power. We have already seen how an act of shattering and plucking will eventually, by the power of Jove, yield the immortal plant of heavenly praise. Similarly, the wounded and trembling ear will yet be touched and more than repaired by the ministry of Apollo. The ear that loses its capacity to hear the songs to which it was attached is granted the power to hear strains of a “higher mood.” We recall the refrain of Saint John: “He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith.” The movement is from a physical to a spiritual organ. It is what happens visually in *Paradise Lost*, where the poet’s blindness to the external world yields a higher, inner vision: “So much the rather thou Celestial Light / Shine inward.” In each case, a castrative loss or curbing yields a higher, almost always immortalizing strength.<sup>16</sup>

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep  
 Clod o’er the head of your lov’d *Lycidas*?  
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,  
 Where your old *Bards*, the famous *Druids*, lie,  
 Nor on the shaggy top of *Mona* high,  
 Nor yet where *Deva* spreads her wizard stream:  
 Ay me, I fondly dream!  
 Had ye been there—for what could that have done?  
 What could the Muse herself that *Orpheus* bore,  
 The Muse herself, for her enchanting son  
 Whom Universal nature did lament,  
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,  
 His gory visage down the stream was sent,  
 Down the swift *Hebrus* to the *Lesbian* shore?

(50–63)

We may recall how such conventional questioning is in large part designed not only to avert potential self-accusation but also to *create* the fictive addressees, substituting the pretence of temporary absence for the suspicion of nonexistence or permanent neglect. At least three features of Milton’s personal use of the conventions deserve notice. First, Milton revises Virgil’s own revision of Theocritus. In his “First Idyl,” Theocritus had Thyrsis ask where in Sicily (i.e., his own recollected locale) the nymphs had been. Virgil’s “Eclogue X,” however, shifts the scenario to Arcadia, a realm quite remote from himself or Gallus. Milton follows Theocritus in using his own national locale—Bardsey, Anglesey, and the river Dee. The effect is an added immediacy, as well as the vigor of an achieved rather than received transfiguration of geography.

Second, the imagined locations of the nymphs share aspects of the positive, consoling images in lines 11–14 noted above. They are associated

either with elevations ("the steep ... the top of Mona high") or with a special, purposeful liquid force ("Where Deva spreads her wizard stream"). Yet now these haunts are empty and remote. Their associated images of protection and strength are brought into question.

The third and more significant feature of this address is Milton's characteristic, self-critical rejection of an indulged fiction. As usual, Milton curbs in order to surpass himself—an essentially elegiac maneuver. The wish fulfillment is renounced "in deference to reality," and the loss is more fully confronted. Here the realization is that of the Muses' inefficacy, and it precipitates the most complicated crisis in the poem.

The poet has to mourn the loss of Lycidas *and* his own loss of belief in the Muses' protection in particular that of Calliope, the mother of Orpheus.<sup>17</sup> This loss is made especially catastrophic by being cast in terms that recapitulate Orpheus's violent death. We are thus brought to that crux in mourning: a recapitulated loss of the mother, together with a scenario of castration. "Lycidas" confronts this with such unparalleled force in part because Milton always seems to renovate conventional images and myths. But it is difficult in this case to exclude additional, biographical factors—Milton's obsessive sense of his own career (his relation to the Muse) and the death, five months previously, of his mother. A full discussion of the issues involved here carries us at least into the immediately following section of the poem.

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care  
 To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,  
 And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?  
 Were it not better done as others use,  
 To sport with *Amaryllis* in the shade,  
 Or with the tangles of *Neaera's* hair?  
 Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
 (That last infirmity of Noble mind)  
 To scorn delights, and live laborious days;  
 But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,  
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
 Comes the blind *Fury* with th'abhorred shears,  
 And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"  
*Phoebus* repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;  
 "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,  
 Nor in the glistening foil  
 Set off to th'world, nor in broad rumor lies,  
 But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes  
 And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;  
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,

Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed."

(64–84)

The cruel cutting short of a career arouses the poet to question his own defense against mortality and to redefine the possible regard, if any, for his own ascetic pursuits. In discussing the occasion of this poem, I noted that one of the tasks facing Milton was that of controlling the energy that is suddenly released once the object or rationale of its binding attachment is threatened. Not surprisingly, therefore, Milton questions the value of his asceticism, wondering whether an unsublimated eroticism is not worth indulging after all. Presumably the justification for strictly meditating the Muse was a promise of fame, and a special relation to that motherly figure, the Muse. By curbing desire, diverting it into poetic ambition, he could retain the close relationship. Or so he might have thought had he not abruptly discovered that the Muse may not be interested, may be quite thankless, and may, after all, show an alarming ability to give way to a kind of anti-Muse, one who mocks at and even causes martyrdom—an Atropos malevolently wielding the shears. By dwelling with horror on the decapitation of Orpheus, Milton not only reenacts the harsh event but does so with a bitter momentary ignorance of what it may achieve. It seems to be a lose–lose situation, one that may remind us of Titus sacrificing his hand for the severed heads of his sons. The economy of sacrifice and reward has collapsed. Or is it that the notion of reward must be revised, a revision somehow earned more fully, after all, by this very submission?

Immediately following this cry of outrage, therefore, the poem turns to what the harsh fate does in fact secure: not an earthly fame, which is made to seem an insufficiently displaced or sublimated object of desire, but rather a more spiritualized version—the divine approval granted by an otherworldly judge. We have seen the attendant imagery of reward prepared earlier, in the figures of shattered foliage and of the shepherd's blighted ear. The damage to these is now repaired as they, too, make way for more spiritual versions and functions.

There is, however, a residual cautioning in Apollo's gesture, as any reader of Virgil's "Eclogue VI" will recall: in Virgil's poem the gesture signified Apollo's rebuke to the poet's premature ambition. In "Lycidas" the criticism takes the form of a more extended chastisement, preparing us, surely, for a Christian reading of this entire episode. From that perspective, achieved more clearly later in the poem, the fate of Orpheus represents the chastening of man's soul in submission to a divine father. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews spells out the Christian version of the oedipal transaction:

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint  
when thou art rebuked of him:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

.....  
 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

(Heb. 12.5-9)

Milton's focus on the authority of the father is marked in the dramatic movement from female to male figures, a movement that is itself part of the work of mourning: the separation from the primary object of desire associated with the mother and an identification with the father and his symbols of power. Hence the movement away from the sisters, the nymphs, and Calliope toward Apollo and Jove, with particular attention to the powerful, even seminal, influence of Jove's eyes. Eyes are the emblems of virility and of a father's gaze. Here, the spiritual version of that virility still has the power to raise aloft, and its totemic prestige is firmly linked to a judging power.

With these ideas in mind, we are now in a position to return to Milton's biography, where we discover not only that Sara Milton died in April 1637 but that this death left the poet with a father who happened at this very time to be as powerful a figure of judgment as Milton could possibly have faced. Since 1634, Milton had in fact struggled with his father's distrust of a poetic career. He had devoted himself primarily to the study of Church history and was at least partly trying to accommodate his father's directive, namely, to engage the clerical issues of the time in sermon and debate. Certainly, he was biding his time, preparing for epic pursuits, but the fact remains that "Lycidas" was probably the first poem Milton wrote following his final revision of *Comus*. The poem therefore had to bear a heavy burden of proof if Milton were to convince his father that poetry could in fact engage serious concerns. Milton writes a poem not only affected by the loss of his mother but also designed for the eyes of his father.<sup>18</sup>

There is still the unanswered question of why, on a clear summer's day, a ship mysteriously foundered and sank in the Irish sea, carrying to his death a twenty-five-year-old clergyman and poet.

O Fountain *Arethuse*, and thou honor'd flood,  
 Smooth-sliding *Mincius*; crown'd with vocal reeds,  
 That strain I heard was of a higher mood:



But now my Oat proceeds,  
 And listens to the Herald of the Sea  
 That came in *Neptune's* plea.  
 He ask'd the Waves, and ask'd the Felon winds,  
 What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?  
 And question'd every gust of rugged wings  
 That blows from off each beaked Promontory.  
 They knew not of his story,  
 And sage *Hippotades* their answer brings,  
 That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd,  
 The air was calm, and on the level brine,  
 Sleek *Panope* with all her sisters play'd.

(85–99)

The poet modulates back to the more strictly pastoral mode symbolized by *Arethusa* and *Mincius*, doing so in a way that deliberately calls attention to the manner in which he has surpassed this mode. The stage-managing device is thus inseparable from a continuing act of self-commentary.

Triton learns from *Hippotades* (*Aeolus*) that neither had there been any disturbance nor had the waves and winds so much as heard of *Lycidas's* fate. While maintaining the opposition between male constraint (his dungeon) and feminine pleasure (the sport of *Panope*), the lines present further, disquieting separations, not only between man and nature but between man and the mythological presences he may once have cherished. The poem is indeed moving, in a typically Miltonic manner, to a Christian distancing or revaluation of Classical myth. There is no sympathy here between the nymphs and a drowning man. Worse yet, they play while he sinks. It is precisely this blend of remoteness and suspected triviality that characterizes the “merely” pastoral world that Milton is even now so thoroughly undertaking to surpass. The play of *Panope* thus becomes associated with the dance of fauns and satyrs to the rural ditties, glad sounds that we now seem to have heard so long ago.

As if to increase this remoteness, the following three lines move to a blend of harsh diction with religious rhetoric:

It was that fatal and perfidious Bark  
 Built in th'eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,  
 That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

(100–102)

The Orphic figure is already undergoing the kind of Christianizing that we studied in chapter 1. Perhaps it was with a view to this that Milton carefully

revised the Orpheus episode in such a way as to delay until now the Christian revision: for example, he began with "goarie scalpe," then altered it to "divine head," then "divine visage", but then, significantly, went back to "gory visage," deleting mention of the divinity.<sup>19</sup> So, too, the rout of savage maenads is now replaced by a suggested agent of Sin, associated with perfidiousness and with the eclipse. The eclipse evokes both the crucifixion (hence moving the subject yet further from a pagan to a Christian martyrdom) and the original Fall. We recall how in *Paradise Lost* the first sign of Eve's sin is precisely an eclipse.

The catastrophe thus begins to find its place more securely within a Christian context of sin, Fall, and redemption, as the later sections of the poem will elaborate.

Next *Camus*, reverend Sire, went footing slow,  
 His Mantle hairy, and his Bonnet sedge,  
 Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge  
 Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.  
 "Ah! Who hath reft" (quoth he) "my dearest pledge?"  
 (103-7)

Camus, personification of the river Cam and of Cambridge University, recalls the mild figure of old Damaetas. But Camus has an added dignity: he is a "reverend Sire," his "footing slow" is different from the light steps that accompanied Damaetas's well-loved songs, and his attire enhances his majestic sadness. We have already studied how the imagery of weaving and embroidery is so frequently associated with the work of mourning; I shall therefore merely note its careful contrivance in these lines. Apart from their customary connotations, and their allusion to prior elegiac weavings, the lines seem to achieve a close yet unobtrusive metaphorical blending of the natural and the human worlds: the garments and embroidery are also the actual margins of the stream, where, amid dim reeds and sedge, one may discern apparent figures, brighter growths inscribed into the fabric like Apollo's words of grief, *ai, ai*, inscribed upon the hyacinth. It is as though the differing worlds can overlap only by metaphor and artifice occasioned by loss. Camus himself seems to pace at the borders of the pastoral world, a world now ineradicably embroidered with mortality. His single utterance is that questioning cry of deprivation, which can be answered only from another realm, in a "dread voice."<sup>20</sup>

Last came, and last did go,  
 The Pilot of the *Galilean* lake.  
 Two massy Keys he bore of metals twain  
 (The Golden opes, the Iron shuts amain).

He shook his Mitred locks, and stern bespake:  
 “How well could I have spar’d for thee, young swain,  
 Enough of such as for their bellies’ sake,  
 Creep and intrude and climb into the fold?  
 Of other care they little reck’ning make,  
 Than how to scramble at the shearers’ feast,  
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest;  
 Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold  
 A Sheep-hook, or have learn’d aught else the least  
 That to the faithful Herdman’s art belongs!  
 What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;  
 And when they list, their lean and flashy songs  
 Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw.  
 The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,  
 But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,  
 Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:  
 Besides what the grim Wolf with privy paw  
 Daily devours apace, and nothing said;  
 But that two-handed engine at the door  
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.”

(108–31)

For the physical appearance of Saint Peter we are given only two items, but they are rich in significance. The keys have been amply glossed, but our understanding of the sexual economies of loss and consolation, together with our sense of more primitive totemic representations of authority and resurrection, should alert us to a wider range of connotation than is customarily evoked.

So, too, the “Mitred locks” deserve a fuller interpretation. The figure of the abhorred shears had certainly emphasized the castrative nature of loss, and the emphasis will be repeated by Saint Peter’s mention of the shearers’ feast. Hair is a traditional symbol of sexual power, and Saint Peter’s locks represent an immortal version of that power. We notice that the locks are not merely worn but shaken like an instrument, and their power is sanctified by the totemic headdress that they support. The association between locks of hair and a resurrected vitality will be reinforced by the figure of the rising sun tricking his beams and flaming in the forehead of the morning sky and ultimately by that of Lycidas, whose oozy locks are laved in heaven with nectar pure. It is with a sense, then, of Saint Peter’s particular totemic attributes that we hear his speech.

What is the real significance and function of Saint Peter’s opening words? I do not think that the purpose of his “How well could I have spard thee ... Enough of such” has been adequately noted. He is making an

equation, and it is important in the light of what follows to recognize this as the essential equation of the revenger. One Lycidas is worth enough of such, and it is against that number—that tally—that the entire speech unrolls like a single act of vengeance. Here is the controlled release of rage that we have seen to be so crucial to the work of mourning. Once again, it involves the locating of a target for a wrath that must be turned outward; the shifting of the burden of pain; the reversal from the passive suffering of hurt to the active causing of it; and above all, the assumption of the power to hurt, a power that we have studied in its relation to the totemic force associated with a metaphoric sexual immortality. This may well account for the penumbra of mystery and awe surrounding the two-handed engine. Its strangeness and apartness is surely an aspect of its power as a totemic instrument, and as such, it must be associated with the two keys and with the miter, which we know to be tall, conical, and two-peaked.<sup>21</sup>

So much of the poet's energy pours into Saint Peter's tirade that it is difficult and artificial to separate its elements. We can at least point to the following: the accumulated frustration of the questions, *Where were ye? What hard mishap? Who hath reft?*; the energy bound to years of laborious preparation and self-denial (here, whatever energy could not quite be rededicated to the pursuit of divine praise could be marshaled into a legitimized rage); the anger against those who had prevented Milton from the possibility of church lecturing; the bitter fury against those who had punished Burton, Bastwick, and Prynne; the anger against a mother or Muse who deserted the son she should have protected; the anger at having to mourn, at having one's rude fingers forced to their shattering work; the anger, finally, of any ambitious poet against his own thus far (to him, and to his father) inadequate work. The last-named element finds its way, I think, into the contempt for those who "grate on their scannel pipes of wretched straw."

Before leaving this speech, we may admire Milton's resolution of the revenger's problematic sense of separation from the agents or source of justice. We have seen Titus and Hieronimo petitioning the gods in vain and receiving only neglect or scorn from the human courts. For them, language loses its efficacy; their grief itself is mocked. Milton heals the breach by the radical device of summoning Saint Peter in person—a summons enabled only by Milton's extremely Protestant internalization of divinity. That is to say, whereas Titus and Hieronimo regard divine power as impossibly remote and external, withdrawn somewhere beyond a diamantine wall, Milton regards it as potentially within the self. So much so that he can give it voice. Milton's words become Saint Peter's. They give him presence. In a sense, they create him. If we balk at supposing that Saint Peter is somehow within Milton, we have no choice but to conclude that Milton is somehow within the saint.

Return *Alpheus*, the dread voice is past  
 That shrunk thy streams; Return *Sicilian* Muse,  
 And call the Vales, and bid them hither cast  
 Their Bells and Flowrets of a thousand hues.  
 Ye valleys low where the mild whispers use  
 Of shades and wanton winds and gushing brooks,  
 On whose fresh lap the swart Star sparely looks,  
 Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes,  
 That on the green turf suck the honied showers,  
 And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.  
 Bring the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies,  
 The tufted Crow-toe, and pale Jessamine,  
 The white Pink, and the Pansy freakt with jet,  
 The glowing Violet,  
 The Musk-rose, and the well-attir'd Woodbine,  
 With Cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,  
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears:  
 Bid *Amaranthus* all his beauty shed,  
 And Daffadillies fill their cups with tears  
 To strew the Laureate Hearse where *Lycid* lies.  
 For so to interpose a little ease,  
 Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.

(132–53)

When well expressed, wrath itself is sweet, like honey; and Milton, as he turned from the diatribe of Peter to the sweet yield of the valleys, must have felt something of what Homer and Plato meant.<sup>22</sup> Milton coaches Alpheus to renew the current of his desire. As we know, Alpheus, the stream, is a figure for an already once-deflected passion: the youth underwent a transformation in order to continue his pursuit. The stream is a figure, in other words, for the mourner's sexuality, and for its necessary willingness to accept not only a detour but a sacrificial change. And despite the great beauty and apparent relaxation in this so-called interlude, the work of sacrifice is minutely continued.

It is important to view the present offering in contrast to the bitter plucking of the poem's start. Now, the anger has been purged, and the rewards (the undying flowers of praise) have been established. The process can be repeated in a sweeter, more decorative manner, even while the clues of sacrifice are unmistakable: the offering of "quaint enamell'd eyes" (the "white Pink," incidentally, also connotes a little eye, pink meaning "eyelet"); the hanging, pensive heads (not only of cowslips but of pansies too); the flowers chosen as emblems of frustrated or forlorn young love ("the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies"); or flowers like the "tufted Crow-toe" (*orcus*

*mascula*) or the amaranth, here explicitly urged to shed his beauty (the amaranth is, literally, the unfading flower, the never-quenched life flame. Its tiny red spires revive in water long after plucking—perfect emblems for a sacrificed but resurrected power).<sup>23</sup>

While essential to the poem's development and to its high level of self-awareness, the recognition of "false surmise" reflects not only on the fictive presence of the dead in "Lycidas" but on the figurative action that underlies any such ceremonial offering, any such imagining that the dead person—someone addressed as *he* or *thou* rather than it—is actually in the mourner's presence. In this sense, the interposing tribute is any elegy, any invention of farewell addressed to one who has already gone. And in the turbulent lines that follow, however much one feels a certain harsh confrontation with the unadorned ugliness of death, the fiction of address is being maintained, even as the exact locating of that address is forcibly bewildered.

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding Seas  
 Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd,  
 Whether beyond the stormy *Hebrides*,  
 Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
 Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world,  
 Or whether thou to our moist vows denied,  
 Sleep'st by the fable of *Bellerus* old,  
 Where the great vision of the guarded Mount  
 Looks toward *Namancos* and *Bayona's* hold;  
 Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth:  
 And, O ye *Dolphins*, waft the hapless youth.

(154–64)

The movement away from the fictive hearse to the great diffusion of the rolling sea definitely accelerates the withdrawal of attachment from the dead. And the distance opened up by those *whethers* and *ors* prepares, as it should, for the necessary reattachment of love to a substitute. That substitute is, as we know, a transfigured version of the lost Lycidas, and it is fascinating to note how Milton actually combines the movement of detachment with a subtle premonition of the apotheosis to come. For the diffusion of place hints, in however painful a voice, at the kind of omnipresence of a deity. The hint is strengthened by the orotund language ("the bottom of the monstrous world") and by the possible suggestion of Christ's visit to harrow hell. It is furthered by reference to Bellerus, Saint Michael, and the legendary figure of Palaemon.

Palaemon was the drowned youth whom dolphins carried to the shore. A temple was erected in homage to him as the guardian of sailors, a role to be accorded Lycidas. Bellerus is the fabled giant who will arise from his

slumbers as though from death. And Saint Michael is not only the patron of mariners (hence again prefiguring the “Genius of the shore”) but also the agent of Justice, wielding a sword that should remind us of the two-handed engine of divine vengeance. Tradition has it that men of faith could see the apparition of Michael on the mountain at Land’s End. There Milton places him, on his fortified elevation guarding against the Spanish strongholds across the sea. The image of consolidated defense surely reflects on the poet’s own increasingly assured defense, his conviction that a concentrated power (be it his lofty rhyme, his praise aloft, or even the power of his reinforced repression, his rededication to an ascetic quest) will stand erect against less high desires and against death itself.<sup>24</sup> It is because these lines so brilliantly effect that distancing of the lost object, the relic of the actual Lycidas, *and* so fully prefigure the new object of attachment, the resurrected Lycidas, that the poem can now finally move to the lines that follow.

Weep no more, woeful Shepherds weep no more,  
 For *Lycidas* your sorrow is not dead,  
 Sunk though he be beneath the wat’ry floor,  
 So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,  
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
 And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled Ore,  
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:  
 So *Lycidas*, sunk low, but mounted high,  
 Through the dear might of him that walk’d the waves,  
 Where other groves, and other streams along,  
 With *Nectar* pure his oozy Locks he laves, And hears the  
 unexpressive nuptial Song,  
 In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
 There entertain him all the Saints above,  
 In solemn troops, and sweet Societies  
 That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.  
 Now *Lycidas*, the Shepherds weep no more;  
 Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,  
 In thy large recompense, and shalt be good  
 To all that wander in that perilous flood.

(165–85)

Here, then, is the act of substitution, without which no work of mourning is complete, the reattachment to a new object of love, in this case a troped, indeed apotheosized, version of the physical Lycidas who had sunk “beneath the wat’ry floor.” The turn to the mounted Lycidas thus necessarily reflects a spiritualization of the poet’s own attachment, a refined reassertion

of desire evident in the accompanying imagery (the emphasis on mounting, on repairing a drooping head, on laving the oozy locks, and finally on the nuptial song in the kingdom of joy and love). We discern not merely the mourner's reinvestment of desire but the conclusion of the archaic funeral rites for the vegetation god—the retrieval or establishment of an emblem of renewed fertility and the celebration of a reunion that regenerates the natural world. Here, of course, in a Christianized version we have the elevation of the soul (still imaged, however, by the sun) and its entry into a spiritually raised, rather than physically renewed, natural world, a world now of other streams and groves, where the nuptial song celebrates the marriage of the Lamb, or of the human spirit, to God. The pastoral world is reinscribed in heaven.

As for the figure of the sun, apart from its totemic power and its history as a crucial elegiac trope, it has been carefully contextualized in "Lycidas," situated in relation to so many other images and prefigurations that it now gathers up a vast range of meaning in its final, triumphant rise. It recalls the opening eyelids of the morn; it fulfills the aborted sudden blaze of fame; it sheds the eclipse; it raises all those fallen, pensive, sunk, or severed heads.

Yet it is intriguing to notice how the poet, even while he exploits this figure of the sun as a simile for the rising soul, manages to supersede it by the Christian force that according to Milton makes that simile possible. Lycidas rises like the sun but does so through the dear might of Christ. We are invited to see how this power, as a force that can cause a sunlike rise, exceeds that of the sun. We may even be reminded that in a Christian cosmos God is the creator or cause of the sun itself. This set of ideas is important to the coda of the poem, and it is stressed further by the motif of an enabling or positing power manifested in the poet's fiat: "Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore." The accent is very nearly that of command. Is the poet himself now playing a Christ-like role?

Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th'Oaks and rills,  
While the still mom went out with Sandals gray;  
He touch't the tender stops of various Quills,  
With eager thought warbling his *Doric* lay:  
And now the Sun had stretch't out all the hills,  
And now was dropt into the Western bay;  
At last he rose, and twitch't his Mantle blue:  
Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.

(186–93)

The mourner's act of self-distancing and self-surpassing, so essential to mourning, is here taken one step further. Even the successful mourner is suddenly superseded, in a way that reminds us of the place of this poem in



the context of Milton's developing career. He has written his consummate pastoral, and has achieved within it instances and proofs of epic power. Not only is this coda written in *ottava rima*, the form for Italian epic, but it reads precisely like those moments in epic poetry when the narrator follows the speech of a protagonist with "Thus sang...." It is as though Milton, in ending and describing his elegy, has already entered an epic.

The line "He touch't the tender stops of various Quills" is surely meant to counterpoint, in a gentle fashion, the forced fingers rudely shattering the leaves. And "touch't the tender stops" ought, too, to recall "touch't my trembling ears," thereby suggesting a development that the poet has now made, an assimilation of the Apollonian, epic touch within the Doric "warble." Once again we admire the mourner's absorption of the gestures of authority, which culminates in the assimilation of the elegist to the guiding figure and power of the poem, the sun. Assimilation and yet, as always, surpassal.

First, there is the power deriving from an accelerated description of the sun's motion, as though the poet's act of description were hurrying the sun, somehow even causing tenses to collapse into the timeless now of eternity, or indeed of poetry: "And now the Sun ... And now was dropt." Following this is the master stroke of replacing the sun by the elegist, sliding from one to the other via a deliberately ambiguous pronoun, *he*. That ambiguity is even prepared for by the attribution to the elegist of a "Mantle blue," somehow part of the same attire as the "Sandals gray;" and by the brilliant succession "And now was dropt ... At last he rose." The physical Lycidas had sunk; his spirit has mounted high. The sun sinks; the poet rises.<sup>25</sup>

The "Mantle blue" calls for a few comments. It is perhaps only the coventry blue cloak of a shepherd. But how to distinguish it now from the blue sky surrounding the sun? What is more interesting, it is a consoling revision of the "mantle black" that surrounded a disconsolate Colin Clout at the end of "January." It is the last and perhaps most pointed of Milton's allusions to the tradition he has overgone.<sup>26</sup>

The way in which the elegist preempts the rising of the sun reflects back on Christ's power to effect a spiritual sunlike rise for man. But Milton has calmly assumed that power himself: *he* makes the uncouth swain rise, and he himself has risen, as though he were another sun. We find it hard to avoid the recognition that it is, after all, the poet who has Christ raise Lycidas. The frame of fictionality encompasses even that supreme action; which brings us to the disquieting region of conjecture, so important to Milton, of whether Christianity may be no more than a superior product (superior to Classical mythology, for example) of man's imagination. What we have already seen to be the poem's repeated questioning of its own fictions cannot entirely be escaped. (The accelerated temporality of the sun's motion is no more real than the rhythmic circle of the idyll. And the sun, in order to behave as a

symbol for resurrection, has to *appear* to have a nocturnal demise, another of man's fictions. And how is he who walked the waves so different from Palaemon? Is he more real? or is he simply more powerful?)<sup>27</sup>

Near the end of Revelation, a text we see alluded to and even quoted in "Lycidas," there is a verse that reads:

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of  
the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God  
did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

(21:23)

John's highly rhetorical imaging of God as the light of the new Jerusalem depends on substituting God for the original solar figure. But "Lycidas," moving as it does from submissive gestures of compulsion and loss to an internalizing counter-usurpation of totemic power, has substituted the figure of the elegist for both the sun and God. As we see the rising poet imaginatively projecting, as no sun can, the landscape of the future, we may think ahead to Ruskin's statement regarding "invention spiritual":

Man is the sun of the world; more than the real sun.  
The fire of his ... heart is the only light  
and heat worth gauge or measure. Where he is,  
are the tropics; where he is not, the ice-world.<sup>28</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Quoted in Scott Elledge, ed., *Milton's "Lycidas": Edited to Serve as an Introduction to Criticism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 174.

2. *Ibid.*, 208.

3. *Ibid.*, 213.

4. *Sbatter* is certainly the strongest verb in the opening of the poem, and Milton has placed it in such a way as to reinforce its effect. The fate of the men, and Bastwick's threat, should raise the question of the symbolic importance of the ear, so prominent in "Lycidas." Finally, we may recall Prynne's words in Milton's "sunk low, but mounted high."

5. Trans. from the Latin by David Masson, in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Patterson, Vol. 12 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 19.

6. *Ibid.*, 27.

7. "Let him live sparingly, like the Samian teacher: and let herbs furnish his innocent diet.... Beyond this, his youth must be innocent of crime and chaste, his conduct irreproachable and his hands stainless.... By this rule it is said that the wise Tiresias lived after the loss of his eyes, and Ogygian Linus, and Calchas when he was

a fugitive from his doomed home, and Orpheus in his old age.... For truly, the bard is sacred to the Gods and is their priest. His hidden heart and his lips alike breathe on Jove" (Milton, "Elegy VI," in *The Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed., Merritt Y. Hughes [Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1957, reprint ed, 1975], 52. Subsequent quotations from "Lycidas" are from this edition).

8. For the allusive echoing within Milton's "Yet once more" see John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 127–29, and Louis Martz, *Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), chap. 3.

More generally, for the relation of "Lycidas" to the traditional pastoral elegy see James H. Hanford, "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's 'Lycidas,'" *PMLA* 25 (1910), 403–47; Thomas Perrin Harrison, Jr. *The Pastoral Elegy: An Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1939), Ellen Lambert, *Placing Sorrow: A Study of the Pastoral Elegy from Theocritus to Milton* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976); and Richard Mallette, Spenser, Milton, and Renaissance Pastoral (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1981), chap. 4.

For the most recent, and in many respects the most subtle, study of Milton's use of generic conventions see Paul Alper's "Lycidas and Modern Criticism," *ELH* 49, no. 2 (Summer 1982), 468–96. This essay also contains a thoughtful response to previous studies of the poem, such as those by Abrams, Friedman, and Fish (M.H. Abrams, "Five Types of *Lycidas*," in *Milton's Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem*, ed. C. A. Patrides, rev. ed. [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983], 216–35, Donald M. Friedman, "Lycidas: The Swain's Paideia," *ibid.*, 281–302, Stanley Fish, "Lycidas: A Poem Finally Anonymous," *ibid.*, 319–40. Patrides' collection contains other essays, which I will refer to later. It also offers an excellent bibliography of studies on the tradition and the poem).

In the course of "Lycidas and Modern Criticism," Alpers seeks to rebut Fish's contention that "the energy of the poem derives not from the presence of a controlling and self-contained individual, but from forces that undermine his individuality and challenge the fiction of his control" (Fish, 322). Where Fish suggests the obliteration of personal voice, Alpers points to that voice's careful convening of the antecedent voices of the genre. My own argument offers the view of an eclogic, self-surpassing voice composed, as Alpers demonstrates, of conventional strands but submitted to a process similar to that which Fish describes. Fish, however, does not intergrate his perception with a psychological view of self-suppression as a crucial element of the work of mourning. I believe that there *is* considerable self-abasement and self-suppression in the poem, but I see this as a phenomenon that is suffered and worked through by an individual mourning mind. Elegies are in large part about this kind of self-chastening, just as they require the elegist's personal accommodation to the impersonal code of language and the symbolic order. In the following chapter, I shall be looking closely at the ways in which a mourner seeks precisely to merge his personal voice with the inherited voices of the dead. The difficulty in such moments is to distinguish self-definition or even self-aggrandizement from a more strictly submissive gesture. Indeed, the elegy as a genre shows how a necessarily intertwined such seemingly antithetical elements must remain.

9. The most comprehensive reading of the imagery of "Lycidas" is still that of Rosemund Tuve, *Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957). See, too, essays by Wayne Shumaker, Josephine Miles, and Richard P. Adams, in *Patrides*.

10. Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Dorothea Wender (London: Penguin, 1973), 23.

11. Rev, 22.1.

12. The sun itself is not sighted during the course of this ideal day: predawn appearances give way to midday sounds, and sight returns only with the view of the descending evening star.

13. Cf. the earlier discussion of narrative repetition in mourning. In Milton's case, this is played out with greatest scope in *Paradise Lost*. Milton even inserts his own warning cry, or rather his desire for such a cry ("O for that warning voice"), a perfect instance of a combined preparation for, yet refreshing of, loss. We are told that it is about to happen, but it happens as if for the first time.

14. The passage is thus a brilliant accomplishment of what Freud calls the mourner's recalling yet undoing of remembered bonds. As Karl Abraham and others have stressed, this recalling is usually done once the memories have been introjected, and it is interesting to relate what we noticed as the oddly englobed quality of the idyll to the phenomenon of introjection. Also, the ability to catch or roll up time in this way is a crucial heralding of the poem's later perspectives on mere time, perspectives gained as though from the vantage of eternity.

15. Of the relation between the serpent and the ear in *Paradise Lost*, or the extensive imagery in Hamlet: "Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, / A serpent stung me" (1.5.35-36). Claudius is the serpent who, like Satan, pours his leprous distillment in the porches of the ear. Similarly, "the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forged process of my death / Rankly abus'd" (1.5.36-38).

16. While the association of blinding with castration is familiar, Jonathan Swift reminds us of the similar association with injuries to the ear. His meditation, interestingly enough, begins with reference to such victims as Bastwick, Burton, and Prynne. After speaking of the "many loppings and mutilations, to which the ears of our fathers, and our own, have been of late so much exposed," Swift continues: "It is held by naturalists, that if there be a protuberance of parts in the superiour region of the body, as in the ears and nose, there must be a parity also in the inferior.... Hippocrates tells us, that when the vein behind the ear happens to be cut, a man becomes a eunuch" (*The Tale of a Tub*, in *Prose Works of Jonathan Swit*, ed. Herbert Davis, 9 vols. [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939], 1:129)

17. Calliope is, of course, the muse of epic poetry, to whom Milton had been dedicating and, in a sense, sacrificing himself. The threat of her removal or helplessness is, therefore, particularly devastating.

18. He has had to face what Adam will express as perhaps the harshest aspect of his and therefore of all human loss:

... how glad would I lay me down  
As in my Mother's lap! There I should rest  
And sleep secure, his dreadful voice no more

Would thunder in my ears....

*Paradise Lost* 10.777–80

The words “dreadful voice” of course echo the “dread voice” in the elegy.

19. Leslie Brisman has discussed this delay in his comments on the poem in *Milton's Poetry of Choice and Its Romantic Heirs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

20. The shift from Camus to Saint Peter is appropriate. They are like two border figures, ushers from one realm to the next. Camus at the edge of his river and the idyllic world, Peter at the gates of heaven. Each is a quasi-deity of water—the Cam and the Galilean lake, respectively.

21. As we shall see, the two-handed engine invites reference to the sword of divine vengeance in Hebrews, Revelation, and Psalm 149, but it is worth speculating on this curious trait of doubleness in the keys, the engine, and the miter's form. We know doubling to be a sign of castration, and it is not unlikely that these totemic objects somehow bear the sign of their status as products of castration.

22. “Socrates: ‘And shall we not find them replete with immense pleasures? Or need we remind ourselves of that feature of passion and anger-of the lines: “Wrath that spurs on the wisest mind to rage, / Sweeter by far than stream of flowing honey,” or of the pleasures mixed up with the pains in lamentation and longing’” (*Philebus* 47e in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series, 71 [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961], 1128–29).

23. On the amaranth and other flower imagery see Tuve. Alpers, too has excellent comments on this entire passage.

24. Of. the similar status of Peele Castle, in Wordsworth's “Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle.” Notice even the emphasis of the “look”:

And this huge Castle, standing here sublime,  
I love to see the look with which it braves,  
Cased in the unfeeling armor of old time,  
The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves.  
(*Poetical Works*, 453)

25. As mentioned in chapter II, n. 9, “Lycidas” bears a significant relation to Spenser's “July.” Apart from the several verbal echoes and repeated motifs, “Lycidas” revises the earlier eclogue's unresolvedly opposed attitudes toward the sun.

26. The “Mantle blue” also recalls a line in a poem of George Herbert, published four years before “Lycidas.” From *The Temple*, a lyric entitled “The Bag” describes Christ's descent to earth and itemizes his simultaneous disrobing. We are told that the “sky his azure mantle gain'd” In “Lycidas” it is the swain who seems to gain the mantle.

Furtherlight on the significance of the mantle could be shed by a section of Yeats's *Autobiography*, quoted and commented on by Avrom Fleishman. Yeats writes of having opened at random a copy of Burkitt's *Early Eastern Christianity* and finding a “Gnostic Hymn that told of a certain King's son who being exiled, slept in Egypt—a symbol of the natural state—and how an Angel while he slept brought him a royal mantle....” Fleishman remarks, “If the ‘image of him who sleeps’ is only tentatively to be identified as the king's son or Emmanuel, it is surely the soul awaiting

resurrection, just as the angelic gift of a higher form of clothing is clearly redemptive" (*Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983], 330–31).

27. This question haunts the entire history of religious beliefs, from the violent succession of deities in Greece to the contests of different nations' gods. In Milton's work, it is particularly and consistently problematic, extending from the "Nativity Ode" to *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.

28. *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Library Edition, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903–12), 7:262.



WILLIAM FLESCH

*The Majesty of Darkness*

*Thou art immortal and this tongue is known  
But to the uncommunicating dead.*

—P. B. SHELLEY

*Abyss is its own apology.*

—DICKINSON

This essay undertakes to urge what I only half-jokingly call the novel view that Milton is of God's party in *Paradise Lost*. Novel, because axioms of philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon the pulse, and most readers, on both sides of this vexed issue, have had to go elsewhere even for the terms of an argument about God's justifiability (for example, to theology). On my reading, *Paradise Lost* dramatizes a series of more or less mistaken interpretations of God in order to claim a terrific prerogative for poetry as the only human endeavor pitched high enough to be adequate to the God the poem imagines. The poem may load the deck in poetry's favor, then, but it still must convince you to play with that deck: that, I argue, is what Milton conceived of as his task. Justifying the ways of God to men becomes equivalent to proving poetry upon the pulse: making the reader go the same steps as the author, till she or he reaches the point where God is his own apology. It will become clear, I hope, that this is not a claim for the vatic fullness of poetry, a fullness which would attest to the presence of God.

---

From *John Milton: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom. © 1986 by Chelsea House Publishers.



Rather, Milton's God is justified through poetry, and one way of putting this is to say that he derives his own authority from poetry. For poetry, I shall argue, is the only thing that Milton conceived of as being inherently antipathetic to idolatry.

People are agreed on Milton's hatred of idolatry. Christopher Hill is most succinct on political implications: "Idolatry is a short summary of all he detested: regarding places as holier than people; interfering with the strongly-held convictions of Christians about how they should and should not worship God; use of financial and corporal punishments in spiritual matters; all the sordidness of church courts propping and pandering for fees." The concept of idolatry does much—even all—of the work of coordinating the poetical, political, and religious dimensions of Milton's thought: readers of all stripes agree to find Eve's worshipping of the tree the clearest sign of her degradation, a degradation to find its latest avatar in what he calls, in "Of Reformation," "the new-vomited Paganisme of sensuall Idolatry" which was the target of the Puritan revolution. Idolatry makes the soul forget "her heavenly flight" (1.520, 522). For Milton it was the exact antithesis of freedom, the alienation of one's own free will. Even Calvinism becomes a mode of idolatry; the Arminian rejection of Calvinist predestination in the "Christian Doctrine" is couched in the terms of iconoclasm:

It seems, then, that predestination and election are not particular but only general: that is, they belong to all who believe in their hearts and persist in their belief. Peter is not predestined or elected as Peter, or John as John, but each only insofar as he believes and persists in his belief.

(6.176)

Determining which party Milton was of, then, depends on deciding which is the party of the iconoclasts. Percy Shelley—who can represent the radical tradition from Blake to Empson—sees Satan as a forerunner of his own explicitly revolutionary hero Prometheus, and it's hard to quarrel with him that even for Milton Satan was on the side which saw itself as resisting oppression. I agree that there are problems with Satan—I'll insist on it—but certainly he spends a lot of time defending his attempted regicide in terms like those of Milton's defenses of the English people. If we are to admire Milton's refusal to idolize the name of king—"a name then which there needs no more among the blockish vulgar, to make it wise, and excellent, and admir'd, nay to set it next the Bible, though otherwise containing little els but the common grounds of tyranny and popery, drest up, the better to deceiv'" (3.339)—it is difficult not to admire much of what Satan says to the same purpose. Throughout the first two Books Satan denounces what he sees

as “the Tyranny of Heav’n” (1.124), or what Mammon calls a “state / Of splendid vassalage” (2.251–52). His incitement of the rebel angels can couch itself as a plea for liberty from servile pomp, whose ceremonies seem to be important in heaven. Satan’s objection to God’s command about the Son that “to him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord” (5.607–8), seems perfectly justified since the Son has not yet demonstrated his worth. While Milton wants us to admire the Son because he volunteers to redeem humanity through his sacrifice, this reason for exaltation comes after Satan’s rebellion (although earlier in the poem). Satan’s objection to the Son stems, at least in part, from the same impulse that caused Milton to inveigh against arbitrariness in law-giving. It wouldn’t be out of character for Satan to urge, with Milton, that “In the publishing of humane lawes, which for the most part aime not beyond the good of civill society, to set them barely forth to the people without reason or Preface, like a physicall prescript, or only with threatnings, as it were a lordly command, in the judgment of Plato was thought to be done neither generously nor wisely.” The judgment Milton is approving is about human and civil laws, it is true, but Milton’s heaven (and at this point, Milton’s God) doesn’t seem fundamentally different in quality from civil society. If God’s purpose is to evoke love in the angels, one would think he’d do better to use persuasion which is “a more winning and more manlike way to keepe men in obedience than feare,” since it “would so incite, and in a manner, charme the multitude into the love of that which is really good, as to imbrace it ever after, not of custome and awe, which most men do, but of choice and purpose, with true and constant delight” (1:746). But God doesn’t give Satan any persuasive reason for the law proclaiming the Son’s glorification; to Satan it does seem an arbitrary and lordly command:

... by Decree  
 Another now hath to himself ingross’t  
 All Power, and us eclipst under the name  
 Of King annointed.

(5.774–77)

And there is no reason to doubt that Satan’s expectations were encouraged by a genuine belief that God ruled only through what Milton scornfully calls “custome and awe” and Satan calls “old repute / Consent or custom” (1.639–40). Satan’s grandeur, even if it is the grandeur of archangel ruined, comes from his iconoclasm, from his desire for liberty.

Obviously, though, there are problems with Satan. His superiority to his conception of God may consist in his perseverance “in some Purpose which he has conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture” as Shelley put it in his “Defence of Poetry” (498), but it is not at all clear how

excellent his purpose is. Empson and Bloom see *Paradise Lost* as chronicling Milton's struggle with the nobility of his own conception of Satan, a struggle which forced him into debasing or "rotting" his own noble conception as Satan's grandeur threatened to get out of hand. But Shelley's analysis of Satan in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, that he is not "exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement" (133), seems as true of Satan early (both in the poem and in the time frame) as later. Satan desires to conquer God so that he can reign in God's place: the liberty he would achieve would be for himself alone. His rejection of Christ's authority comes ultimately from his sense that his own power is being diminished. He refuses to worship the name of king in God: yet for himself and his crew he claims that their "Imperial Titles assert / Our being ordain'd to govern, not to serve" (6.801–2). He will not acknowledge as true of himself what he argues against God, that titles of nobility are "merely titular" (6.774). Satan's revolt is not against tyranny. It is against a tyrant whose place he wishes to usurp.

We should admire, then, the iconoclastic traits that urge Satan to revolt against a figure who does look and act very much like a tyrant, but we should not overlook his own similar tendencies. Satan never sustains the iconoclasm which makes him admirable, since side by side with it exists a desire to be the worshipped icon. I think this accounts for our ambivalent feelings about Satan: heroic in his rebellion against idolatry, he never gets finally beyond it himself.

Even his analysis of his fall reifies the dubious battle. The rebels (with the partial and hypocritical exception of Mammon) all follow Satan in ascribing God's victory only to the superior *degree* of his power, a degree they might hope to match. Beelzebub articulates their idolatrous conception of the true God (and yet it is this idolatrous conception that allows them to imagine themselves iconoclasts) when he anticipates Satan's claim that God has overcome them by force. His name for God is "our Conqueror":

... whom I now  
 Of force believe Almighty, since no less  
 Than such could have o'erpow'rd such force as ours.  
 (1.143–45)

As in Satan's speech about testing God's traditional kingship, the idolatrous strain subverts the speaker's iconoclasm. Beelzebub's pun echoes Milton's objections to imposing laws by force instead of reason, but at the same time it takes the term "Almighty" to refer only to superior force. For the rebel angels, the war in heaven was a war to determine who was first in strength. Their rejection of traditional power offers nothing but a new power in its place. So that their conception of God is that he is great because of his power; he is the victor "whom Thunder hath made greater" (1.258).

To be fair to Satan, he is different from the other rebels by being the only one of them who seems really (if inconsistently) to be outraged by the equation of greatness with power. He is most noble when most stoical, when least impressed by the force that has vanquished him. His claim that thunder made God greater misconceives God, but it also rejects such a conception of greatness. Although he ends up by repeating it, Satan deplores what he takes to be God's idolatry of force:

Hail, horrors, hail  
 Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell  
 Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings  
 A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.  
 The mind is its own place, and in itself  
 Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.  
 What matter where, if I be still the same,  
 And what I should be, all but less than bee,  
 Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least  
 We shall be free....

(1.250–59)

Satan is the only one of the rebels whose character is complex, and that complexity manifests itself in almost all his speeches. His irreconcilable impulses towards self-sufficient iconoclasm and towards his own iconic glory besiege him with contraries. We feel the authentic power of his affirmation of self-reliant freedom, independent of place: he anticipates Michael's doctrine that "God attributes to place / No sanctity ..." (11.836–37). But that freedom too often resolves into meaning nothing more than freedom to attempt to regain only the lost place, "once more / With rallied Arms to try what may be yet / Regain'd in Heav'n ..." (1.249–71).

We do get a sense of the nobility of Satan's rebellion when we hear that one of its results was to have his name blotted out of the book of life. There is unintended pathos in Raphael's sneer, "Nameless in dark oblivion let them dwell" (7.380). Satan's willingness to give up his name stems from that part of him which scorns terms of honor, what Milton, writing as Charles' iconoclast, calls "the gaudy name of majesty." All the angelic names double as titles, deriving their glory from God, who appears in all of them (via the -el suffix) except Zephon's. In the "Christian Doctrine" Milton says that angels take on God's name to image him:

The name of God seems to have been attributed to the angels because they were sent from heaven bearing the likeness of the divine glory and person and, indeed the very words of God... Angels or messengers, even though they may seem to take upon

themselves, when they speak, the name and character of God, do not speak their own words but those specified by God, who sent them.... Exod. xxxiii. 20: *no one can see me and live*. Also John 1.18: *no one has ever seen God*, and v. 37: *you have never heard his voice nor seen his shape*; I Tim. vi. 16: *dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see*. It follows, then, that whoever was heard or seen was not God....

(236–37)

Although this is primarily about the identity of the messengers who speak to humans, I think that for Milton the names of all the angels implied their conditions as images of God, just as Adam is created in God's image. (I will insist, however, on the importance for Milton of the interpretation that Adam's *name* alludes to the ground he comes from.) Satan's rebellion entails the loss of his Godlike name, and this loss would mean two things to him. It would first of all signify his own kenosis, his refusal to bear the name and be the image of God, in favor of a radically unidolatrous freedom. Following Althusser and Deleuze, I see the act of naming—of calling by name—as forming and fixing the subject, and, as Foucault says, the moment of subjectivity is also the moment of subjection, of the insertion of a link in the great chain of power relations; if this claim has any intuitive force to it there's no reason to deny that intuition to Milton. But for Satan this freedom would also come to mean supplanting God.

By giving up a title which invests him with God's image, Satan comes to attempt to rival God's invisibility and inaccessibility. This attempt is double-edged. It proceeds out of a less iconic and more admirable understanding of God than the other angels (both fallen and unfallen) possess (as I'll claim later, even the unfallen angels think that they can see God); but it erroneously and idolatrously considers a visible, accessible, irremediably subjective being like Satan capable of rivaling God. Pride engenders Satan's fall, but I think that that pride is not accurately described as pride of place alone. Satan's nobility does, for many acute and powerful readers, rival and even exceed God's. As a projection of Milton's repressed pride in his own insightfulness, an insightfulness which tempts him (if Sandler is right) to reject the authority of the Bible, Satan can be understood to be imagining himself to know more about Godlike inaccessibility than any of the other angels, and perhaps even than God himself. But Satan is idolatrously proud of his own unidolatrousness. I think this is the feeling behind Satan's scorn at God's being made greater by thunder. Satan (or Milton in Satan) thinks, and not without some very good evidence, that his conception of Godliness is poetically superior to God's. He certainly speaks better poetry than God is allowed to. I am going to argue that not only is Satan's conception of God inadequate, but also his conception of Godliness;

nevertheless Satan comes closer than any of the other angels to the understanding of Godliness which was Milton's.

The loss of his name indicates Satan's nobility, and his reaction to it distinguishes him, for a time at least, from the rest of the fallen angels. Milton's scorn for the other rebels is boundless. Not complex like Satan, their only desires are gluttonous: to be feasted and adored as idols. Satan sustains for a time (and only partially) his noble and impossible condition of namelessness, a truer image of God's invisible glory than are the idols. But the other rebels seem avid to get themselves new names, avid to be idolized in their own names:

... of their Names in heav'nly Records now  
 Be no memorial, blotted out and ras'd  
 By thir Rebellion, from the Books of Life.  
 Nor had they yet among the Sons of *Eve*  
 Got them new Names, till wand'ring o'er the Earth,  
 Through God's high sufferance for the trial of man,  
 By falsities and lies the greatest part  
 Of Mankind they corrupted to forsake  
 God thir creator; and th'invisible  
 Glory of him that made them, to transform  
 Oft to the Image of a Brute, adorn'd  
 With gay Religions full of Pomp and Gold,  
 And Devils to adore for Deities:  
 Then were they known to men by various Names,  
 And various Idols through the Heathen World.

(1.361–75)

This passage catches one of the profoundest contrasts in the poem—that between the puerile, cartoonish infestation of these ridiculous deities and “God's high sufferance” which inflects “all our woe” with the sense that it is God's as well (otherwise why *high* sufferance?). To the extent that the rebels find their greatest delight in “gay Religions full of Pomp and Gold” they're ridiculous. And yet, Satan does differ from them. Milton arouses our disgust at these lesser rebels. But in large part we are disgusted because they contrast with Satan. They are parasites, ready to swarm in when he's done his job, for the rewards only. But no reader can see this passage as referring to Satan, and Milton explicitly aligns himself with Satan's distrust of names when, at the beginning of Book 7, his invocation of the Muse is to the “meaning, not the Name” (7.5).

But Satan is not able to maintain his impossible namelessness. To be like God he would really have to be unchanged by place or time, but his response to his fall is too often close to the obsessive concern with outward

show that characterizes the pervasive idolatry of the fallen angels. For the most part, Satan's actions are ultimately reactions, and so are based, however indirectly, on the exterior constraints that Satan as iconoclast wants to think himself entirely independent of. Even in Book 1 he spends a lot of time playing the adolescent inverter that Harold Bloom finds he has become by Book 9. His first speech to Beelzebub asserts his desire for revenge, a reactive passion (1.107), and fifty lines later he takes up his adversarial role decisively: "To do aught good will never be our task, / But ever to do ill our sole delight, / As being contrary to his high will / Whom we resist" (1.159–62). This resolution finally leads to his ultimate degradation, in which he wholly accepts the adversarial name that heaven has given him, and revels in its meaning: "Satan (for I glory in the name, / Antagonist of Heav'n's Almighty King)" (10.386–87). The Son ultimately manifests himself as Satan's better when he refuses this reactive, adversarial role in Book 10; his willingness "to clothe his Enemies" (10.219) enriches the possibilities of human life instead of turning the world into the silly theatre of antagonism that Satan wants it to be.

At the end of Book 2 Milton provides an objective correlative to the fallen angels' idolatrous overestimation of names. Many readers echo Johnson's discomfort with the allegorization of Sin and Death, as being unworthy of the grandeur that has come before. But this unworthiness itself allegorizes the idolatry of the rebels. They never learn, what it will be Adam and Eve's burden to discover, that sin and death are something more than the names of horrid personages. For Satan, the words "sin" and "death" become the names of exterior beings, instead of being felt as interior states. The externalization of sin and death allegorizes Satan's refusal to understand the pertinency of a figurative understanding of allegory. He takes the image for the essence, and he worships the image. According to Sin's account—the force of which neither of them understands—Satan "full oft / Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing, / Becam'st enamored" (2.763–65). He falls in love with sin as a narcissistic self-image, and so evinces his sinful idolatry of himself. That he could find a sufficient, a perfect, idol for himself within so decayed an allegory shows how debased his self-idolatry has become.

Idolatrous narcissism is on one level the cause of all the falls in the poem. Abdiel interprets it as the opposite of real liberty, when he upbraids Satan, echoing Sin, as being "Thyself not free, but to thyself enthralled" (6.181). Satan tempts Eve, who has already manifested her narcissistic tendencies in her attraction to her reflection at the pool (4.460–66), with the promise of what she might become; Adam's reproach to her, that she insisted on going off alone because she was "longing to be seen" (10.877) doesn't seem unfair. But Adam consents to eat when he finds that Eve has fallen because he feels "The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh, / Bone of my Bone thou art" (9.914–15), and that "to lose thee were to lose myself" (9.959).

Commentators often try to distinguish Satan's narcissistic attraction to Sin from what looks like a similar trait in God by calling it a parodic version of the Father's glorification of his Son. The Son is supposed to be worthy of God's surpassing love because he is "The radiant image of his Glory" (3.63); God praises him as "thou, in whom my glory I behold / In full resplendence" (5.719–20), and when he addresses him "O Son, in whom my soul hath chief delight, / Son of my bosom, Son who art alone / My Word, my wisdom, and effectual might" (3.168–70), the Son seems to have sprung out of God's bosom as Sin will spring out of Satan's head and Eve from Adam's side. Obviously Milton did feel a difference between God's love for his Son and Satan's desire for Sin, but the difference doesn't ilable for the heavenly audience, except by decree.

In fact, it's impossible, from a heavenly perspective, to distinguish between Satan and God except as different in degree. I have been arguing that one of the signs of the rebel angels' idolatry is their belief that might makes right, that only force ratifies the pretension to sovereignty, and so that the only difference between Satan and God is one of degree (except that Satan sometimes imagines himself as deploring this state of things). A less vicious version of the rebels' doctrine manifests itself in the idea of the great chain of being, in which every link has its place in a hierarchy. A defense of hierarchy can of course be mounted: "Orders and Degrees / jar not with liberty, but well consist" (5.792–93)—but this is Satan speaking. His initial objection is not to the chain but to having his position as its second link (after God) usurped by the Son. Abdiel is exceptional among the angels in perceiving a radical discontinuity between the highest of the angels and the Son (5.841–45), who is himself, according to the Arian "Christian Doctrine," only the first of all *created* beings (Part I, Chapter V and *passim*). But Abdiel's interpretation isn't the one encouraged in Heaven, since the Father's prediction that "God shall be All in All" (3.341) seems an easy induction from the continuous version of the chain that Raphael explains to Adam. Thus his repetition of "all" enforces a continuity in being—a continuity which does seem to attribute sanctity to place:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom  
 All things proceed, and up to him return,  
 If not deprav'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;  
 But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,  
 As nearer to him plac't or nearer tending  
 Each in thir several active Spheres assign'd,  
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds



Proportion'd to each kind....  
     time may come when men  
 With angels may participate ...  
 And from these corporal nutriments perhaps  
 Your body may at last turn all to spirit,  
 Improv'd by tract of time, and wing'd ascend  
 Ethereal, as wee....

(5.469–99)

Empson notices some of Raphael's unwitting echoes of Satan's dream temptation in this passage (147ff). I want to build on his insight by arguing that Raphael sounds so much like Satan because they have very similar ideas about God and heaven. Raphael and Beelzebub both seem to have the same conception of what it means to be almighty. For Beelzebub, in his claim that God demonstrated himself to be almighty by defeating a force next in power to his (1.144–45), almightiness implies a position at the top of the scale of power, commensurable with lesser might. Raphael takes a similar view when he describes Michael and Satan battling with "next to Almighty Arm" (6.316). For both of them, God is a Platonic form: if he is the origin of ontology, he is likewise approachable through ontology, with being becoming purer (or mightier) as one is placed or tends nearer to him.

Again, Raphael doesn't seem far from the lesser rebels in his conception of God's *invisibility*. Milton subscribes to the Arian tenet that the Father is absolutely unknowable. He is radically different from all created beings, even the Son, who is the voice we hear and the sight we see when we imagine that we are seeing God: "*The Word* must be audible, but God is inaudible just as he is invisible, John v. 37; therefore the Word is not of the same essence as God" (6.239). The rebels, with (as I have argued) the intermittent exception of Satan, possess a debased notion of this doctrine. God's inaudibility and invisibility get parodied when the rebels corrupt human beings "th'invisible / Glory of him that made them, to transform / Oft to the Image of a Brute" (1.369–71), which is to have the unknown degenerate into the monstrous. Mammon's attempt to persuade the fallen angels that they can make a material heaven of hell also presents God's invisibility in material terms:

    This deep world  
 Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst  
 Thick clouds and dark doth Heav'n's all-ruling Sire  
 Choose to reside, his Glory unobscur'd,  
 And with the majesty of darkness round  
 Covers his throne, from whence deep thunders roar

Must'ring thir rage, and Heav'n resembles hell?  
(2.262–68)

But this somewhat literal-minded conception of God's hidden state is not restricted to hell. Raphael always presents God as either within a covering cloud (e.g. 6.28 and 56–57), or hidden by a dazzling brightness. It is worth comparing Milton's conception of God's dazzling invisibility with Raphael's. One's impression is that Raphael believes his inability to tolerate the direct sight of God comes merely from his being too far down on the chain of being. God is dazzling, yes, but his inaccessibility is finally relative. Raphael and the other angels can't see God, but they take this invisibility as proceeding from the weakness of their own sight (a weakness Satan refuses to acknowledge), not as one of God's fundamental attributes. Adam echoes Raphael when he laments the weakness that the fall has produced in him:

How shall I behold the face  
Henceforth of God or Angel, erst with joy  
And rapture so oft beheld? those heav'nly shapes  
Will dazzle now this earthly, with thir blaze  
Insufferably bright.  
(9.1080–84)

For Raphael, God speaks “as from a Flaming Mount, whose top / Brightness had made invisible” (5.598–99), which—at first—looks like Milton's hymn in Book 3 to:

... thee Author of all being,  
Fountain of Light, thyself invisible  
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit'st  
Thron'd inaccessible, but when thou shad'st  
The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud  
Drawn round about thee like a radiant Shrine,  
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,  
Yet dazzle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim  
Approach not, but with both wings veil thir eyes.  
Thee next they sang of all Creation first,  
Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,  
In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud  
Made visible, th'Almighty Father shines,  
Whom else no Creature can behold....  
(3.374–87)

I think that after reading the whole of *Paradise Lost* a reader coming

back to these lines should understand God's invisibility in the second line as fundamental, as preceding the glorious brightness he expresses, not proceeding from it as an effect. We can infer from the last three lines that, far from hiding God, clouds make him visible, like the clothes the invisible man wears in Wells, since it is only in the Son that God is visible without clouds. The reference to the brightness of the Seraphim invites the reader to see in this hymn another allusion to the great chain of being, since there is an implicit comparison of their brightness with God's. But in addition to the difference between God's invisibility and his dazzling light, Milton introduces another discontinuity when clouds shade the full blaze. It is this doubly distanced expression of God that the angels find insufferably bright, and it appears that Raphael mistakes this tertiary inaccessibility for God's invisibility. Milton, on the other hand, would see this attenuated brightness as the end of the great chain of being (or even already beyond it, since *brightest* Seraphim shade their eyes). Beyond that is God's fundamental inaccessibility.

My claim is that the Platonic doctrine which Raphael speaks for is mistaken and that it is this same mistaken doctrine that ultimately tempts the rebels' attempt. Following Deleuze, I want to argue for a Gnostic (but not, I hope, Bloomian) alternative to Platonic doctrine—an alternative which focuses the drama of *Paradise Lost* not on the staged opposition God/Satan but on the complex relationship of a different kind of God with human beings. Deleuze underlines a kind of idolatry in Plato when he contrasts the Timaeian god Chronos (who represents the "moving image of eternity") with the temporality of human beings as "actors." The task of the actor, says Deleuze, is intensity: he or she must concentrate in the most fleeting of presents the weight of the entire past and future of the character represented. The ephemerality of the means of representation—its inadequacy to what it represents—becomes itself an intensity which figures the charge of time more adequately than any more leisurely present (that is a present whose inherent evanescence is not at issue): "Instead of going from the most ample present towards a future and past which can only be expressed by a present more transitory than they are, you go from a future and past become limitless to the most transitory present—a pure instant which ceaselessly subdivides" (my translation). The actor, then, is anti-Platonic, since the soul of acting is that it should be only fictional (which is not the same as third-rate being). It should have the poignancy of what is only fictional, the poignancy that belongs to Calliope when she turns out to be an empty dream. Deleuze is good at relating that poignancy to temporality, in a way that could gloss Proust, but which I want to make gloss *Paradise Lost*:

The actor is not like a god, but like a counter-god. God and the actor are opposed to each other in their reading of time. What

humans grasp as past or future, the god lives in his eternal presence. The god is Chronos: the divine present is the circle in its entirety, while the past and the future are dimensions relative to some highlighted segment of the circle. But for the actor, the present is the narrowest, tightest, most ephemeral, most punctual point on a straight line, never ceasing to divide that line, and dividing itself into past/future. The actor has the essence of the Aeon: instead of the fullest, profoundest present—a present spreading out like an oil stain, embracing past and future—here arises a limitless past/future reflected in an empty present with no more thickness than a mirror. (my translation)

I'll want to argue that Milton's true God was the Gnostic Aeon, not Raphael's debased and serenely self-present manifestation of complacency. Raphael's understanding of God's secrecy and invisibility is pretty tame. He resolves his uncertainty about how to "relate / To human sense th'invisible exploits / Of warring Spirits; how ... unfold / The secrets of another World" by concluding that they really aren't so different from the common knowledge of this world. The hint to Adam indicates his Platonism fairly strongly, with its allusion to the allegory of the cave: "what if Earth / Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein / Each to other like, more than on Earth is thought?" (5.564–76). In Books 7 and 8 he thinks of God as guarding only state secrets from the angels, by a sort of divine executive privilege, suppressing what apparently could be revealed. He tells Adam not to inquire too closely about the nature of the universe, "nor let thine own inventions hope / Things not reveal'd, which th'invisible King, / Only Omniscient, hath suppress in Night...." (7.121–23). This makes it sound as though invisibility were an accidental, not an essential, feature of the things that are closest to God. Near the beginning of Book 8 Raphael praises God for doing "wisely to conceal" the mechanism of his astronomy, "and not divulge / His secrets to be scanned by them who ought / Rather admire...." (8.73–75). This God comes out of Machiavelli, deriving his power not so much from what he keeps to himself as from the fact that he keeps things to himself, which allows him to be the only omniscient one. As a representative of the angels' conception of God, Raphael unwittingly explains how the rebels could have thought themselves capable of replacing him. The angels don't really understand God to be entirely different from themselves. For none of them are secrecy and invisibility *inherent* attributes of the things they do not know. One gets the feeling that, like Bentley, they would emend "secret" to "sacred" in "the secret top of Horeb" (except that at least Bentley feels there's a possible difference there, which they do not).

Adam and Eve start off with an understanding similar to the angels'. They believe that their inability to see God is a function of their place, and

their morning hymn in Book 5 conceives of him as being “to us invisible.” They think that higher up on the chain they would be able to see him; thus they praise the angels, “for yee behold him” (5.157 and 161), and Raphael confirms what Milton surely considered an error. Raphael claims that it is the angels’ “happy state” to “stand / In sight of God enthron’d” (5.535–36). What does this do but ratify Satan’s dream temptation of Eve? There she was encouraged to equate “high exaltation” with the ability to “see / What life the Gods live there, and such live thou” (5.90 and 80–81): thus visibility would mean commensurability—and so susceptibility to being equalled (and, as Satan continues, overthrown). Again, in Book 9, Satan’s temptation encourages Eve to attempt the clearer sight that Raphael has already told her belongs to the angels:

Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,  
 Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,  
 His worshippers; he knows that in the day Ye  
 Eat thereof, your Eyes that seem so clear,  
 Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then  
 Op’n’d and clear’d, and ye shall be as Gods,  
 Knowing both Good and Evil as they know.  
 That ye should be as Gods, since I as Man,  
 Internal Man, is but proportion meet....

(9.702–11)

Eve is receptive to Satan’s argument here because it is based on the Platonic conception of “proportion meet.” Raphael has described the possibility of moving up on the great chain of being; he promised the humans that they could eventually attain to the angelic vision that does have sight of God. Satan exploits both Raphael and Eve’s naive notion that God is within the possible reach of sight in order to encourage her to attempt that reach. One of the immediate consequences of Eve’s disobedience is a further degradation of her understanding of secrecy and invisibility. She thanks Experience because “it op’n’st Wisdom’s way, / And giv’st access, though secret she retire. / And I perhaps am secret; Heav’n is high, / High and remote to see from thence distinct / Each thing on Earth....” (9.810–14). Already she senses that eating the fruit does not provide an easy way up to heaven, which is high and remote; what momentarily sounds like a claim to God-head—“I perhaps am secret”—immediately reduces to the hope that what she has done will be overlooked. (But the expression of that hope is wonderful: already she’s speaking great poetry.)

There is, then, something seriously deficient about the angelic and unfallen conception of God. Empson remarks that Book 6 reads like bad science fiction, which seems a good way of summing up our discomfort with

heaven according to Raphael. Therefore, I want to suggest that the fall of humanity turns out to be fortunate (to argue that it's not, as Danielson does, is inevitably to prefer God's poetry in Book 3 to Milton's) because it enables a much deeper understanding of God. Satan verges on such an understanding when he is closest to Milton, when he is thinking most poetically, most like an Arian. If the angels are Arians at all, it is in a trivial way; for them God is only unknowable and inaccessible because he's just the other side of knowledge and accessibility. But for Adam and Eve the fall produces a sense of drastic discontinuity between finite intelligences and the unknowable God. This sense of discontinuity is at first primarily negative (as when Adam asks how he will be able henceforth to tolerate the insupportably dazzling sight of God or Angel, or when Eve feels that heaven is high and remote), but even in its negative aspect Milton equates it with poetic power. His dismissal, in his invocation to Book 9, of Raphael's account of the war in heaven seems every bit as imperious as Empson's. It is for the "sad task" of describing the *fall* that Milton requests "answerable style" (9.13 and 20); this seems a bit odd at first, since he'd shown very little anxiety about whether he'd be able to ventriloquize a seraphic description of the war in heaven. But he goes on in the invocation to reject poetry about "tilting Furniture" (9.34), and thereby himself voices our half-suppressed embarrassment about the silliness of what's gone on in heaven. He's not interested in the standard topics that give "Heroic name / To Person or to Poem" (9.40–41):

Mee of these  
 Nor skill'd nor studious, higher Argument  
 Remains, sufficient of itself to raise  
 That name, unless an age too late, or cold  
 Climate, or Years damp my intended wing  
 Deprest; and much they may, if all be mine,  
 Nor Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear.  
 (9.41–47)

More interesting than the implication that Raphael's narrative is not up to the poetry Milton finally aspires to is the contrast with twilight Eden presented by the opening of Book 9. There is more poetic affect in Milton's intense apprehension of his mortality in these lines than in any of the descriptions of the events in heaven. Even the cautious optimism of the last two lines is suffused with a sense of loss. Perhaps he'll live to finish the poem, but he'll still be susceptible to all the dampening influences of his mortal condition. These lines feel rather like *The Tempest*: the island is magical, but when you leave it every third thought will be of death. I think this passage is so moving because of the contrast between Urania's radiance and Milton's mortal blindness. We get a sense of her radiance, but also a sense that its

power is not a saving but a consoling one. “Nightly” seems to be the key word. For Urania, night is like the nights in Paradise before the fall, illumined by the stars, planets and moon, or like night in heaven: “grateful Twilight (for Night comes not there / In darker veil)” (5.645–46). But for Milton it ultimately means the night of Sonnet XXIII, forgotten for a moment but returning after his nightly muse has fled. The radiance which illuminates him also intensifies his sense of loss, as when Caliban wakes and cries to sleep again.

In the invocation to Book 9, Milton both asserts and demonstrates that loss of Eden, the fall into mortality, produces poetic affect. Of course, this is a position that he cannot be comfortable with. One feels that the choiring angels hymning praise to the works of God provide the model of poetry that Milton is least anxious about. But the affect actually derives from the impossibility of sustaining the apparent radiance of that poetry in a fallen condition. For a long time, I think, Milton felt ambivalent about his sense that poetic power is enabled by loss, and at least twice before he tried to dissipate that ambivalence by splitting its antinomies into paired poems: “L’Allegro” / “Il Penseroso” and “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity” / “The Passion.” But in *Paradise Lost* he combines celebration and lamentation. This combination reflects Milton’s ambivalence about the poetry he finds himself writing most powerfully; but this ambivalence also produces the most powerful moments in that poetry. As an evil rhetorician whose language is sublimely intensified in hell, Satan represents the negative side of that ambivalence. But the Romantics seem right in thinking that Milton couldn’t avoid, through much of the poem, feeling a strong identity with Satan, an identity which he understood as a real problem: as I have argued, the identification seems to stem from their both having a deeper conception of Godliness than the rest of heaven. And this conception seems indissolubly linked to ambivalence. Satan and Milton are both suspicious of the origins of their poetic power, but Satan’s final response is to get rid of ambivalence by reifying that origin, by making it either an icon to be rejected (if the icon is God) or worshipped (if it is himself). Milton, on the other hand, had a lot invested in not identifying poetic and iconic thinking. If he calls books the image of God in “Areopagitica” (2.492), by the 1660s he was very careful to explode the notion that one could call “idols the layman’s books” (6.693). Satan cannot sustain the drastically iconoclastic sense that his poetic power springs from something radically unknowable, from unknowability itself. He does not have the negative capability that would enable him to accept ambivalence itself as a condition of power. This is not just another way of saying what the angels say, that his overweening pride made him reject an invisible God who nevertheless should obviously be obeyed. Satan’s deep sense that the origin of power is inaccessible far

outdoes, in its deep and powerful sublimity, the angels' conceptions of God. But it finally founders, while Milton's does not.

Empson and Bloom see Milton's response to his ambivalence as being finally to cut the Gordian knot by scapegoating Satan, by making him despicable (or, more subtly, by recounting how unjust rebellion necessarily makes the highest nobility vile). But *Paradise Lost* seems ultimately to respond to this problem positively too, which is I think its greatest strength. In giving up Satan it doesn't give up God or its ambivalent conception of God. Early on, Milton was ambivalent about a poetry based on loss, in *Paradise Lost* he bases his poetry on the very loss that that ambivalence entails, the loss of angelic certainty about the origin of power.

## II

It is a version of the abyss as somehow God's element, in the same way that night is Milton's, that Adam will eventually learn. The way he learns it is via his learning that his own element is really dust, that his name images, not Platonic forms, but the formless, the scattered. His lamentation in Book 10 recognizes dust as "our final rest and native home" (10.1085) when he speaks the lines Mary Shelley used as her powerful epigraph: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me Man, did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me ...?" (10.743-45). The knowledge that "we are dust, / And thither must return and be no more" (11.199) is the knowledge of death that the fruit of the tree instilled. Milton insists on the quality of this knowledge, altering Genesis to have Adam and Eve "know" but not appreciate their origin before the fall. So when God climaxes his judgment with the phrase "know thy birth" before the line from Genesis, "For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return" (10.207-8), there is a strong implication that this knowledge is incommunicable to the immortals. Adam and Eve did not know what this meant, even though they were acquainted with its content, when they were immortal. Knowledge has come to mean something different to them now. The power of the judgment is not available to the unfallen. The judgment is powerful because it reveals the dark nativity of life as being the abyss. The knowledge available to human beings of their natural element produces the poetic affect that Milton associates with Godliness. Humans go beyond the fallen angels in this knowledge, since the rebels keep asserting that "in our proper motion we ascend / Up to our native seat" (2.75-76). The rebels reject the apprehension of the abyss that establishes poetic power, and in this refusal of the unknowable they prove themselves as ultimately not like God. But Adam's final statement that the fall was fortunate doesn't refuse the unknowable. He goes beyond the foreknowledge vouchsafed to Michael



when he sees beyond the end of time. Here he at last speaks Milton's words, achieves Milton's insight into the unknowable:

How soon hath thy prediction, Seer blest,  
 Measur'd this transient World, the Race of time,  
 Till time stand fixt: beyond is all abyss,  
 Eternity, whose end no eye can reach.

(12.553–56)

One of the consequences of my argument is the claim that God does not ever appear in *Paradise Lost*: “whoever was heard or seen was not God.” That claim seems to be worth making since it saves God from sounding ridiculous. As I read the poem, the figure of God is an emanation constructed for the dwarfish understandings of the angels. In the “Christian Doctrine” Milton tells us:

It is safest for us to form an image of God in our minds which corresponds to his representation and description of himself in the sacred writings. Admittedly, God is always described or outlined not as he really is but in such a way as will make him conceivable to us. Nevertheless, we ought to form just such a mental image of him as he, in bringing himself within the limits of our understanding, wishes us to form. Indeed he has brought himself down to our level expressly to prevent our being carried beyond the reach of human comprehension, and outside the written authority of scripture, into vague subtleties of speculation.

(6.133–34)

The “safest” way is the way taken by the loyal angels, who are content to form an image of God in their minds. H. R. McCallum uses the injunction in this passage to argue that Milton wants us also to take the safe way out. I agree that part of Milton very much wanted to repress his Satanic sense that his idea of God was deeper than that of the Scriptures. But *Paradise Lost* is most powerful when Milton allows that sense full rein. Bloom remarks on the outrageousness of Milton's pursuit of “Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme” (1.16), since one of the prose attempts of the story narrated in *Paradise Lost* is the Bible (*Vessels*, 83). Milton at his most powerful refuses the safest way. He calls his song “advent'rous” (1.13), and I think we feel some surprise when Adam gives Eve the same epithet after the fall (9.921). We could read this either way: the angelic reading would be that Milton is casting suspicion on his own enterprise by comparing it with Eve's sin; but

more interesting (or adventurous), I think, is the idea that Eve's adventurous deed ultimately results as Satan has predicted; results in enlarging human apprehensions of God.

Milton certainly would not countenance an image of God which went beyond the received images. But the important point is that he doesn't countenance them either. The extreme Puritanism of his definition of idolatry in the "Christian Doctrine" cuts against an unadventurous literalism: "Idolatry means making or owning an idol for religious purposes, or worshipping it, *whether it be a representation of the true God or of some false god*" (6.690–91, my emphasis). Milton at his darkest and most powerful—at his most mortal—goes beyond received images, not to another image, but to meditations on loss and exile which share the inessential essence of what Valentinus—writing against Raphael's hero Plato—called the forefathering abyss.



MARY NYQUIST

*The genesis of gendered subjectivity  
in the divorce tracts and in Paradise Lost*

It appears that one can now speak of “third-wave feminism” as well as “post-feminist feminism.” Like other labels generated by the historical moment to which they refer, these await a lengthy period of interrogation. But if they should stick, their significance will be associated with the variety of attacks mounted against Western bourgeois or liberal feminism over the past decade and a half. Now, as never before, what has to be contended with—precisely because it has been exposed in the process of contestation and critique—is the historically determinate and class-inflected nature of the discourse of “equal rights.” The questions, equal with whom, and to what end? have been raised in ways that have begun to expose how, ever since the early modern period, bourgeois man has proved the measure. They have also shown how the formal or legal status of this elusive “equality” tends by its very nature to protect the status quo.

Because much academic criticism on *Paradise Lost*, especially that produced in North America, has been written within a liberal-humanist tradition that wants Milton to be, among other things, the patron saint of the companionate marriage, it has frequently made use of a notion of equality that is both mystified and mystifying. The undeniable emphasis on mutuality to be found in *Paradise Lost*—the mutual dependency of Eve and Adam on one another, their shared responsibility for the Fall—is for this reason often treated as if it somehow entailed a significant form of equality. Differences

---

From *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the texts and traditions*, eds. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson. © 1988 by Mary Nyquist.

that in *Paradise Lost* are ordered hierarchically and ideologically tend to be neutralized by a critical discourse interested in formal balance and harmonious pairing. To take just one, not especially contentious, example, Milton is said to go out of his way to offset the superiority associated with Adam in his naming of the animals by inventing an equivalent task for Eve: her naming of the flowers. In this reading, Milton, a kind of proto-feminist, generously gives the power of naming to both woman and man.<sup>1</sup> The rhetorical effectiveness of this point obviously depends in important ways upon the suppression of features suggestive of asymmetry. Left unquestioned must be the differences between Adam's authoritative naming of the creatures—an activity associated with the rational superiority and dominion of "Man" when it is presented by Adam, who in Book VIII relates to Raphael this episode of the creation story in the second chapter of Genesis—and Eve's naming of the flowers, which is revealed only incidentally in her response to the penalty of exile delivered in Book XI. In a speech that has the form of a lament for the garden she has just been told they are to leave, Eve's naming in Book XI appears in such a way that it seems never to have had the precise status of an event. It is, instead, inseparably a feature of her apostrophic address to the flowers themselves: "O flowers / ... which I bred up with tender hand / From the first op'ning bud, and gave ye Names" (XI.273–7).<sup>2</sup> Here Eve's "naming" becomes associated not with rational insight and dominion but rather with the act of lyrical utterance, and therefore with the affective responsibilities of the domestic sphere into which her subjectivity has always already fallen.

In recent years, a remarkably similar critical current, intent on neutralizing oppositions, has been at work in feminist biblical commentaries on Genesis. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, claims for the spiritual equality of the sexes have very often had recourse to Genesis 1.27, "So God created man [*hā'ādām*, ostensibly a generic term] in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."<sup>3</sup> This verse, which is part of what is now considered the Priestly or "P" creation account (Genesis 1–2.4a), has always co-existed somewhat uneasily with the more primitive and more obviously masculinist Yahwist or "J" creation account in chapter 2, where the creator makes man from the dust of the ground (thereby making *hā'ādām* punningly relate to *hā'ādāmâ*, the word for ground or earth) and woman from this man's rib. Within a specifically Christian context, the relationship between the two accounts has been—at least potentially—problematical, since I Timothy 2:11–14 uses the Yahwist account to bolster the prohibition against women taking positions of authority within the Church: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

Recently, in an effort to reconcile feminism and Christianity, Phyllis Trible has tried to harmonize the differences between the Priestly and the Yahwist creation accounts. Trible holds that the exegetical tradition alone is responsible for the sexist meanings usually attributed to the Yahwist creation story, which she renarrates using methods that are basically formalist.

More specifically, Trible argues that the second chapter of Genesis tells the story not of the creation of a patriarchal Adam, from whom a secondary Eve is derived, but the story of the creation of a generic and androgynous earth creature or “man” to whom the sexually distinct woman and man are related as full equals. Throughout, Trible’s retelling is strongly motivated by the desire to neutralize the discrepancy between the “P” and the “J” accounts by assimilating “J” to “P,” which is assumed to recognize the equality of the sexes and therefore to provide the meaning of the two creation accounts taken together as one. Because “P” suggests the possibility of a symmetrical, non-hierarchical relationship between male and female, “J” is said by Trible to tell the story of the creation of a sexually undifferentiated creature who becomes “sexed” only with the creation of woman. The simultaneous emergence of woman and man as equals is signalled, she argues, when Yahweh brings the newly fashioned partner to the previously undifferentiated *hā’ādām* or “man,” who responds with the lyrically erotic utterance: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23) (in Trible’s reading “taken out of” means “differentiated from”).<sup>4</sup>

Trible’s revisionary and profoundly ahistorical reading is significant in large part because it has been so widely influential. Among feminist theologians it would seem to have established a new orthodoxy. And it has recently been ingeniously elaborated for a secular readership by Mieke Bal, who assumes with Trible that the commentator can, by an effort of will, position herself outside the traditions of masculinist interpretation; and that Genesis bears no lasting traces of the patriarchal society which produced it.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is far too easy to adopt the opposing or rather complementary view that Genesis is a text inaugurating a transhistorically homogeneous patriarchal culture. This is, unfortunately, a view that is frequently expressed in connection with *Paradise Lost*. For in spite of the existence of scholarly studies of Genesis in its various exegetical traditions, the view that the relationship of *Paradise Lost* to Genesis is basically direct or at least unproblematically mediated continues to flourish. And so, as a result, does an entire network of misogynistic or idealizing commonplaces and free-floating sexual stereotypes, relating, indifferently, to Genesis and to this institutionally privileged text by Milton, English literature’s paradigmatic patriarch.

The notion of a timeless and ideologically uninflected “patriarchy” is of course vulnerable on many counts, not least of which is its capacity to

neutralize the experience of oppression. I would therefore like to attempt to situate historically Milton's own appropriation of the Genesis creation accounts. In the process, I hope also to draw a preliminary sketch, in outline, of the genealogy of that seductive but odd couple, mutuality and equality. It is certainly not difficult to recognize the reading given Genesis by Tribble and Bal as a product of its time. Especially in North America, the notion of an originary androgyny has had tremendous appeal to mainstream or liberal feminism. Taken to represent an ideal yet attainable equality of the sexes, androgyny is often associated metaphorically with an ideal and egalitarian form of marriage. A passionate interest in this very institution makes itself felt throughout Milton's divorce tracts, in which his interpretation of the two creation accounts first appears. Milton's exegesis, too, is the product of an ideologically overdetermined desire to unify the two different creation accounts in Genesis. Not surprisingly, at the same time it is representative of the kind of masculinist "mis"-reading that Tribble and Bal seek to overturn. By emphasizing its historical specificity, however, I hope to show that it is so for reasons that cannot be universalized.

## II

Milton appropriates these two texts, first in the divorce tracts and then in *Paradise Lost*, by adopting the radically uni-levelled or this-worldly Reformed method of reconciling them. For leading commentators such as Calvin and Pareus, the two accounts do not correspond to two stages in the creation of humankind, the intelligible and the sensible, as they do in an earlier, Greco-Christian tradition. Indeed there are not in their view two accounts in this sense at all but instead one story told in two different ways, once, in the first chapter of Genesis, in epitome, and then, in the second chapter, in a more elaborated form. Simplifying matters considerably, and using terms introduced into the analysis of narrative by Gérard Genette, one could say that in the view articulated especially cogently by Calvin and then elaborated, aggressively, by Milton, the *story* consists of the creation in the image of God of a single being supposed to be representative of humankind, Adam, and then the creation of Eve; the *narrative discourse* distributes this story by presenting it first in a kind of abstract and then in a more detailed or amplified narrative fashion. More specifically, the first two statements of Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him," are thought to refer to the creation of the representative Adam, told in a more leisurely and graphic fashion as a creation involving the use of the dust of the ground in the second chapter; while the concluding "male and female created he them" is taken to refer to the creation from this Adam of his meet help, Eve.

Echoing similar statements by Pareus, Milton writes of the second chapter's narrative of Eve's creation for Adam: "This second chapter is granted to be a commentary on the first, and these verses granted to be an exposition of that former verse, 'Male and female created he them.'"<sup>6</sup> Yet the second chapter can have the status of a commentary in part because of the gaps, ambiguities, or troublesome suggestions to be found in the first. Commenting on the blessing of fertility in Genesis 1:28, for example, Calvin says that it is actually given to the human couple after they have been joined in "wedlocke," even though this event is not narrated until the following chapter.<sup>7</sup> As this indicates, for Protestant commentators, in so far as the rhetorically amplified second version is capable of interpreting and completing the account that comes before it in this way, it is the last creation account that tends to take precedence over the first.

If the Protestant exegetes Milton cites in his divorce tracts find the meaning of "male and female created he them" in the narrative of the creation of a help meet for Adam, they do so by reading that narrative ideologically, as proving that marriage, far from being what in their view the Roman Church would have it, a remedy prescribed for the spiritually weak, is divinely instituted, indeed recommended. That woman was created solely or even primarily for the purposes of procreation is the low-minded or "crabbed" (Milton's adjective) opinion the Protestant doctrine of marriage sees itself called to overturn.<sup>8</sup> Emphasizing, eloquently, the psychological needs sanctioned by the deity's words instituting marriage ("It is not good that the man should be alone," Genesis 2:18), the Reformers enable an emerging bourgeois culture to produce what has the appearance at least of an egalitarian view of the marital relation. The very phrase "meet for him" is said by Calvin to suggest in the Hebrew *kēneged*, the quality of being "like or answerable unto" (*quia illi respondeat*) the man and to indicate vividly that psychological rather than physical likeness founds marriage as an institution.<sup>9</sup> Milton endorses this view when he takes the untranslatably expressive Hebrew "originall" to signify "*another self, a second self, a very self itself*" (T 600), and also when he has the divine interlocutor promise Adam, "Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self, / Thy wish, exactly to thy heart's desire" (PL VIII.450–1).

As has often been pointed out, in the divorce tracts Milton raises to unprecedented and undreamt of heights this early modern tendency to idealize the marriage bond. The extent to which he relies upon an implicit privileging of "J" over "P" (indeed, over the other texts he treats, as well) in order to do so has, however, not been commented upon. Milton's advocacy of a more liberalized interpretation of the grounds for divorce proceeds by countering the mean-spirited misinterpretations of scripture promulgated by scholastics and canonists.<sup>10</sup> On its more constructive front, it seeks to harmonize different and radically conflicting scriptural texts. The most



taxing exegetical feat Milton has to perform is the reconciliation of Matthew 19:3–11, which suggests that remarriage after divorce is forbidden on grounds other than “fornication,” and Deuteronomy 24:1–2, which Milton reads as sanctioning divorce for reasons of what we would now call incompatibility. *Tetrachordon*, the tract in which Milton’s skills as exegete are most on display, announces in its very title his determination to establish unity and sameness in the place of seeming difference and contradiction. Meaning “four-stringed,” and thus referring to the four-toned Greek scale, *Tetrachordon* attempts to harmonize what on the title page are referred to as the “four chief places in Scripture, which treat of Mariage, or nullities in Mariage.” The first text given on the title page is “Gen. 1.27.28 compar’d and *explain’d* by Gen. 2.18.23.24” (*T* 577; my emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

The explaining of Genesis 1 by Genesis 2 is of multi-fronted strategic importance to Milton’s polemical attack on existing English divorce laws, which don’t properly recognize the spiritual nature of marriage. First and foremost, it permits Milton to exploit rhetorically the sexual connotations of “male and female,” essential to the divorce tracts’ central, most tirelessly worded argument, which is that neither sexual union in and of itself nor procreation is the primary end of marriage as originally constituted. Commenting directly on “Male and female created he them” in *Tetrachordon*, Milton states it has reference to “the right, and lawfulness of the mariage bed.” When relating this text to its immediate context, he claims that sexual union is an “inferior” end to that implied by the earlier “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him” (Milton’s detailed exegesis of which I’ll be coming back to later on) (*T* 592). As this suggests, a bi-polar and hierarchical ordering of the spiritual and physical dimensions of experience structures many of the exegetical moves in these tracts. The following commentary on “male and female” is fairly representative, and illustrates, in addition, the important role played by “J:”

He that said *Male and female created he them*, immediately before that said also in the same verse, *In the Image of God created he him*, and redoubl’d it, that our thoughts might not be so full of dregs as to urge this poor consideration of *male and female*, without remembring the noblenes of that former repetition; lest when God sends a wise eye to examin our triviall glosses, they be found extremly to creep upon the ground: especially since they confesse that what here concerns mariage is but a brief touch, only preparative to the institution which follows more expressly in the next Chapter...

(*T* 592)

The divorce tracts seek to persuade the mind that doesn’t want to creep upon

the ground that it should be duly impressed with the fact that in Genesis 2:18 God himself speaks, revealing in no uncertain terms what the end of marriage is: “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” Expounding the true meaning of the earlier verse, “Male and female created he them,” this verse declares “by the explicite words of God himselfe” that male and female is none other “than a fit help, and meet society” (T 594). Milton is willing to put this even more strongly. It’s not just that we have here the words of God himself, expounding the meaning of an earlier text. God here actually explains *himself*: “For God does not heer precisely say, I make a female to this male, as he did briefly before, but expounding himselfe heer on purpos, he saith, because it is not good for man to be alone, I make him therefore a meet help” (T 595).

In Milton’s exegetical practice, then, “J”’s narrative makes possible a spiritualized interpretation of the more lowly and bodily “male and female.” Indeed, “J”’s narrative, understood as instituting a relationship primarily psychological, provides the very basis for the passages emphasizing mutuality to be found throughout the divorce tracts. The above citations don’t begin to convey the eloquence with which Milton can celebrate the pleasures of a heterosexual union that is ideally—that is, on the spiritual plane intended by its divine institution—fitting or meet. And there are numerous other moments in these works where without rhetorical flourish mutuality is clearly asserted or implied. The woman and man of the marriage relation can, for example, be referred to as “helps meete for each other.”<sup>12</sup> On a more practical level, and of direct relevance to the legal reforms he is proposing, is the statement Milton offers of his position when opening the first chapter of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*: “*That indisposition, unfitnes, or contrariety of mind, arising from a cause in nature unchangable, hindring and ever likely to hinder the main benefits of conjugall society, which are solace and peace, is a greater reason of divorce then naturall frigidity, especially if there be no children, and that there be mutuall consent*” (DDD 242). The explicit reference to “mutuall consent” here is matched or perhaps even deliberately introduced by the opening words of the subtitle appearing in both the first and second editions of this work: “Restor’d to the Good of Both Sexes, From the bondage of Canon Law, and other mistakes....”

Yet much as the dominant discourse of the academy might like to celebrate this praiseworthy attention to mutuality, there are very few passages of any length in the divorce tracts that can be dressed up for the occasion. For over and over again, this laudable mutuality loses its balance, teetering precariously on the brink of pure abstraction. And the reason it does so is that it stands on the ground (to recall the play on *hā’ādāmā*) of a lonely Adam who is not in any sense either ungendered or generic. It becomes clear, finally, that the concluding phrase of Milton’s position-statement—“and that there be mutuall consent”—is not expected to stand up

in a court of law. In the penultimate chapter of the second edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton states his view “that the absolute and final hindring of divorce cannot belong to any civil or earthly power, against the will and consent of both parties, *or of the husband alone*” (DDD 344; my emphasis). Even if this could, improbably, be attributed to a moment’s forgetfulness on the part of an author busy revising and enlarging his original, it still wouldn’t be able to pass itself off as an instance of simple self-contradiction. For as I hope to show, this particular assertion is also the self-consistent outcome of the deeply masculinist assumptions at work in Milton’s articulation of a radically bourgeois view of marriage.

Time and again, the language of the tracts passes through the use of plural forms potentially inclusive of both sexes only to come to rest with a non-generically masculine “he.” As the discussion up to this point has indicated, in so far as the story of Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib is thought to articulate the Protestant doctrine of marriage, it is not her creation *after* Adam *per se* that is so significant but her creation *for* him, to remedy his loneliness. The egalitarian sentiments expressed, sporadically, throughout the divorce tracts therefore cannot finally obscure Eve’s secondary status as a “gift” from one patriarch to another. Created for Adam, Eve is, as Adam puts it in *Paradise Lost*, “Heav’n’s last best gift” (V.19). Yet Eve is also, of course, created *from* Adam, as well as *for* him. And in Milton’s view, as Adam’s “likeness” Eve does not even have the status—to use Satan’s description of “man” in *Paradise Lost*—of the Father’s “latest,” meaning most recent, “image” (IV.567). For by unifying the two creation stories in the way Reformed principles permit him to, Milton’s exegesis makes possible the production of two ideologically charged and historically specific readings, contradictorily related: on the one hand an interpretation of “male and female” that psychologizes heterosexual union and dignifies marriage, and on the other an explication of “created man in his image” that tends to restrict the meaning of “man” to an individual Adam, from whom and for whom the female is then made.

It is important to put this exactly, for of course biblical commentators always claim that woman is also in some sense made in the image of God. Calvin, like Milton, however, locates the generic sense of “man” directly in the first and gendered man’s representative status. Commenting on Genesis 2:18, “I will make him an help meet for him,” Calvin responds to the question, why isn’t the plural form “Let us make” used here, as it was in the creation of “man”?:

Some think, that by this speech, the difference which is betweene both sexes is noted, and that so it is shewed, how much more excellent the man is, then the woman. But I like better of another interpretation, which differeth somewhat, though it be not

altogether contrarie: namely, that when in the person of man, mankinde was created, the common worthnesse of the whole nature, was with one title generally adorned, where it is said, *Let us make man*: and that it was not needful to be repeated in the creating of the woman, which was nothing else but the addition and furniture of the man [quae nihil aliud est quam viri accessio]. It cannot be denied, but the woman also was created after the image of God, though in the seconde degree. Whereupon it followeth, that the same which was spoken in the creation of the man, pertaineth to womankind.<sup>13</sup>

Milton's stridently masculinist, "Hee for God only, shee for God in him" in *Paradise Lost* obviously goes much further than Calvin in drawing out the masculinist implications of this hermeneutical practice, which forges an identity between the generic and the gendered "man." In *Tetrachordon*, too, Milton pursues the logic of this exegesis with a maddening and motivated precision. In his commentary on "in the image of God created he him," the intermediate statement of Genesis 1:27, he states that "the woman is not primarily and immediately the image of God, but in reference to the man," on the grounds that though the "Image of God" is common to them both, "had the Image of God been equally common to them both, it had no doubt bin said, In the image of God created he them" (T 589).

So it continues to matter that Adam was formed first, then Eve. As a further means of taking the measure of Milton's interest in this priority, I would now like to discuss three seventeenth-century texts more favourably disposed towards an egalitarian interpretation of Genesis. Although research in this area is still underway, it is safe to say that Milton could not but have known that questions of priority figure prominently in the Renaissance debate over "woman" we now know as the "Querelle des Femmes." In *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the cynicall bayter of, and foule mouthed barker against Evahs sex*, for example, one of the feminist responses to Joseph Swetnam's *The Araignment of lewd, idle, forward and unconstant women*, Rachel Speght appeals several times to the privilege assumed to be a property of firstness. Speght mentions that although it is true that woman was the first to sin, it is also woman who receives the "first promise" that God makes in Paradise; she argues that the dignity of marriage is proved by Jesus honouring a wedding ceremony with "the first miracle that he wrought;" and that the spiritual equality of the sexes is shown when after his Resurrection Christ "appeared unto a woman first of all other."<sup>14</sup>

In the restricted intellectual economy of the "Querelle," orthodox views of male superiority are frequently countered by paradoxical assertions of female superiority. Lastness is therefore placed in the service of overturning firstness, as in Joan Sharpe's poetic defense of women against

Swetnam's *Araignment*, where it is claimed: "Women were the last worke, and therefore the best, / For what was the end, excelleth the rest."<sup>15</sup> Speght, however, deliberately avoids the use of this kind of paradox. Like other Renaissance and Reformed commentators, preachers and courtesy-book writers, Speght places a strong emphasis on marriage as involving the "mutuall participation of each others burden." And this emphasis is sustained rhetorically throughout the tract. For example, while accepting the conventional view that woman is "the weaker vessel," Speght supplies a subtly polemical reference to man as "the stronger vessel."<sup>16</sup> In deploying a linguistic stress on balance and mutuality to neutralize hierarchical oppositions, this young, early seventeenth-century Protestant may very well be the most important unsung foremother of modern liberal feminist commentators on Genesis and on *Paradise Lost*.

Speght does not offer any programmatic statements on the relation of "P" to "J," nor does she attempt systematically to assimilate one to the other. But like all feminist participants in the "Querelle des Femmes," she assumes that Genesis 1:26 and 27 provide a clear statement of the spiritual equality of the sexes. The passage in which she briefly explicates Genesis 1:27 is distinctive, however, in its provisional but decidedly revisionary reconciliation of the two creation accounts: "in the Image of God were they both created; yea and to be brief, all the parts of their bodies, both externall and internall, were correspondent and meete each for other."<sup>17</sup> By referring to both woman and man, and in relation to one another, the terms "correspondent and meete" ("correspondent" being, as modern commentators point out, a good translation of the Hebrew *kēneged*) deftly unite the "male and female created he them" of the "P" account with the account in "J" of Eve's creation for Adam, which here, momentarily, loses its narrative identity. Speght's brief exegesis carefully preserves an emphasis on bodily fitness, while pointedly ignoring questions of chronology that might threaten the egalitarian statement.

At one point Speght refers to marriage as "a merri-age, and this worlds Paradise, where there is mutuall love."<sup>18</sup> The same celebratory word-play ("the very name whereof should portend unto thee merry-age") appears in a work published just two years before Swetnam's provocative tract, Alexander Niccholes' *A Discourse, of Marriage and Wiving*. Interesting for, among other things, its citation of lines from the Player Queen's speech in *Hamlet*, Niccholes' *Discourse* eulogizes the special pleasures of marital friendship in one of the very phrases used in *Tetrachordon*: the wife is "such a friend, which is to us a second selfe."<sup>19</sup> Niccholes' brief commentary on the two creation accounts differs significantly from Milton's, however. Appearing in the first chapter, "Of the First Institution and Author of Marriage," Niccholes' exegetical remarks follow the citation of Genesis 2:18 ("It is not good for the man to bee alone"):

so the creation of the woman was to be a helper to the man, not a hinderer, a companion for his comfort, not a vexation to his sorrow, for *consortium est solatium*, Company is comfortable though never so small, and Adam tooke no little joy in this his single companion, being thereby freed from that solitude and silence which his lonenesse would else have bene subject unto, had there beene no other end nor use in her more, then this her bare presence and society alone: But besides all this, the earth is large and must be peopled, and therefore they are now the Crowne of his Workemanship, the last and best and perfectest peece of his handiworke divided into Genders, as the rest of His creatures are, Male and Female, fit and enabled *Procreare sibi similem* to bring forth their like, to accomplish his will, who thus blessed their fruitfulness in the Bud: Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth.<sup>20</sup>

In this passage, as in the divorce tracts, the two different creation accounts, presented in their “real” order of occurrence, are discussed as if each revealed a different end or benefit of the first institution. And “J”’s narrative of the creation of a meet help for Adam, given a strictly psychological and social interpretation, is given priority over “P”’s. But Niccholes significantly omits any discussion of the creation of “man” in God’s image. This absence permits the plural “they” easily to take over, so that it is the (now happily united) first man and woman alike who are “the last and best and perfectest peece of his handiworke.” Although Niccholes mentions that woman was made both “for” and “out of” man, he maintains his emphasis on mutuality by erasing any explicit or evaluative commentary on her having been made *after* man, as well.

The commentary I would like to examine next is one produced during the same period as the divorce tracts, that is, at the very time when egalitarian issues of all kinds were being hotly contested, and when women in the sectaries not only laid claim to their spiritual equality with men on the basis of Genesis 1:27 and other texts, but publicly proclaimed the extra-textual significance of this equality by preaching and prophesying.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Speght’s and Niccholes’, the text I turn to now belongs, officially, to the commentary genre. Issued in association with the Westminster Assembly and published in 1645, the annotations on Genesis in *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testaments* have not, to my knowledge, ever been studied.<sup>22</sup> Yet they shed an extraordinarily clear, not to say glaringly bright, light on the distinctive and motivated features of Milton’s exegesis.

An annotation on 1:26 takes up directly the question of the meaning of the signifier “man” or “Adam.” With reference to the phrase “let them” (in “And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,” etc.), the annotation

states: “The word *man*, or the Hebrew, *Adam*, taken not personally or individually for one single person, but collectively in this verse, comprehendeth both male and female of mankind: and so it may well be said, not *let him*, but *let them* have dominion.” Here the generic sense of *ha’adam* is made completely to override the gender-specific sense. To this end, the use of the plural pronoun in the latter section of Genesis 1:26 is privileged over the singular pronoun, used with reference to the image (“in the image of God created he him”). This annotation alone therefore reveals a process of interpretation diametrically opposed to that at work in *Tetrachordon*, where, as we have seen, Milton seizes upon the difference between singular and plural forms in Genesis 1:26 and 27 to argue that only the gender-specific Adam is made immediately in the image of God.

What makes comparison of the *Annotations* with *Tetrachordon* possible and of crucial importance is that both accept the Reformed view of the relationship between the two creation accounts. Adam and Eve are said to be formed on the same, that is, the sixth, day, but their creations are presented first in chapter 1, where “their creation in the generall was noted with other creatures,” and then again in chapter 2, where “in regard of the excellencie of mankind above them all, God is pleased to make a more particular relation of the manner of their making, first of the man, vers. 7. and here [vers. 22] of the woman.” Yet as these words suggest, the *story* assumed by the *Annotations* is slightly different from Milton’s, which starts unabashedly with a “man” taken personally or individually. The difference is fine, but extremely significant. Like Milton and other Protestant commentators, the *Annotations* rejects the view that male and female were created simultaneously, together with the view that both sexes were originally embodied, hermaphrodite-like, in a single being. “J”’s narrative ordering is respected, which means that woman was indeed created after man. But this is how the gloss on verse 27’s “male and female” puts it:

Not at once, or in one person, but severally; that is, though he united them in participation of his image, he distinguished them into two sexes, male and female, for the increase of their kinde: their conformitie in participation of Gods Image is clearly manifest by many particulars, for in most of the respects fore-mentioned, Annotation in ver. 26, the image of God is equally communicated to them both, and Eve was so like to Adam (except the difference of sexe which is no part of the divine image) in the particulars fore-mentioned, that in them, as she was made after the image of Adam, she was also made after the image of God: as if one measure be made according to the standard, an hundred made according to that, agree with the standard as well as it.

By associating differences between the sexes solely with reproduction, this comment seems to harken back to a Platonically inflected division between the spiritual and the physical. The concluding analogy, however, shows this truly remarkable text grappling with hierarchically ordered notions of secondariness. Working with reference to the production of things in the form of commodities, the analogy attempts to take on the difficulties resulting from the view that man and woman were made “severally.” And it tries to effect, on its own, an egalitarian synthesis of “P” and “J.” That man was first made in the image of God is implicitly conceded. But that woman was made “after” man becomes a statement referring not so much to an order of temporality as to an order of materiality. Woman is made “after” the image of Adam in the sense of being made “according to the standard” of the image of Adam. The analogy argues, by ellipsis, that since Adam was himself really created “after” the image of God, which is the original “standard,” being created “after” Adam’s image, Eve is equally created “after” the image of God. Thanks to this highly ingenious and polemically motivated analogy, Eve’s being created “after” Adam loses its usual sense of secondariness.

Read in the context of other learned Protestant biblical commentaries, this analogy has a jarring effect since, in exceeding by ninety-nine the requirements of logic, it seems to testify to the contemporary phenomenon of the growth of mercantile capital. For the sake of an egalitarian synthesis between “P” and “J,” this workmanly analogy tries to undermine not only a hierarchically inflected logic of temporality but also the generally Platonic logic whereby original is privileged over copy. It is true that man is still, quite literally, the “measure.” And to give the analogy its force, woman is placed in the position of being not the first commodity made “after” this measure but rather the “hundred” that can be produced on its basis. The logic deployed by the analogy from production insists, however, that it is not really possible to measure any residual differences between the image of God, man, and woman. Of the great variety of attempts made in the Renaissance and seventeenth century to come to Eve’s defense, this must be the least chivalrous in content, the most lacking in conventional grace or charm. But it definitely does the job. And it certainly establishes, dramatically, the possibilities open to Milton, which he rejected.

In rejecting a position like that of the *Annotations*, Milton implicitly takes what would seem, from another perspective, though, to be a “progressive” stance, namely that the difference between woman and man is not a simple matter of biology; that it is not a difference of sex *per se*. In both *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion* Milton rejects the view that Adam would have been given a male not a female partner had companionship been the end of marriage. The following passage from *Tetrachordon*, which comments on the all-important “*It is not good for man to be alone*,” suggests why Milton would not want to imagine Eve’s being created according to the same “standard” as Adam:



And heer *alone* is meant alone without woman, otherwise *Adam* had the company of God himself, and Angels to convers with; all creatures to delight him seriously, or to make him sport. God could have created him out of the same mould a thousand friends and brother *Adams* to have bin his consorts, yet for all this till *Eve* was giv'n him, God reckn'd him to be alone.

(T 595)

By specifying a desire that only “woman” can satisfy, and by associating that desire with a transcendence of sexual difference as vulgarly understood, the divorce tracts seem almost to open up a space for the category of “gender.” Yet that this space is in no sense neutral can be seen in the language with which friendship between men gets differentiated from the marital relation. In *Colasterion* Milton opposes “one society of grave freindship” to “another amiable and attractive society of conjugal love.”<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere Milton can associate the marriage relationship with the need man has for “sometime slackning the cords of intense thought and labour” (T 596); or he can refer to the seeking of “solace in that free and lightsome conversation which God & man intends in mariage” (DDD 273). It should go without saying that man can have this need for companionship remedied, can intend to enjoy “lightsome conversation” as opposed to “grave freindship,” only if woman is constituted as less grave, more attractive, more lightsome and more amiable than her male counterpart; and if both she and marriage itself are associated with a world apart.

### III

As has already been suggested, the priority bestowed upon Adam in Milton’s divorce tracts is not associated directly with the order of creation. It tends, instead, to be inscribed in the divine words instituting marriage, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). These words, which Milton frequently refers to simply as “the institution,” are in turn often taken to gesture towards a prior loneliness or “rational burning” experienced by the first man, Adam. I have already argued that the priority Milton gives “J” over “P” is inscribed indelibly in every one of his major rhetorical and logical moves. In concluding this discussion of the divorce tracts, I would like to show how consistently or systematically this priority is associated with the deity’s instituting words and thus, by implication, with Adam’s needs.

It has not yet been mentioned that Matthew 5:31, 32 and Matthew 19:3–11, which together constitute one of the four texts treated in *Tetrachordon*, and which appear unequivocally to forbid divorce except for

fornication, are susceptible to Milton's polemical appropriation of them precisely because in chapter 19 Jesus is represented as quoting from Genesis. The relevant verses, cited by Milton, are the following, verses 3–6:

The Pharisees also came unto [Jesus], tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

The two texts cited here are the now-familiar “male and female created he them” in Genesis 1:2,7 and “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Milton's strategy in commenting on the verses from Matthew is to subvert their literal and accepted meaning by referring the citations back to the divine words of institution, which, he points out, are *not*, significantly, quoted. Although the tempting Pharisees, his immediate interlocutors, aren't worthy of receiving this instruction, Jesus's intention, Milton argues, is to refer us back to the uncited words of institution in chapter 2, “which all Divines confesse is a commentary to what [Jesus] cites out of the first, the *making of them Male and Female*” (*T* 649). The instituting words are thus made to govern the manner in which those cited by Jesus from chapter 1 are to be interpreted.

Also cited is Genesis 2:24, which Milton regards as spoken by Adam. Yet Milton's exegesis has already determined that Adam's speech too has meaning only with reference to the words of divine institution. In the first part of Adam's speech (“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man,” Gen. 2:23), Milton finds Adam referring to and expounding his maker's instituting words, regarded as constituting a promise now fulfilled (*T* 602). By establishing a dialogic relation between Adam's words and those of his maker, Milton can argue that anyone who thinks Adam is in these words formulating the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage “in the meet flesh” is not only sadly mistaken but guilty of using “the mouth of our generall parent, the first time it opens, to an arrogant opposition, and correcting of Gods wiser ordinance” (*T* 603). It is the next part of Adam's speech, however, verse 24, which is commonly thought to be “the great knot tier,” as Milton correctly points out: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” In Milton's view, *by* opening with “therefore,” this verse clearly indicates that Adam confines the implications of

his utterance only to “what God spake concerning the inward essence of Mariage in his institution” (*T* 603). With reference to both parts of Adam’s speech, Milton’s position thus is that the deity’s words are the “soul” of Adam’s and must be taken into Adam’s utterance if it is properly to be understood.

This is not, interestingly, the reading given these verses by Calvin, who assigns verse 23 to Adam, but draws attention to the interpretative choices open with regard to 2:24, for which three different speakers are eligible: Adam, God, and Moses. After a brief discussion Calvin opts for Moses, suggesting that, having reported what had historically been done, Moses in this passage sets forth the end of God’s ordinance, which is the permanence or virtual indissolvability of the marriage bond.<sup>24</sup> For reasons that are obvious, Milton would want to reject this reading. By making Adam the speaker of this passage, Milton weakens its authority as a text enjoining the indissolubility of marriage. Since this is the very text cited by Jesus in Matthew, such an assault on its status as injunction is a decisive defensive move. But it is also more than that. For by assuming Adam to be its speaker, Milton also strengthens the contractual view of the first institution his exegetical practice implicitly but unmistakably develops.

That Milton’s understanding of the first institution is implicitly both contractual and masculinist can perhaps be seen if his exegetical practice is compared with that of Rachel Speght. Towards the beginning of *A Mouzell for Melastomus*, Speght argues that Eve’s goodness is proved by the manner of her creation:

Thus the resplendent love of God toward man appeared, in taking care to provide him an helper before hee saw his owne want, and in providing him such an helper as should bee meete for him. Sovereignty had hee over all creatures, and they were all serviceable unto him; but yet afore woman was formed, there was not a meete helpe found for *Adam*. Mans worthinesse not meriting this great favour at Gods hands, but his mercie onely moving him thereunto: ... that for mans sake, that hee might not be an unit, when all other creatures were for procreation duall, hee created woman to bee a solace unto him, to participate of his sorrowes, partake of his pleasures, and as a good yokefellow beare part of his burthen. Of the excellencies of this Structure, I meane of Women, whose foundation and original of creation, was Gods love, do I intend to dilate.<sup>25</sup>

Were Milton to have read Speght’s tract, I suspect that midway through the first sentence here he would have discovered himself a resisting reader. The notion that God acted on Adam’s behalf “before hee saw his own want” would have seemed highly provocative, if not downright offensive. Speght

draws strategically on orthodox Protestantism's doctrinal emphasis on divine grace as radically transcendent, as an active principle utterly unconnected with human deserts. In the process, Adam becomes a passive recipient of a gift, meetness abounding, while Eve is subtly positioned in relation with her true "original," divine love.

By contrast, in the divorce tracts and, as we shall see, in *Paradise Lost* as well, Milton foregrounds an Adam whose innocent or legitimate desires preexist the creation of the object that will satisfy them. But this is to put it too abstractly. In Milton's exegesis, the significance of the gift—woman—passed from maker to man is determined by two speeches, first the maker's and then Adam's, precisely because these speeches are construed as a verbal exchange that is basically contractual. In Genesis 2:18 Adam's maker promises him that he will assuage his loneliness and provide him with a meet help; in 2:23 and 24, Adam accepts this gift by acknowledging it is exactly what was promised him, and then promises to honour it on these very grounds. Eve's status as a divinely bestowed gift is exploited polemically by both Speght and Milton. But unlike Speght's transcendent lord of love, Milton's veiled but systematic insistence on the contractual form of the first institution is produced by a Protestantism pressed into the service of an historically specific form of individualism, an individualism paradigmatically masculine, autonomous, articulate, and preternaturally awake to the implications of entering into relations with others.<sup>26</sup>

#### IV

One of the questions concerning *Paradise Lost* that this discussion of the divorce tracts has, I hope, made it possible to address is: why does Milton's Eve tell the story of her earliest experiences first, in Book IV? Why, if Adam was formed first, then Eve, does Adam tell his story to Raphael *last*, in Book VIII? An adequate response to this question would require a full-scale analysis of the ways in which *Paradise Lost* articulates a putative sequential order of events or story with the narrative discourse that distributes this story. As a genre, epic is of course expected to develop complicated relations between a presumed chronological and a narrative ordering of events. But *Paradise Lost* would seem to use both retrospective and prospective narratives in a more systematic and motivated manner than does any of its predecessors, in part because it is so highly conscious of the problematical process of its consumption. I would like to argue here that *Paradise Lost's* narrative distribution of Adam and Eve's first experiences is not just complexly but ideologically motivated, and that the import of this motivation can best be grasped by an analysis aware of the historically specific features of Milton's exegetical practice in the divorce tracts.

This practice is crucially important to *Paradise Lost's* own use of the Genesis creation texts. In the case of the passage it most obviously informs, Raphael's account of the creation of "man" on the sixth day of creation in Book VII, certain features are intelligible only in the light of this historically specific context. If commenting on this passage at all, critics have tended to suggest that Raphael gives something like a heavenly, as compared with Adam's later more earthly, account of creation.<sup>27</sup> This doesn't, however, even begin to do justice to the intricately plotted relations of the "P" and "J" accounts in the following:

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.  
 This said, he form'd thee, *Adam*, thee O Man  
 Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breath'd  
 The breath of Life; in his own Image hee  
 Created thee, in the Image of God  
 Express, and thou becam'st a living Soul.  
 Male he created thee, but thy consort  
 Female for Race; then bless'd Mankind, and said,  
 Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth,  
 Subdue it, and throughout Dominion hold  
 Over Fish of the Sea, and Fowl of the Air,  
 And every living thing that moves on the Earth.  
 Wherever thus created, for no place  
 Is yet distinct by name, thence, as thou know'st  
 He brought thee into this delicious Grove,  
 This Garden, planted with the Trees of God,  
 Delectable both to behold and taste;  
 And freely all thir pleasant fruit for food  
 Gave thee, all sorts are here that all th' Earth yields,  
 Variety without end; but of the Tree  
 Which tasted works knowledge of Good and Evil,  
 Thou may'st not; in the day thou eat'st, thou di'st;  
 Death is the penalty impos'd, beware,  
 And govern well thy appetite, lest sin  
 Surprise thee, and her black attendant Death.  
 Here finish'd hee.

(VII.519–48)

Genesis 1:26–8 is here given in what is virtually its entirety. But the principal

acts of Genesis 2:7–17 are also related: Yahweh’s making of “Man” from the dust of the ground (2:7), his taking of this man into the garden of Eden (2:15), and his giving of the prohibition (2:16,17). One could argue that even Milton’s “artistry” here hasn’t received its proper due, since this splicing economically makes from two heterogeneous accounts a single one that is both intellectually and aesthetically coherent.

Yet it does more, far more, than this. For Raphael’s account removes any trace of ambiguity—the residual generic dust, as it were—from the Priestly account of the creation of *bā’ādām* or “man” in the image of God. This it does by a set of speech-acts unambiguously identifying this “man” with Raphael’s interlocutor, Adam. The direct address in “he form’d thee, *Adam*, thee O Man / Dust of the ground” has what amounts to a deictic function, joining the representative “Man” to Raphael’s gendered and embodied listener, who is specifically and repeatedly addressed here, while Eve (though still an auditor) very pointedly is not. It is clearly significant that these very lines effect the joining of the Priestly and Yahwistic accounts. By placing “thee O Man / Dust of the ground” in apposition to the named “Adam,” it is suggested that this individualized “Adam” actually is *bā’ādām* or representative man and the punning *bā’ādāmā* “ground,” an identity that only the joining of the two accounts reveals.

The impression this joining creates is that the two accounts have always already been one in narrating the creation of Adam. The same cannot be said of Raphael’s account of the creation of Eve, however. For in contrast (I would like to say something like “in striking contrast,” yet it has not really been noticed) to the ingenious joining that takes place for the sake of Adam, Raphael refers to Eve’s creation only in the statement immediately following, which is again, significantly, addressed to Adam: “Male he created thee, but thy consort / Female for Race” (529–30).<sup>28</sup> Outside of this meagre “but thy consort / Female for Race,” Raphael’s account does not otherwise even allude to the creation of Eve, although, as we have seen, other details of the narrative in the second chapter are included in it. Indeed, if we examine the matter more closely, it appears that the Yahwist account is made use of only up to and including Genesis 2:17 (the giving of the prohibition) precisely because Genesis 2:18 inaugurates the story of the creation of a help meet for Adam.

But of course the story of Eve’s creation is not excised from *Paradise Lost* altogether, which is, presumably, why readers have not protested its absence here. It is told later, by another narrator, Adam. One of the effects of this narrative distribution is that in Milton’s epic Adam’s story comes to have exactly the same relation to Raphael’s as in the divorce tracts and in Protestant commentaries the second chapter of Genesis has to the first: it is an exposition or commentary upon it, revealing its true import.<sup>29</sup> Yet the second telling can have this status only because it is Adam’s. As my discussion

indicates, Milton's argument in the divorce tracts rests on a radical privileging of "J" over "P" in the specific form of a privileging of the words of divine institution in Genesis 2:18. Had Milton interpolated the story of Eve's creation into Raphael's creation account, he would have had to record these words in the form of indirect speech (as he does the words of prohibition in lines 542–7) or else to have reproduced both the creator's speech and Adam's. In either case, the instituting words would have been displaced from their centres of authority. By transferring the entire narrative to Adam and by interpolating a dramatic colloquy into this narrative, *Paradise Lost* ensures the coincidence of narrator and auditor of the instituting words, of narrator and of the first man's instituting response. By dramatizing this commentary, this necessary supplement to Raphael's account, in the form of a colloquy narrated by Adam, *Paradise Lost* makes sure that the doctrine of marriage is both produced and understood by the person for whom it is ordained, just as in the divorce tracts it is the privileged male voice, Milton's, which expounds the true doctrine of divorce.

As the divorce tracts never tire of insisting, the true doctrine of marriage relates only to the satisfaction of that which the wanting soul needfully seeks. In *Paradise Lost* this doctrine is co-authored by Adam and the "Presence Divine," who work it out together. It is also communicated, formally, by the extraordinary emphasis placed on Adam's subjectivity, on his actual experience of desire. As Milton has masterminded the exchange, the divine instituting words come *after* Adam has been got to express his longing for a fitting companion (VIII.444–51), so that this longing has the kind of priority that befits the first man. Yet the longing is also clearly a rational burning. With its strong filiations to the disputation, the very form of the colloquy establishes that this desire is rational, and that merely reproductive ends are certainly not what Adam has in mind. Although procreation is referred to, it is presented as a kind of necessary consequence of the conjunction of male and female, but for that very reason as a subordinate end. Adam's language cleverly associates it with a prior lack, a prior and psychological defect inherent in his being the first and only man (VIII.415–25). The way Milton's Adam responds to the deity's formal presentation to him of his bride, Eve, is just as motivated. The Genesis 2:23–4 speech is cited, but only after it has been introduced in a way that joins it explicitly to the causes implicit in the deity's instituting words:

This turn hath made amends; thou hast fulfill'd  
 Thy words, Creator bounteous and benign,  
 Giver of all things fair, but fairest this  
 Of all thy gifts, nor enviest. I now see  
 Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh, my Self  
 Before me; Woman is her Name, of Man

Extracted; for this cause he shall forgo  
 Father and Mother, and to his Wife adhere;  
 And they shall be one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul.  
 (VIII.491–9)

This speech is presented as a species of spontaneous lyrical utterance (“I overjoy’d could not forbear aloud” (490)) and according to Adam is “heard” by Eve. Yet it is obviously addressed *not* to her but to her maker, who is thanked for the gift itself, but not until he has been praised for having kept his word. Before letting Adam commit himself to the project of becoming one flesh with Eve, Milton has to make it clear that Adam does so believing that the “Heav’nly Maker” has done what he has promised, that is, created a truly fit help.

Not only the placement of Adam’s narrative after Raphael’s but also its most salient formal features can thus be seen to be motivated ideologically, and to illustrate the causes joining the divorce tracts and *Paradise Lost*. Before turning to Eve, I would like to summarize the discussion so far by emphasizing that these causes are joined, and to man’s advantage, both when “P” and “J” are united and when they aren’t. By joining “P” and “J” as it does, Raphael’s account specifies the gendered Adam of *Paradise Lost* as the “man” who is made in the divine image. By disjoining them, Raphael’s account lets Adam himself tell the story of the creature made to satisfy his desire for an other self.

We can now, more directly, take up the question, why does heaven’s last best gift tell her story first? One way of approach might be to suggest that had Eve’s narrative of her earliest experiences appeared where “naturally,” in the order of creation, it should have, that is *after* Adam’s, *Paradise Lost* might have risked allowing her to appear as the necessary and hence in a certain sense superior creature suggested by what Jacques Derrida has called the logic of the supplement, undeniably set in motion by Adam’s self-confessed “single imperfection.” *Paradise Lost*’s narrative discourse would seem to want to subvert this logic by presenting Eve’s narrative first. And it seems to want to subvert it further by placing immediately *after* Adam’s narrative a confession in which Eve’s completeness and superiority is made to seem an illusion to which Adam is, unaccountably, susceptible. In this part of Adam’s dialogue with Raphael, the language of supplementarity as artificial exteriority seems curiously insistent: Eve has been given “Too much of Ornament” (VIII.538); she is “Made so adorn for thy delight the more” (VIII. 576) and so on.

Yet a displaced form of the logic of supplementarity may nevertheless be at work in the place of priority given Eve’s narrative. For if Eve is created to satisfy the psychological needs of a lonely Adam, then it is necessary that *Paradise Lost*’s readers experience her from the first as expressing an



intimately subjective sense of self. From the start she must be associated in a distinctive manner with the very interiority that Adam's need for an other self articulates. Or to put this another way, Eve's subjectivity must be made available to the reader so that it can ground, as it were, the lonely Adam's articulated desire for another self. Appearing as it does in Book IV, Eve's narrative lacks any immediately discernible connection with the Genesis creation accounts on which the narratives of both Raphael and Adam draw. Its distance from Scripture as publicly acknowledged authority is matched by Eve the narrator's use of markedly lyrical, as opposed to disputational, forms. Set in juxtaposition to the rather barrenly disputational speech of Adam's which immediately precedes it in Book IV, Eve's narrative creates a space that is strongly if only implicitly gendered, a space that is dilatory, erotic, and significantly, almost quintessentially, "private."

In a recent essay, Christine Froula reads Eve's first speech thematically and semi-allegorically, as telling the story of Eve's (or woman's) submission of her own personal experience and autonomy to the voices (the deity's, then Adam's) of patriarchal authority. As the very title of her essay—"When Eve Reads Milton"—indicates, Froula wants to find in Milton's Eve if not a proto-feminist then a potential ally in contemporary academic feminism's struggle to interrogate the academic canon together with the cultural and political authority it represents. Milton's Eve can play the part of such an ally, however, only because for Froula the privacy of Eve's earliest experiences and the autonomy she thereby initially seems to possess are equivalent to a potentially empowering freedom from patriarchal rule.<sup>30</sup> Given the liberal assumptions of the feminism it espouses, Froula's argument obviously does not want to submit the category of personal experience to ideological analysis.

In attempting to give it such an analysis, I would like to suggest that Eve's speech plays a pivotal role, historically and culturally, in the construction of the kind of female subjectivity required by a new economy's progressive sentimentalization of the private sphere.<sup>31</sup> It is possible to suggest this in part because the subjective experiences Eve relates are represented as having taken place before any knowledge of or commitment to Adam. That is, they are represented as taking place in a sphere that has the defining features of the "private" in an emerging capitalist economy: a sphere that appears to be autonomous and self-sustaining even though not "productive" and in so appearing is the very home of the subject. In Book VIII Adam recalls having virtually thought his creator into existence and having come up with the idea of Eve in a dialogue with his fellow patriarch. By contrast, Eve recalls inhabiting a space she believed to be uninhabited, autonomous, hers—but for the "Shape within the wat'ry gleam." It is, however, precisely because this belief is evidently *false* that it is possible to see this space as analogous to the "private" sphere, which is of course constituted

by and interconnected with the “public” world outside it. Illusory as this autonomy is, inhabiting a world appearing to be her own would nevertheless seem to be the condition of the subjectivity Eve here reveals.

It has long been a commonplace of commentaries on *Paradise Lost* that a network of contrasts is articulated between Eve’s narration of her earliest experiences and Adam’s, the contrasts all illustrating the hierarchically ordered nature of their differences. Yet it has not been recognized clearly enough that while shadowing forth these bi-polar oppositions, Eve’s narrative is supposed to rationalize the mutuality or intersubjective basis of their love. For by means of the Narcissus myth, *Paradise Lost* is able to represent her experiencing a desire equivalent or complementary to the lonely Adam’s desire for an “other self.” It is not hard to see that Adam’s own desire for an other self has a strong “narcissistic” component. Yet Adam’s retrospective narrative shows this narcissism being sparked, sanctioned and then satisfied by his creator. By contrast, though in Book IV Eve recalls experiencing a desire for an other self, this desire is clearly and unambiguously constituted by illusion, both in the sense of specular illusion and in the sense of error. Neo-Platonic readings of the Narcissus myth find in it a reflection of the “fall” of spirit into matter. Milton transforms this tragic tale into one with a comic resolution by instructing Eve in the superiority of spirit or, more exactly, in the superiority of “manly grace and wisdom” over her “beauty.” But because this happily ending little *Bildungsroman* also involves a movement from illusion to reality, Eve is made to come to prefer not only “manly grace and wisdom” as attributes of Adam but also, and much more importantly, Adam as embodiment of the reality principle itself: he whose image she really is, as opposed to the specular image in which her desire originated.

To become available for the mutuality the doctrine of wedded love requires, Eve’s desire therefore must in effect lose its identity, while yet somehow offering itself up for correction and reorientation. As has often been noted, Eve’s fate diverges from that of Narcissus at the moment when the divine voice intervenes to call her away from her delightful play with her reflection in the “waters.” We have seen that in Book VIII Adam’s desire for an other self is sanctioned by the divine presence’s rendering of “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” When the divine voice speaks to Eve, it is to ask that she redirect the desire she too experiences for an other self:

What thou seest,  
 What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself,  
 With thee it came and goes: but follow me,  
 And I will bring thee where no shadow stays  
 Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces, hee

Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy  
Inseparably thine.

(IV.467–73)

Unlike the instituting words spoken to Adam in Book VIII, these have no basis in the Yahwist creation account. Yet they are clearly invented to accompany the only part of that account which Milton has to work with here, the brief “and brought her unto the man” (Gen. 2:22), which in Genesis immediately precedes Adam’s words of recognition. Marked inescapably by literary invention and uttered by a presence that is invisible to Eve, the voice’s words have a curiously secondary or derivative status, at least compared with those spoken to Adam. They seem indeed, fittingly, to be a kind of echo of the divine voice.

In so far as it effects a separation of Eve from her physical image, this word in a way echoes what Milton calls the creator’s originary “divorcing command” by which “the world first rose out of Chaos” (*DDD* 273). But the separation of Eve from her image is not the only divorce effected here. Before this intervention the “Smooth Lake” into which Eve peers seems to her “another Sky,” as if the waters on the face of the earth and the heavens were for her indistinguishable or continuous. The divine voice could therefore much more precisely be said to recapitulate or echo the paternal Word’s original division of the waters from the waters in Genesis 1:6–7. Before describing her watery mirror and her other self, Eve mentions “a murmuring sound / Of waters issu’d from a Cave”—murmurs, waters and cave all being associated symbolically with maternity, as critics have pointed out. When the paternal Word intervenes, Eve’s specular auto-eroticism seems to become, paradoxically, even more her own, in part because it no longer simply reflects that of Ovid’s Narcissus. And when Eve responds to the verbal intervention by rejecting not only his advice but also Adam, “hee / Whose image” she is, preferring the “smooth wat’ry image,” an analogical relationship gets established between female auto-eroticism and the mother–daughter dyad. But—and the difference is of crucial importance—this implicit and mere analogy is based on specular reflection and error alone. Grounded in illusion, Eve’s desire for an other self is therefore throughout appropriated by a patriarchal order, with the result that in *Paradise Lost*’s recasting of Ovid’s tale of Narcissus, Eve’s illusion is not only permitted but destined to pass away. In its very choice of subject, Milton’s epic seems to testify to the progressive privatization and sentimentalization of the domestic sphere. That this privatization and sentimentalization make possible the construction of a novel female subjectivity is nowhere clearer than in Eve’s first speech, in which the divine voice echoes the words originally dividing the waters from the waters, words which in their derived context separate Eve from the self which is only falsely, illusorily either mother or other.

This takes us to the very last feature of Eve's story-telling to be considered here. As has been suggested, Protestant exegetes consider Adam's declaration in Genesis 2:24, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," to be part of the first wedding ceremony. A version of this ceremonial utterance appears in Adam's narrative and (highly abridged) in Eve's. In Genesis, this declaration follows "and brought her unto the man," a verse which is translated into action in both of *Paradise Lost's* accounts. Calvin, when commenting on this phrase, views the action from Adam's point of view, as involving the exchange of a gift: "For seeing Adam tooke not a wife to him selfe at his owne will: but tooke her whome the Lord offered and appointed unto him: hereof the holinesse of matrimonie doeth the better appeare, because we know that God is the author thereof."<sup>32</sup> Yet Milton is not alone in seeing this moment from Eve's point of view as well as from Adam's, for Diodati, commenting on "And brought her unto him," says: "As a mediator, to cause her voluntarily to espouse her self to Adam and to confirm and sanctify that conjunction."<sup>33</sup> In *Paradise Lost*, the story Eve tells stresses with remarkable persistence both the difficulty and the importance of Eve's "voluntarily" espousing herself to Adam. Many years ago Cleanth Brooks mentioned that Eve's speech in Book IV seemed to anticipate Freud's observations on the comparative difficulty the female has in the transition to adult heterosexuality.<sup>34</sup> But if it does so, it is in a context that constitutes female desire so as to situate the process of transition within competing representational media, within what is almost a kind of hall of voices and mirrors.

This entire discussion of the relation between *Paradise Lost's* retrospective creation narratives and the divorce tracts can therefore be put in the following, summary terms. If in Book VIII's recollected colloquy Adam is revealed articulating the doctrine of marriage, in Book IV's recollected self-mirroring Eve is portrayed enacting its discipline. Or to formulate this somewhat differently, by associating Eve with the vicissitudes of courtship and marriage, and by emphasizing her voluntary submission both to the paternal voice and to her "author" and bridegroom, Adam, *Paradise Lost* can *first* present the practice for which Adam *then*, at the epic's leisure, supplies the theory. In doing so, *Paradise Lost* manages to establish a paradigm for the heroines of the genre Milton's epic is said to usher in. In the Yahwist's creation account, Adam may have been formed first, then Eve. But Milton's Eve tells her story first because the domestic sphere with which her subjectivity associates itself will soon be in need of novels whose heroines are represented learning, in struggles whose conclusions are almost always implicit in the way they begin, the value of submitting desire to the paternal law.

Of course the female authors and readers associated with the rise of the novel are not always willing to submit to this discipline. And in what is

perhaps the most strongly argued critique of the institution of marriage to be written by a feminist before this century, “Milton” is prominently associated with the very ideological contradictions that get exposed. In *Reflections upon Marriage*, Mary Astell submits the notion of “subjection” to an analysis that is devastatingly sharp and in certain ways deconstructive, since she wants to undo the notion that subjection is synonymous with “natural” inferiority. Arguing, even if with heavy irony, by means of the very rationalist and individualist principles that came to prevail during the Civil War period, Astell urges women who are considering marriage to become fully conscious of the liberties they will have to surrender if they are to enter into this state of institutionalized domestic subjection. Her wry reference to Milton is fairly well-known: “For whatever may be said against Passive-Obedience in another case, I suppose there’s no Man but likes it very well in this; how much soever Arbitrary Power may be dislik’d on a Throne, not *Milton* himself would cry up Liberty to poor *Female Slaves*, or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny.”<sup>35</sup>

As I have suggested, the appearance, at least, of Active-Obedience is far more important to *Paradise Lost* and to Milton’s rationalism than this remark would suggest. Might an awareness of this be registered in Astell’s reflections on Genesis in the supplementary “Preface”? Like other feminists writing from within the Christian tradition, Astell finds I Timothy 2:11–14, with its unambiguous assertion of the Genesis Adam’s priority over Eve, exceedingly troublesome: she offers a rather laboured allegorical interpretation, and then adds the caveat that if the “Learned” don’t accept it, it will be because “Learning is what Men have engros’d to themselves.”<sup>36</sup> Though less defensive, her remarks on Genesis itself are no less acerbic. After mentioning, approvingly though tentatively, the opinion that “in the Original State of things the Woman was the Superior,” Astell proceeds to this brilliantly savage rebuttal of the notion of woman’s “inferior” secondariness:

However this be, ’tis certainly no Arrogance in a Woman to conclude, that she was made for the Service of GOD, and that this is her End. Because GOD made all things for Himself, and a Rational Mind is too noble a Being to be Made for the Sake and Service of any Creature. The Service she at any time becomes oblig’d to pay to a Man, is only a Business by the Bye. Just as it may be any Man’s Business and Duty to keep Hogs; he was not made for this, but if he hire himself out to such an Employment, he ought conscientiously to perform it.<sup>37</sup>

Like other feminist commentators, from participants in the “Querelle des Femmes” to Phyllis Triple and Mieke Bal, Astell here implicitly privileges

“P” over “J.” In overturning the view that woman was created “for” man, Astell, however, applies to the domestic sphere the historically determinate notion of contractual relations that Milton helps to articulate in his divorce tracts, political treatises and in *Paradise Lost*. With dazzling, Circe-like powers, Astell’s analogy works to disabuse bourgeois “Man” of his delusions of grandeur. But in exploiting, however archly, a contractual notion of “Service,” it also illustrates some of the hazards involved in the project—ongoing—of trying to call a spade a spade.

#### NOTES

1. For this, see Barbara K. Lewalski, “Milton and women—yet once more” (*Milton Studies*, 6, 1974, 8). Other defenses have been written by Virginia R. Mollenkott, “Milton and women’s liberation: a note on teaching method” (*Milton Quarterly*, 7, 1973, 99–102); Joan M. Webber, “The politics of poetry: feminism and *Paradise Lost*” (*Milton Studies*, 14, 1980, 3–24) and Diane K. McColley, *Milton’s Eve* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1983). Generally speaking, an apologetic tendency is a feature of much North American academic literature on Milton.

2. Quotations from Milton’s poetry are from *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, Odyssey, 1957)

3. Biblical quotations are from the King James version.

4. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1978), 100–11. The discussion in chs 1 and 4 of this work revises and extends the influential “Depatriarchalizing in biblical interpretation” (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 16, 1973, 30–48). For a fuller discussion of some of the exegetical issues touched upon here, see an earlier version of this essay, “Genesis, genesis, exegesis, and the formation of Milton’s Eve,” in *Cannibals, Witches and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, ed. Marjorie Garber (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1987), 147–208. The present essay is part of a full-length study on Genesis, gender, discourse and Milton to be published by Cornell University Press and by Methuen.

5. Mieke Bal, “Sexuality, sin, and sorrow: the emergence of the female character (a reading of Genesis 1–3)” (*Poetics Today*, 6, 1985, 21–42).

6. *Tetrachordon*, ed. Arnold Williams, in vol. II of *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Ernest Sirluck (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959), 594. Subsequent references to this edition of *Tetrachordon* will appear parenthetically introduced by “T.” See David Paraeus, *In Genesin Mosis Commentarius* (Frankfurt, 1609), 267, 293.

7. John Calvin, *A Commentarie of John Calvine, upon the first booke of Moses called Genesis*, tr. Thomas Tymme (London, 1578), 47.

8. Margo Todd argues persuasively for the importance of relating Protestant to humanist views in “Humanists, Puritans and the spiritualized household” (*Church History*, 49, 1980, 18–34). For a discussion of the distinctively Puritan development of this ideology see William and Malleville Haller, “The Puritan art of love”

(*Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 5, 1942, 235–72); William Haller, “Hail Wedded Love” (*English Literary History*, 13, 1946, 79–97); see also John Halkett, *Milton and the Idea of Matrimony: A Study of the Divorce Tracts and “Paradise Lost”* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970), and James T. Johnson, *A Society Ordained by God: English Puritan Marriage Doctrine in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1970). For a negative evaluation of the impact on women of the development of bourgeois marriage doctrine, see Linda T. Fitz, “‘What says the married woman?:’ marriage theory and feminism in the English Renaissance” (*Mosaic* 13, Winter) 1980, 1–22. For a wide-ranging, comparatist discussion of these socioeconomic and ideological changes as they affect the relations of the sexes, see the introduction to *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xv–xxxi.

9. Calvin, op. cit., 74. Latin cited from *Mosis Libri V, cum Johannis Calvini Commentariis* (Geneva, 1563), 19.

10. The political, legal and social contexts for Milton’s tracts are discussed by Chilton L. Powell in *English Domestic Relations, 1487–1653* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1917), 61–199, and by Ernest Sirluck (ed.), vol. II of *Complete Prose Works*, 137–58. Milton’s rhetorical strategies are examined by Keith W. Staveland, *The Politics of Milton’s Prose Style* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975), 54–71, and by John M. Perlette, “Milton, Ascham, and the rhetoric of the divorce controversy” (*Milton Studies*, 10, 1977, 195–115). A relevant and illuminating study of the “crossing” of rhetorical, judicial and other discursive codes can be found in Pat Parker’s “Shakespeare and rhetoric: ‘dilation’ and ‘delation,’” in *Othello, Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (London, Methuen, 1985), 54–74.

11. For a discussion of the title, see the preface by Arnold Williams, *Tetrachordon*, 571.

12. *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, ed. Lowell W. Coolidge, vol. II of *Complete Prose Works*, 240. Further references will be introduced by “DDD.”

13. Calvin, op. cit., 71; *Mosis Libri V*, 18.

14. Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the cynicall bayter of, and foule mouthed barker against Evavs sex* (London, 1617), 6, 14, 16. Joseph Swetnam, *The Araignment of lewd, idle, forward, and unconstant women* (London, 1615). For further discussion of this controversy, see Coryl Crandall, *Swetnam the Woman-Hater: The Controversy and the Play* (Lafayette, Purdue University Studies, 1969), and Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540–1620* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1984). The “Querelle des Femmes” has recently been studied by Joan Kelley, *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65–109. See also Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980), as well as the discussion of “feminist polemic” in *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578–1799*, ed. Moira Ferguson (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985), 27–32.

15. Joan Sharpe, chapter VIII of *Ester Hath Hang’d Haman: A Defense of Women*,

*Against The Author of the Arraignment of Women* by Ester Sowernam, reprinted in *First Feminists*, 81.

16. Speght, op. cit., 4, 5.

17. *ibid.*, 11.

18. *ibid.*, 14.

19. Alexander Nicholes, *A Discourse, of Marriage and Wiving: and of the greatest Mystery therein Contained: How to Choose a good Wife from a bad ...* (London, 1615), 5.

20. *ibid.*, 2.

21. See the influential discussion by Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War sects" (*Past and Present*, 13, 1958, 42–62). Phyllis Mack examines some female prophets and the ways in which their activities were "limited by traditional beliefs about woman's passivity, her low social position, and her basic irrationality," in "Women as prophets during the English Civil War" (*Feminist Studies*, 8, 1, 1982, 25). For a discussion of more overtly political interventions, see Patricia Higgins, "The reactions of women, with special reference to women petitioners," in *Politics, Religion and the English Civil War*, ed. Brian Stuart Manning (London, Edward Arnold, 1973), 177–222.

22. *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testaments ... By the Joynt-Labour of Certain Divines ...* (London, 1645). For its insistence on the generic sense of Genesis "Man," the *Annotations* would seem to be indebted to the text ordered by the Synod of Dort and published in 1637, later translated as *The Dutch Annotations Upon the Whole Bible...*, tr. Theodore Haak (London, 1657).

23. *Colasterion*, ed. Lowell W. Coolidge, vol. 2 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 739–40.

24. Calvin, op. cit., 77–8.

25. Speght, op. cit., 2, 3.

26. Catherine Belsey examines the development and representation of liberal-humanist "Man" in *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London, Methuen, 1985). Francis Barker suggestively locates in the seventeenth century the emergence of a distinctively bourgeois subjectivity; see *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays in Subjection* (London, Methuen, 1984). Jean Bethke Elshtain critiques the rise of liberal ideology in *Public Man, Private Woman* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981), 100–46. For a discussion of the divorce tracts that sees them expressing an alienated bourgeois individualism, see David Aers and Bob Hodge in their very important "'Rational burning': Milton on sex and marriage" (*Milton Studies*, 12, 1979, 3–33).

27. J.M. Evans, *"Paradise Lost" and the Genesis Tradition* (London, Oxford University Press, 1968), 256.

28. If commented upon at all, the emphasis on procreation here is naturalized so that it becomes an expression of Raphael's character or situation. Aers annotates these lines by suggesting that Raphael is revealing a typically "distorted view of sexuality," *John Milton, "Paradise Lost:" Book VII–VIII*, ed. David Aers and Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Cambridge Milton for Schools and Colleges*, ed. J. B. Broadbent



(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974), 99. Halkett (op. cit., iii) points out that Raphael later (VIII.229–46) reveals that he was not present the day of Eve's creation. But since both are supposed to take place on the same "Day," Raphael's absence obviously cannot explain the different treatment given Adam's creation and Eve's in his account. I would argue that such character- and situation-related effects are part and parcel of the ideologically motivated narrative distributions examined here.

29. In emphasizing the lines of continuity between the divorce tracts and *Paradise Lost*, I am questioning the position developed by Aers and Hodge, who see *Paradise Lost* gesturing towards "a more adequate view of sexuality and the relationship between women and men" (op. cit., 4). Like other readers, Aers and Hodge stress the importance of the following speech, suggesting that in it "Adam makes the equation Milton did not make in his prose works, the crucial equation between mutuality, equality, and delight" (23):

Among unequals what society  
Can sort, what harmony or true delight?  
Which must be mutual, in proportion due  
Giv'n and receiv'd. (VIII.383–6)

In my view, however, this produces a mystifying view of "equality," since what Adam is here rejecting is the society of creatures belonging to a different species; Eve is "equal" only in the restricted sense of being a member of the human species. Although I do not here explore the various tensions and contradictions of Milton's views on gender relations in *Paradise Lost*, I make an attempt to do so in "Fallen differences, phallogocentric discourses: losing *Paradise Lost* to history," in *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987).

30. Christine Froula, "When Eve reads Milton: undoing the canonical economy" (*Critical Inquiry*, 10, 1983, 321–47). That Derrida's *Supplement* can productively expose motivated contradictions in the not unrelated field of Renaissance rhetorical theory is demonstrated by Derek Attridge in "Puttenham's perplexity: nature, art and the supplement in Renaissance poetic theory," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 257–79.

31. For a sharp analysis of the ways in which, among the upper classes, the development of an affective domestic sphere served to reinforce masculinist modes of thought, see Susan Moller Okin, "Women and the making of the sentimental family" (*Philosophy and Public Affairs*, II, 1981, 65–88).

32. Calvin, op. cit., 76–7.

33. Annotation on Genesis 2:22 in John Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, tr. (R.G.), 3rd edn (London, 1651).

34. Cleanth Brooks, "Eve's awakening," in *Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry* (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1954), 283–5. Brooks says that to the student of Freud, Eve's psychology may seem "preternaturally" convincing; he also remarks that Eve is "charmingly feminine withal"!

35. Mary Astell, *Reflections upon Marriage, The Third Edition, To Which is Added A Preface, in Answer to some Objections* (London, 1706), 27. Ruth Perry examines this work's political discourse in her recent biography, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986), 157–70. See also Joan K. Kinnaird, "Mary Astell and the conservative contribution to English feminism" (*Journal of British Studies*, 19, 1979, 53–75); and see the discussion by Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1982), 131–9.

36. Astell, op. cit., Preface, a2, a3.

37. *ibid.*, A2.



JOHN GUILLORY

*The father's house:*  
*Samson Agonistes in its historical moment*

Neque enim, pater, ire iubebas  
Qua via lata patet, qua pronior area lucri,  
Certaque condendi fulget spes aurea nummi ...  
("Ad Patrem")

LIFE-NARRATIVES

**T**he argument of this essay takes as its point of entry the long-standing conviction of Milton's readers that the narrative of *Samson Agonistes* does not yield to interpretation unless it can be made to stand quasi-allegorically for some other story whose constituent concerns and characters belong to the time and place of the drama's composition. The difficulty of producing this other narrative raises in an acute form the most general of theoretical questions concerning the historical specificity of any literary text; yet it may be that the very resistance to this specificity thrown up by the code-like narrative of *Samson* (extending even to the date of composition, which has never been fixed) is an interesting arena upon which to engage the theoretical question. I propose to read the narrative in its historical moment, but I do not mean that I shall decode the drama by establishing once again,

---

From *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the texts and traditions*, eds. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson. © 1988 by John Guillory.

or for the first time, its proper historical context. I intend rather to argue that the relation of text to context (as though to bring the historical “background” a little closer) is a false problematic and has produced in this instance an illusion of narrative intelligibility. The problematic I would advance in its stead recognizes the text as itself a historical event, in the sense that Milton’s choice of the Samson story is a determinate choice, not the neutral vehicle of meaning but an event whose significance is enabled and conditioned by a particular configuration of the total social formation.

The difference such a reading would make can be suggested by glancing briefly at the three contextual decodings of the narrative heretofore governing criticism. These are, first a *political* context, in which Milton’s redaction of the Samson story records a certain response to the failure of the Commonwealth and the restoration of the monarchy. Second, an *autobiographical* context, in which the life of Samson is identified with the professional, literary, or domestic life of Milton. And third, a *theological* context (currently the most favored), in which the narrative recapitulates the stages leading up to the “regeneration” of the “elect” Protestant.<sup>1</sup> None of these contextual readings, or their many variant or combined forms, is without explanatory power, nor are they mutually exclusive. Yet they produce their intelligible translations of the Samson story at the cost of isolating the dyad of text and context from the social formation within which both text and context are significant events. Here I would pose the question not of context but of *mediation* (scarcely a new concept, but one seldom enough employed in Renaissance criticism). The problematic of mediation, which addresses the relation between a field of cultural production and the whole of social life, has been developed most rigorously within a materialist concept of history and it is ultimately a materialist reading I shall attempt. I offer as a useful and certainly not tyrannical formula for the materialist problematic a sentence from Theodor Adorno’s critique of Benjamin: “Materialist determination of cultural traits is only possible if it is mediated through the *total social process*.”<sup>2</sup> Milton’s choice of the Samson story signifies as a determinate choice within nothing less than this totality.

Nevertheless it will be necessary to begin with a rather more limited and specific hypothesis about mediation between social levels in the early modern period: Max Weber’s still crucial argument in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber differs on some significant points with what would presumably be a thoroughly materialist account of the relation between religion and economy, but his work has provided the terms and evidence for virtually every concept of mediation specific to the early modern period and to Protestant Europe. For Weber the hinge of the social levels represented by Protestantism and capitalism is the practice of “vocation,” which operates as both a focus of theological controversy and as a discourse of the working life. Weber traces this polyvalence to the early Reformation

rejection of “good works” and the later emergence of a doctrine of election, a doctrine which in practice imposed a structure upon life itself. Calvin’s God demanded “not single good works but a life of good works combined into a unified system.”<sup>3</sup> Thus the Catholic organization of everyday life, wherein every moment is referred to eternity as the potential moment of death, is replaced by a *narratable* life, a structured life determined as “elect” or “reprobate” only as a whole. There is good prima-facie evidence for situating *Samson* as an intervention into this history in the very fact that current contextual decodings of the narrative have invariably sought out a context in which a life-narrative is at issue. Even the political reading of the drama is contingent upon the conventional figuring of the nation’s history as the life of the heroic individual.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Milton seems to have designed the narrative precisely in order to problematize the structured life, as the confirmation of the providential plan governing the isolated episodes of Samson’s life is suspended until the crisis of retrospective validation in the temple.<sup>5</sup>

At certain points Milton more openly attaches the life of Samson to the history of Protestant election or vocation, as when the Chorus, addressing God, says that Samson is

such as thou hast solemnly elected,  
With gifts and graces eminently adorn’d  
To some great work, thy glory.

(678–80)<sup>6</sup>

Yet we know that in fact the sense of election in such a passage cannot be strictly Calvinist because Milton himself was a believer in the Arminian revision of Calvinist doctrine, which affirmed the freedom of the will over predestination. If at this moment the history of election appears in the margin of the drama merely as a problem of definition, or of the theological context, that impression will be dispelled as soon as we measure what is at stake in Milton’s deployment of the received discourse. A better sense of what such discursive maneuvers mean is given by Foucault’s conception of “genealogy,” a process he describes as “the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules ... in order to impose a new direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a new game.”<sup>7</sup> Milton’s drama undertakes the “surreptitious appropriation” of that Calvinist system or plan for the ordering of life whose cardinal principle is predestination. This system of rules is given a new direction in the Arminian heresy, to which *Samson Agonistes* lends its particular force. Such interventions take their place and have their effects within the long sequence of discursive practices by which the vocation is dislocated from the medieval ecclesiastical lexicon in order first to be identified with the radical Protestant concept of election,

and later, in equally critical circumstances, to be extracted from its theological matrix. By the later eighteenth century the vocation functions as the key term in the bourgeois ideology of industriousness Weber finds exemplified in the writings of Benjamin Franklin. The current sense of vocation is therefore not the lineal descendant of some original discourse but the fossil record of successive upheavals. Its very sedimentation makes it capable of inflecting the working life both positively and negatively, as the déclassé “vocational training,” or as the vocation which transcends the venal motives of careerism.

The narrative of *Samson* belongs in another demonstrable respect to the genealogy of Weber’s Protestant ethic, namely to that epistemological crisis of proving one’s election which racked the soul of the Calvinist. Just as the dilemma of *certitudo salutis*, according to Weber, gave rise to an identification of *success* with the proof of salvation, so Milton’s Samson suffers from a persistent doubt about his success, a doubt that cannot be reduced only to a question of salvation or “regeneration.” The real historical dilemma of election, the gulf between the private assurance of election and its public exhibition, is carried over intact into Milton’s drama, even though election itself is drained of its Calvinist rigor. What remains of that doctrine is precisely its ideological effect, its participation in the constitution of a new subject with a new name: the “individual.” Only the individual can be saved or damned, and *in the same way*, only the individual can succeed or fail at a vocation. Current readings of *Samson*, if they remark just the problematic relation between the inner narrative of conviction or doubt and the outer narrative of success or failure in the struggle against the Philistines, tend to privilege the internal narrative in a reduction of the drama to the operation of a psychic economy, an economy in which the ebbing and flowing of Samson’s physical strength can be correlated to the conviction of providential vocation, the inner state Protestant theology calls “faith.”

From works of law to works of faith: the Pauline doctrine enables for Calvinism the transformation of religious practice into a psychic economy, a spiritual accounting that constitutes the individual in a new way, over against the juridical constraints of the social, the “law.” Clearly the homeostatic psychic economy of Calvinism permitted the achievements of the working life, in a fatal slippage from “works” to “work,” to be entered as credits in the ledger of the soul. Weber’s study documents the emergence of this psychic economy, which he calls an “ethic,” and which for him mediates between the major social structures of Protestantism and capitalism. I shall argue that the putative homeostasis of the individual psyche is geared to a *general* economy of social relations, an economy in which the vocation (in the sense of “working life”) is not merely a redundant confirmation of a purely interior certainty, nor the state of faith merely the warm glow of material success. If the historical problem of the vocation can be conceived alternatively as the

relation between an inaccessible inner state and a narratable life, then the problematic of mediation underlying Weber's study can be addressed as the question of how certain narratives—"accounts" of individual lives—emerge and function within a specific historical conjuncture.

To be sure, this is a question of ideology and the means of its critique, but here it would seem that the most readily available apparatus for examining the narrative of the inner life—psychoanalysis—is itself another version of the same kind of ideological discourse. There are nonetheless good reasons for moving beyond Weber initially (if not finally) in the direction of Freud, not the least of which is that ideology-critique (as it has been developed from Marcuse to Althusser) is as yet dependent in its formulations upon the very psychoanalytic vocabulary that is the latest and finest product of ideology.<sup>8</sup> Yet it may well be the case that ideological discourses provide the means of their own critique in failing to erase their genealogies; in this sense, the Protestant vocation belongs to what Foucault calls the "history of the present," the history of psychoanalysis itself.

In the final section of this paper I hope to move beyond an ideology-critique in psychoanalytic terms and onto the ground of materialism by locating the point at which the homeostatic economy of the psyche disintegrates and the vista of the general economy appears beyond the life of the individual. With reference to the narrative of *Samson*, this point is the moment of Samson's death, when his life becomes fully narratable, or when that life-narrative begins to circulate. From this retrospective vantage, it can be shown that the psychic economy generating the serial episodes of the life-narrative has all along been determined by a contradiction between the demands emanating from the poem's two fathers, Yahweh and Manoa; the distinction between these two fathers marks the *difference* between the psychic and the social. The Hebrew God demands a "great work," while the earthly father demands, as I shall show, "labor in a calling." Both demands can be identified with the concept of vocation, but this is no longer an instance of polyvalence so much as contradiction. Samson arranges the disposition of his resources—the psychic, symbolic, or material capital represented by "strength"—in order to satisfy the demands of both fathers; and this he is able to do not by a labor of production, but by a single, fantasmatic "great work" of destruction. The fact of a deviant *labor of destruction* expending the whole of a capital endowment situates the drama historically within a specific economic order, but signifying by its narrative of destruction the antithesis of that order. To read *Samson Agonistes* in its moment is to understand first, its discordant relation to the normative vocational narrative of the bourgeois Protestant, and second, the meaning of such a counter-narrative, its capacity to circulate and to give pleasure, within a social order exalting at every level the principle of production.



## EXTRAORDINARY CALLING

To begin with Weber's question, then, is to set before us the task of fixing the typical thematization of the Samson story in Judges within the field of Protestant writings. Consider, for example, this text by the well-known theologian, William Perkins, from *A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of Men*:

And if we marke it well, the work of God shewes evidently to what dangers they are subject, that doe anything either without or against their callings. Sampson's strength lay not in his haire (as men commonly thinke) but because hee went out of his calling, by breaking the vow of a Nazarite, when he gave occasion to Dalilah to cut off his Haire, therefore he lost his strength; for God promised strength but with a commaundement, that hee should be a Nazarite to the end.<sup>9</sup>

Judges provides an illustrative tale of what happens when a man falls away from his calling; indeed, the calling is defined here by what diverges from it, just as it would seem to be defined in Milton's redaction of the story. Yet this definition does not distinguish Samson from any other follower in the Nazarite path; he was called to much more than obedience to vows. In Perkins' text the story is partially depleted of its meaning in order that the situation of Samson might be read as normative. The same tactic of normalization is adopted by the marginal annotators of the Geneva Bible, who also interpret the narrative from judges as a moral fable of "vocation." Such an allegory is developed during Samson's final moments, as here the uniqueness of his situation tends to escape the net of circumscriptive thematization. Hence, Samson's coerced "sport" before the Philistine lords (16:25) calls forth this comment: "Thus by Gods iust judgements they are made slaves to infidels, which neglect their vocation in defending the faithful." Not quite consistently, Samson between the pillars (16:29) is glossed: "According to my vocation, which is to execute Gods judgements upon the wicked," a statement that would seem to acknowledge a specific rather than a general concept of Samson's task. The more disturbing suicidal exclamation ("Let me die with the Philistines") is accompanied by a somewhat evasive return to a normative theme: "He speaketh not this of despaire, but humbling himself for neglecting his office and the offense thereby given." Samson's "suicide," which is conventionally explained away, is least of all compatible with a "vocational" reading.

The texts from Perkins and the Geneva commentators, with which Milton would have been familiar, record an incapacity to fix a boundary between the two senses of vocation, as calling and as work. Yet such a

distinction was frequently attempted, and it usually took the form adopted by Perkins in the following passage:

The generall calling is the calling of Christianity, which is common to all that live in the Church of God. The particular, is that special calling that belongs to some particular men: as the calling of a Magistrate, the calling of a Minister, the calling of a father, of a childe, of a seruant, of a subiect, or any other calling that is common to all.

(I.752)

Perkins' category of the special calling is scarcely exclusive, but it is evident from the remainder of the treatise that he is primarily interested in those callings which we would call "occupations." The relative poverty of Perkins' vocabulary reproduces the same paronomasia that is the subject of Weber's researches in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The discursive problem to which Milton's version of the Samson story responds can now be more narrowly defined and examined: it concerns the distinction between general and particular vocation, as that unstable distinction conditions subsequent deviations from Calvinism.

Weber initially addresses this problem by tracing the emergence of the modern sense of *Beruf*, "which undoubtedly goes linguistically back to Bible translations by Protestants" (207). His major example is Luther's translation of the apocryphal book of Jesus Sirach 11:20 as "bleibe in deinem Beruf," where the Vulgate had "opus." German Bibles had, formerly, "Werk," or "Arbeit." The Latin term synonymous with *Beruf* was of course *vocatio*, but that had referred to the *religious* life, particularly to the life of the cloister. Luther also translates a similar crucial verse, I Corinthians 7:20, as "Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called" (translating the New Testament *kleesis* as *Beruf*). More accurate translations would be, for the Latin, *status*, and the German, *Stand*. The alterations are small volleys in the polemics of Protestantism, aimed specifically at the *consilia evangelica* of the monks. The latter is replaced by a new "valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs" (80), the Weberian *idée reçue* that is in fact only a premise of Weber's argument. Protestant theologians such as Perkins, who condemn the monks themselves for idleness, are able to say that the monks have no *vocation* (I.755), impressive testimony to the effectiveness of the appropriated term, if only as a device of polemic. However, several intervening circumstances have to be remarked, and they are, according to Weber, even more significant than the revaluation of labor inaugurated by the early Protestants.

According to Weber, the sanctification of work did not necessarily imply its rationalization, which he associates with Calvinist rather than

Lutheran forms of Reformation. In fact, Luther's sense of labor is in some ways thoroughly traditional; he believed, as Weber remarks, that "the individual should remain once and for all in the station and calling in which God had placed him, and should restrain his worldly activity within the limits imposed by his established station in life" (85). Along with its newer resonances, *Beruf* retained the meaning of *status*. Luther's innovation might be simply irrelevant to any post-Calvinist conception of labor, were it not for the fact that he uses *Beruf* frequently also to mean "the call to eternal salvation through God." Calvin's sense of a "call to eternal salvation" is only too clear; yet the machinery of predestination yields another distinction authorized by the cryptic final sentence of the marriage parable in Matthew: "For many are called (*kleetos*) but few are chosen (*eklektos*)." This is the text by which Calvin expounds his distinction between a general and a special calling:

The statement of Christ "Many are called but few are chosen" [Matt. 22:14] is, in this manner, very badly understood. Nothing will be ambiguous if we hold fast to what ought to be clear from the foregoing: that there are two kinds of call. There is the general call, by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the word—even those to whom he holds it out as a savor of death [cf. II Cor. 2:16], and as the occasion for severer condemnation. The other kind of call is special, which he deigns for the most part to give to the believers alone, while by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts. Yet sometimes he also causes those whom he illuminates only for a time to partake of it; then he justly forsakes them on account of their ungratefulness and strikes them with even greater blindness.<sup>10</sup>

The general call is at best vacated of its meaning, and at worst it becomes what Empson would have called one of God's "grisly jokes." More important, the distinction is drawn entirely within the soteriological problematic. Whereas Luther had defined a special calling as the particular employment or labor of an individual life, Calvin identifies the same structural category with the *elect*. It might be supposed that the more radical and powerful Calvinist scheme would simply displace the Lutheran distinction, but that is not what happens. Weber shows that precisely the problem engendered by the discrimination of the elect from the reprobate is responsible for the retention of Luther's pun on *Beruf*: "It was only as a result of the development which brought the interest in proof of salvation to the fore that Luther's concept was taken over and then strongly emphasized by [the Calvinists]" (210).

After Calvin, then, “calling” and “vocation” continue to be used indiscriminately on both sides of the distinction between *vocati* and *electi*. The indeterminacy of this conceptual complex is the condition for the semantic link between Calvin’s election, which has nothing to do, after all, with labor *per se*, and Luther’s *Beruf*. Milton inherits these distinctions, along with their instability. An irresolvable ambiguity of terms is especially characteristic of the Arminian heresy, whose aim is scarcely to discard the technical apparatus of Calvinism; on the contrary, the terms remain in place, but their relations are altered, and another bifurcation appears. For Milton, as an Arminian, the distinction between *vocati* and *electi* cannot have quite the same force as it must for the Calvinist, since he no longer accepts a decree of reprobation. More than that, *De Doctrina* undertakes to remove election completely from its context of predestination; but then what content might it have? Would it not simply be absorbed by the secondary meanings of vocation, because, against its now conventional meaning, it would refer to *choosing* rather than *being chosen*? “Whence I infer,” Milton writes, “that ‘the elect’ are the same as ‘believers,’ that the terms are synonymous” (VI.180). God chooses those who choose themselves. Milton has no need for a purely soteriological distinction between a general and a special election. All election is general: “It seems, then, that predestination and election are not particular but only general: that is, they belong to all who believe in their hearts and persist in their belief” (VI.176). Finally Milton is careful to distinguish the general election from the idea of the particular, individual task: “nor do I mean the election by which he chooses an individual for some employment [ad munus]” (VI.172.).

But is the latter notion in any other way an example of election? Elsewhere in *De Doctrina* Milton refers to a similar idea as *special vocation*:

Special vocation means that God, whenever he chooses, invites certain select individuals, either from the so called elect or from the reprobate [sive electos quos vocant sive reprobos], more clearly and more insistently than is normal.

Certain selected individuals: he called Abraham, for example, out of his house, when he probably had not the slightest idea that such a thing would happen, Gen. xxi. 1, etc. and when, in fact, he was an idolator.

(VI.455)

A distinction between election and vocation is very difficult to maintain, both here and in the chapter on “Predestination.” Samson is unquestionably an example of “special vocation,” like Abraham, called out of his house [domo sua evocavit] to do the work of God; but a much larger point emerges from this analysis: Milton’s concept of special vocation is the *return* of election, the

return of being chosen rather than choosing. The now orthodox interpretation of Samson's "regeneration" misses this point by attaching his internal narrative to the *general* vocation, the spiritual progression Milton adopts in his Arminian version of the Calvinist paradigm: vocation–regeneration–repentance–faith–justification. The application of such a paradigm to Samson's story falsifies precisely Milton's attempt to suppress the Calvinist residue of his theology, which nevertheless returns in *De Doctrina* with the nervous "sive electos quos vocant sive reprobos," and in *Samson* with every meditation, however finally exculpatory, on the justice of God. Much as the Geneva annotators accommodated the violence of judges, current advocates of Samson's "regeneration" have normalized Milton's redaction, reducing the extraordinary call to merely typical status.<sup>11</sup>

#### UNPROFITABLE SERVANT

Samson, Manoa, and the Chorus allude frequently to Samson's unique calling, and it is these passages I hope to have located precisely within the region of theological controversy. I would now like to consider in greater detail the key passage from *Samson* quoted above, with the intention of probing the limits of Weber's conceptualization of the Protestant vocation. The passage is excerpted from a longer rumination by the Chorus on what must have seemed to Milton an affinity of the *Samson* narrative with the story of job:

Nor do I name of men the common rout,  
 That wandering loose about  
 Grow up and perish, as the summer fly,  
 Heads without name no more remember'd,  
 But such as thou hast solemnly elected,  
 With gifts and graces eminently adorn'd  
 To some great work, thy glory,  
 And people's safety, which in part they effect:  
 Yet toward these, thus dignifi'd, thou oft,  
 Amidst thir height of noon,  
 Changest thy count'nance and thy hand, with no regard  
 Of highest favors past  
 From thee on them, or them to thee of service.

(674–86)

If election seems here to be an *ironic* predestination, a "grisly joke," it is in this and several other ways a transformation rather than a transcendence of the Calvinist scheme. As a "solemnly elected" individual, Samson stands

against not a spiritually reprobate majority but the *nameless*, “the common rout ... Heads without name no more remember’d.” The antinomies of election and reprobation are redefined as election and *obscurity*—the “invisible” church has become, precisely, the *most* visible. These “elect” can be figured as visibility itself; they are most conspicuous at “thir height of noon.” The pressure of Milton’s own obsession is evident here; certainly he feared obscurity more than any discredited reprobation, but then he has gone a long way toward identifying the one with the other. The obsession of the drama with fame, itself an ethically suspect motive, compounds with the Calvinist soteriology to produce a socially advanced valuation of individual fate. We shall return to this notion when we follow Samson into the temple, at his height of noon (“noon grew high”).

The homology of election and fame suggests a modification of election to respond to a newly defined elite, one which *emerged* from the Calvinist elect. Hence Milton is intent to dissociate Samson from a hereditary nobility (171) just as much as from the common rout. In the biblical text these discriminations are not made. At the same time, it is rather difficult to specify any group to which Samson might belong as a representative figure. It is easier to locate a referent for the obscure multitude in the egregious interjection, “That wandering loose about.” Such wandering is not entailed by the distinction between those who are elected to a conspicuous fame and those who are not. “Wand’ring loose” implies a hypothetical antithesis, a quality of fixity in the character of Samson, but that idea is not to be found in the passage itself. Rather it generates a series of oppositions from beneath, operating as a covert thematic which is elsewhere openly acknowledged in the phallic narrative of Samson’s castration by Dalila, signifying among other things a slackening of vocational rigidity. Resolute application to an ordained task is demanded by the “special vocation” that Milton distinguishes from mere labor on the one hand, and predestination on the other. If that *idée fixe* fails to maintain its distinction from Calvin’s predestination, I will now argue that it also fails to remain uninvaded by the fact of “mere” labor.

“Special vocation” in the sense of the “working life” is signalled by what is probably the most active subtext in the drama, the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30). Milton has already linked both his blindness and his “one talent” to this parable in Sonnet XIX, and it is unsurprisingly evoked by Samson, who possesses the singular talent of strength. just as critical is an unmistakable affinity with the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16); both parables conceive of the relation between God and man as that of a master-employer to a servant-employee. In *Samson*, any recollection of the parable of the workers in the vineyard would seem to cancel the elective assurance of the parable of the talents. Yet we hear in the protest of the Chorus against the (apparently) arbitrary master who remunerates his servants with ironic even-handedness (“just and unjust, alike seem

miserable”) the complaint of the workers in the vineyard. The contest of the two parables occurs more familiarly in Sonnet XIX: “Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?” When Samson’s “one talent which is death to hide” does not yield a profit, his labor is mere wage-labor; he merely gets what he deserves. And getting what one deserves is of course the economic formula for *reprobation*, which can only be transcended by the absolute gift of election, the absolute transcendence of economy itself. The lament of the Chorus, “[Thou] throws’t them lower than thou didst exalt them high,” is thus heavily charged with the same Calvinist irony that retroactively contaminates the parable of the workers in the vineyard: “So the last will be first, and the first last.” The psychic economy governing Samson’s “special vocation” can be described as an attempt to affirm the economy of the parable of the talents against the economy of the parable of the workers in the vineyard (as though the economic form of talent/profit were not in fact mediated in the real world by the form of wage-labor).<sup>12</sup>

The logic of Milton’s economy requires not the equal remuneration of labor but the production of a *profit*. We will see that for Samson, if that profit does not appear “in the close,” labor is degraded to “day-labor, light denied,” or worse, to “idleness,” the condition of the “common rout ... wand’ring loose about.” That is to say, Samson will have no vocation. In its contempt for “wand’ring,” the Chorus speaks in unison with Perkins and his colleagues, when they condemn “rogues, beggars, vagabonds” for idleness, for not taking up a vocation in life.<sup>13</sup> Their vagrancy is of course a consequence of their mass expropriation, but the social fact of vagrancy is volatilized in the crucible of Puritan ethics and rematerializes as a schematic counterpart to the valorization of labor undertaken by all those theologians from Perkins to Baxter who imported the categories of election and vocation into the representation of everyday working life. Hence Samson prefers even a degraded form of labor, the “servile toil” of the Philistine mill, to the idleness that is the antinomy of calling:

To what can I be useful, wherein serve  
My Nation, and the work from Heav’n impos’d,  
But to sit idle on the household hearth,  
A burdenous drone.

(564–7)

Such a “drone” could not be distinguished from the “summer flies” dismissed by the Chorus. Samson’s calling, which has consisted hitherto of isolated acts of destruction, is nevertheless an occupation. His vocational failure leaves him with nothing to do, an “unprofitable servant” (Matt. 25:30) who has fallen out of his class and into the horde of the socially reprobate, the expropriated, the unemployed.

## INTIMATE IMPULSE

Labor is the shadow cast by all of Samson's actions; yet the objective form of his vocation, his apparently random acts of destruction, prevents us from finally assimilating his narrative to a normative ideology. This problem, which is not accessible to a Weberian analysis, can be approached from another direction as the problem of the discrepancy between the demands of Samson's two fathers, God and Manoa. If Manoa disapproves of Samson's "nuptial choices," he also remains skeptical of those divinely inspired "intimate impulses" which we know to be both the justification of Samson's object choices and the form taken by his calling. What does Manoa want of and for his son? The question might be rephrased to highlight Manoa's contemporaneity with Milton: "What might the seventeenth-century middle-class father want of his male child?" Many things, of course, but at the least he might claim the right to control both marital and occupational choices. In his divorce tracts, Milton rejects the coerced choice of marriage partners as a "savage inhumanity" (II.275). As for the second "right," the evidence (for example, of "Ad Patrem") points to its rejection as well. On this point Milton was as usual advanced for his time. The period of transition is epitomized by one historian of the family, Jean-Louis Flandrin, as follows:

In the sixteenth century, the only recognized vocation had been the religious one; apart from that, parents were left free to choose the occupations of their children. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, every estate had become a "profession" and required a "vocation," which parents were forbidden to thwart.<sup>14</sup>

It would be very difficult to believe that this reversal was effected without trauma; we know that Milton's own father was perplexed by the occupational vagueness of his son's life. If Samson's activity scarcely has the appearance of an occupation, its structurally "vocational" features are determined by the father's demand for a certain regular activity, for rational labor. At the same time, this activity must answer to the demand of the Father God, which Milton rather coyly implies is quite beyond Manoa's comprehension.<sup>15</sup> This contradiction is focused (if not resolved) by the repetition of the "intimate impulse," a paradoxical rationalization of an act itself anarchic and eruptive.

The problem of the iterability of the "intimate impulse" arises crucially in the recounting of Samson's decision to marry a second Philistine woman: "I thought it lawful from my former act" (231). The absence of any narrative confirmation of divine guidance leaves the impulse stranded in the psyche, reduced merely to a *feeling*. The possibility of doubt has the effect of producing a fully Cartesian meditation on the privacy of thought. Samson does not attempt to assimilate his second marriage to the earlier impulse,



which he “knows” to be from God, but rather elevates that impulse into a principle of legitimation. The “feeling” remains inaccessible but the concept of the impulse functions as a legal precedent, and so displaces the epistemological problem of a private experience onto an already legitimized social structure. In this way the act that needed to be justified because it transgressed the law itself becomes the justification of future transgression. The Chorus accepts this argument, after some vigorous attempts at self-persuasion (“He with his Laws can best dispense”) that conclude at the *expense* of a “rational” principle (“Down Reason, then, at least vain reasonings down”). At this point Manoa enters, and the narrative sequence makes explicit the antinomies governing the drama: the father, the law, rationality, and iterability must be ranged against God, transgression, irrationality, and a convulsive mode of action. Narrative repetitions in *Samson* appear as singular, unstructured acts of impulsion, or as a “compulsion to repeat.” Samson’s marriages, his failures to contain his several secrets, his acts of destruction; everything must be done at least twice. Milton would have been sensitized to this pattern even by the current etymology of Samson’s name, “there the second time.” The narrative invokes a pervasive polarity between the law, as representative of social relations, and the impulse, as representative of an overruling psychic economy. At this point we are prepared to consider the question of why Samson’s vocation takes the form of a compulsion to repeat, which is precisely a compulsion to transgress the law.

That the question of the law arises here (and even more crucially at the climax of the drama) has the effect of opening up the relation of the psychic to the social just at the moment when the social seems to be disappearing into the psychic. I would like to set this relation in apposition to several texts of Freud, with the intention of reconstructing that recurrent structure of ideology by which psychic economies, whether Calvinist, Freudian, or anything in between appropriate and displace the mechanism of the economic *per se*. A hypothetical “psychic economy” governing the internal narrative of *Samson* therefore does not leave behind the prehistory of election, its complicity with Calvinist ideologies of labor, but rather follows the track of that ideology as it displaces the scene of action to the “mind.” If Manoa can be seen to represent the familial interests of the contemporary bourgeoisie, it is Samson who refuses the representative function, who offers instead a unique and interesting *internal* drama. It will also be helpful to observe in the typical strategies of psychoanalysis the analogue of Samson’s private justification of his public actions (founded upon a communication between himself and God); election is here performing the quasi-analytic function of inducing introspection, of displacing compulsion to a domain of interiority. Samson exhibits what Freud calls a *Schicksalszwang*, a “fate compulsion,” described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as “being pursued by

a malignant fate or possessed by some ‘daemonic’ power.” The mythological terms are then smoothly translated into analytic language: “but psychoanalysis has always taken the view that their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves and determined by early infantile experiences” (XVIII.21). In order to translate the *daemon* into *Zwang*, Freud overleaps several centuries, the whole period of the “disenchantment of the world,” in which neither the *daemon* nor the *Zwang* are available terms of explanation. For Milton’s Samson, it is an open question whether his fate is determined by an external agency or arranged by himself (“Whether prompted by God or by his own valor”).<sup>16</sup> Fixing upon one or the other alternative will depend, precisely, upon whether and how external agencies are internalized, that is upon a *psychologizing* move. In his metapsychology, Freud attempts to demonstrate that the external *Zwang* is so transformed by the psychic economy as to become virtually supernumerary to its operation, reduced, as it were, from an agency of predestination to an impotent foreshadowing. I propose, then, something more than an analogy to this metapsychology: that if late Calvinist theology defines a psychic economy, the relation of economy to psyche, or of labor to election, can be theorized in a preliminary way as the relation of (external) *Zwang* to (internal) *Schicksal*.

Consider, for example, the analytic account of that external compulsion known as the “law” given in *The Future of an Illusion*. In place of the Hebraic etiology of law as God-given, Freud posits as the founding institutions of civilization two forms of social coercion: “But with the recognition that every civilization rests upon a compulsion to work [*Arbeitszwang*] and a renunciation of instinct [*Triebverzicht*], it has become clear that civilization cannot consist principally and solely in wealth itself and the means of acquiring it and the arrangement for its distribution” (XXI.10). The *Arbeitszwang* is soon left aside, since it is a universal necessity, and (at least at this point in the argument) does not undergo internalization. Freud is concerned only to explain the renunciation of instinct, and it is that “external compulsion” [*äusserer Zwang*] which “gradually becomes internalized” (XXXI.11).

In the major study to follow, *Civilization and its Discontents*, work appears again as a result mainly of the “stress of necessity,” but in addition an attempt is made to articulate the two founding coercions of civilization in relation to a single defense mechanism, sublimation. Still, the most significant comment is relegated to a footnote:

It is not possible, within the limits of a short survey, to discuss adequately the significance of work for the economics of the libido. No other technique for the conduct of life attaches the individual so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work; for his work at least gives him a secure place in a portion of reality, in the

human community. The possibility it offers of displacing a large amount of libidinal components, whether narcissistic, aggressive or even erotic, on to professional work and on to the human relations connected with it lends it a value by no means second to what it enjoys as something indispensable to the preservation and justification of existence in society. Professional activity is a source of special satisfaction if it is a freely chosen one if, that is to say, by means of sublimation, it makes possible the use of existing inclinations, of persisting or constitutionally reinforced instinctual impulses.

(XXI.80)

It is only rarely in Freud's work that the "economics of the libido" touches upon the economy in the restricted sense, here as the re-entrance of libido into economy. Freud's note does not argue that work actually absorbs a considerable quantum of frustrated *erotic* libido—he only adds a tentative "even erotic" to his list of possible sublimations. In this formulation, certain kinds of work, "freely chosen activity," provide the opportunity of sublimating *aggression*.<sup>17</sup> The activity resulting from such a sublimation can again be described as *Arbeitszwang*, but this would mean something new, an *internalized* compulsion. Joan Rivière, the translator of this work in the *Standard Edition*, gives us "professional work" for the word *Berufsarbeit*, which should make very clear historically, what kind of work Freud has in mind. The history sedimented in the word Freud employs recalls the same contradiction discovered in the Protestant *Beruf*, work as "freely chosen activity" (vocation) and as being chosen (election).

Nevertheless the implications of this sedimented history are only ancillary to Freud's argument, which is concerned in the body of text with accounting for the "discontent" of that instinctual renunciation which is a consequence of aggression, the major derivative of the "death-drive." The subtleties of the theory are less pertinent at the moment than the central thesis of an aggressivity placed in the service of the super-ego, which becomes a kind of breeder-reactor of renunciation and further aggression. It would seem that in this context the question of work would no longer be problematic, that the compulsion to repeat (*Wiederholungszwang*), as the major representative of the death-drive, would sum up every lesser example of compulsion. Nevertheless, the "compulsion to work" does reappear later in the book, having ascended from the footnotes to a very prominent place in the argument—this time as a mythological complement to the sexual drive: "The communal life of human beings had, therefore, a twofold foundation: the compulsion to work, which was created by external necessity, and the power of love.... Eros and Ananke have become the parents of human civilization too" (XXI.101). The identification of Ananke with the

“compulsion to work” (*der Zwang zur Arbeit*) is surprising; why is there no theoretical relation between this *external* necessity and the internal aggression that is everywhere else in Freud’s later work the complement to Eros? Elsewhere the dyad is, as we know, Eros and Thanatos, the death-drive. The relation between Thanatos and Ananke can be brought to the fore by reconnecting the ligaments of the argument as follows: An internalized *Arbeitszwang* is the sublimation of aggression, which is a derivative of the death-drive, whose representative is the *Wiederholungszwang*. If work is indeed the sublimation of aggression according to the later theory of the drives, it is unfortunately also true that sublimation was never successfully integrated into the economic scheme of the metapsychology. It is just this failure of integration that allows Freud to idealize a certain kind of labor, the *Berufsarbeit*, and in fact to model the psychic economy of labor on two quite atypical examples, “intellectual work” and “artistic creation” (XXI.79). In this kind of labor, an *impossible* psychic economy obtains, one in which nothing is lost in expending energy.

If Calvinist theology can be said to function as a psychology, a system for inducing and representing psychic events, this psychology, like Freud’s, also fails to represent labor except in idealized form, as extra-economic, as a sublimation or internalized *Ananke*. Indeed it is the conception of a *Zwang* subtending the ideology of the bourgeois vocation—a *compulsion to work* which is attested in myriad documents of the early modern bourgeoisie—that allows us to reconstruct something like a psychic economy of Calvinism. The *Berufsarbeit* of the Calvinist is also a sublimation of aggression (competition), which is a derivative of his fate (election), whose representative is the compulsion to repeat (as we shall see, accumulation of profit). Samson acts out the psychic economy of the Calvinist, but in a deviant form: his vocation is a *desublimation* of aggression, a crucial difference marking the discrepancy between the divine and earthly father’s demands as the recto and verso of destruction and production.<sup>18</sup>

Like the bourgeois vocation, Samson’s acts seem to escape the stress of necessity when they are no longer compelled from the outside, and this is to say that the individual is constituted as such (“Samson hath quit himself like Samson”) at the moment when the vocation is proven, election confirmed. Of course the constitution of the individual as an autotelic mind, free in its interiority, completes a process of identification that is for Freud the original determinism of psychogenesis. “Individuality” is a dialectical successor to the law of the Father, and it is asserted (as we know in Milton’s case as well as Samson’s) most conspicuously when the choice of vocation comes into conflict with the will of the Father. Clearly the choice of vocation can be made the terrain of renewed Oedipal conflict, but it is scarcely surprising that Freud has so little to say about this second battle between fathers and sons. The *Berufsarbeit* is always removed from the reductive reach of the metapsychology.

If the crucial point for Milton in placing Samson between the pillars is precisely his freedom (“Now of *my own accord* such other trial / I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater”), that freedom might nevertheless be read by the demystifying theory of either Calvin or Freud as the internalization of the law, the will of the Father. Milton is finally as undecided as Freud about the extent to which he will permit such a demystification, and thus the source of the “rousing motions” is itself left undecided: “And eyes fast fixed he stood, as one who prayed, / Or some great matter in his mind revolved.” The distance that produces the indeterminable option produces a fully privatized individual, who therefore acts of his “own accord,” that is, in accord with his interiority. From the strategically distanced position of audience to the messenger, we can only speculate that inside the black box of Samson’s mind there “revolves” a gyroscope of motivation, whose external expression is a sudden, unpredictable *motion*, the convulsing to and fro that brings the temple down. As the verse turns to its second option, not of prayer but of constituting “other minds,” the Arminian heresy assumes a larger ideological function of identifying freedom with individuality. Such an identification is an unforeseen consequence of the very theology that administered so apparently final a rebuke to human volition. Late Calvinism, which typically weakens the doctrine of predestination to an ethic of self-determination, is locked into place as one possible ideological buttress of the bourgeois vocation. God wants us to do what we want to do.

Just as the “impulse” can signify both compulsion and volition, its complex form, the compulsion to repeat, can be construed as the conjuncture between the repetitional structure of social constraint—namely, the law—and the matter of what is repeated in the *Samson* narrative—a transgressive violence. The impulse both embodies and transgresses the law (“I thought it lawful from my former act”). In this context, it is significant that Samson’s “rousing motions” are preceded by the recollection that God has the power to “dispense” whom he will from a strict obedience. There can be no doubt that the idea of *dispensation* and the plan of *destruction* are linked in Samson’s mind—but what is a dispensation? Milton’s discussions of the term are mainly to be found in the divorce tracts, where dispensation is defined as “some particular accident rarely happ’ning and therefore not specify’d in the Law, but left to the decision of charity, ev’n under the bondage of Jewish rites, much more under the liberty of the Gospel.” He gives the example of David’s eating the “Shew bread ... which was ceremonially unlawful” (II.299). However, the dispensation does not abrogate the law. Samson claims that he will do nothing “scandalous or forbidden to our Law,” yet he does what the Philistines command, attend at their religious rites. Let us for the moment refocus the instrument of the inquiry and ask what really was “dispensed” when Milton displaced the action fully into Samson’s mind, when it became inaccessible to our perception. We confront immediately what appears to be

a contradiction, as the foregoing analysis would lead us to suppose that Samson's final act of freedom should be interpreted as internalization of the law, whereas now we must regard the same moment between the pillars as a *dispensation*.

The contradiction results from the projection of the former complement of compulsion—volition upon the latter, of law—dispensation. Of course any declaration of freedom can be understood as, and reduced to, an internalized necessity, but I am inclined to take seriously the insertion of Samson's act into a category of dispensation. For once Milton has not defined freedom trivially as the alternative of obeying or disobeying the law, but rather located it in those hypothetical moments when the law is set aside. With this hypothesis in mind, we can be properly impressed that Samson is dispensed first from the law of endogamy (marriage within the tribe), and last from the corresponding prohibition in the ritual sphere, of participation in extra-tribal worship. He is dispensed from the *constituting prohibitions* of Hebraic culture. Milton poses, in heterodox theological terms, a radical question about the founding coercions of culture. It will not do, therefore, to recuperate the law wholly as an internalized necessity, by however sophisticated an articulation of an intervening "third term," a primal or symbolic father. There is an irreducible contradiction between the possible meanings of Samson's final act, as a determinate compulsion to repeat, and as the "free" indulgence in the absence of the law, of what the law forbids to the individual—violence.

By the latter alternative I mean to confront the fact of aggression directly; it has for the most part been evaded in criticism of the drama, or reduced to the merely contingent circumstance of Samson's regeneration.<sup>19</sup> If the fact of legitimated aggression is as central to *Samson Agonistes* as it is to any revenge drama, that assumption of legitimacy must be read in the framework of a psychic economy as a fantasy of desublimation.<sup>20</sup> Such a fantasy is an exact inversion of the bourgeois ideology in which the *Berufsarbeit* is the sublimation of aggression. The concept of desublimation brings into focus that contradiction by virtue of which Samson's acts become the labor of violence, that is, both rational and dispensed from what will prove to be not the economics of the libido but a specific class rationality.<sup>21</sup>

The fantasized character of aggression in the drama must be insisted upon, because the law is only temporarily set aside. Its representative, Manoa, remains very much onstage, and his presence betrays the immanence of very particular historical conditions. The transcendent Father-God, in contradistinction, has the dogmatic privilege of a transhistorical potency: "He with his laws can best dispense." Samson is returned "Home to his father's house" in the recognition that the family is the agent of the law. Most importantly for the operation of the psychic economy, the destruction of the temple satisfies both Manoa and the Father-God, rather an unlikely

achievement. The extraordinary calling is much more likely to conflict with the father's demand, as it did with Milton and his own father. Milton often has it both ways, but never more exorbitantly than in the final images of Samson as both "self-killed" and "self-begotten" ("Like that self-begotten bird"). If in dispensing with his law, the father *absents* himself, that absence must be read as both punishment and reward (or in the imagery of the drama, as the complex of blindness and a compensatory "inward illumination"). The psychic economy defined by this complex is further condensed into the *complicatio* of the phoenix, an image of maternal succession ("from out her ashy womb now teemed") and so of the absence of the father; but also a "Christian" typological image, certainly threatening to Milton, of the Father's sacrifice *of* the Son.<sup>22</sup> It is not possible, it seems to me, to put these images together, except in the sense in which Samson is "tangled in the fold;" that is, the images can be laid atop one another along with the general antinomian wreckage. Inasmuch as the phoenix achieves a genealogy that evades the necessity of paternal succession, indeed, of the "paternal metaphor," the image embodies the paradox of the castrated male, who becomes limitlessly powerful because *beyond the law*. The psychic economy evinced by Samson eventuates in this paradox, however, only provided the psyche is conceived to be autonomous and self-contained. That economy can now be reinserted into a general economy of exchange by raising the question of what profit accumulates, and to whom, when the agent of exchange destroys himself, or offers himself in a *total* exchange. This question concerns the economic relation between production and destruction, within what we must now recognize as the historical regime of a specific mode of production. The significance of the narrative of destruction is mediated by nothing less than this "total social process."

#### SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

The destruction of the Philistine lords serves the immediate purpose of seeming to overturn a relation of domination that has become structural in the perception of the dominated. As Milton knew, Philistia continued to rule until the period of the Kings. No national victory is claimed at the end of *Samson*. Rather Milton asserts the exemplary status of Samson's life and death, valued above even the providential history of the Israelites. The disappointed millennialism of the major works is thus countered by the consolation of the "one just man," a theme frequently enough evoked by collective failures. But what kind of consolation is this? How can it be said that an image of destruction compensates for the renewal of domination? The effective redress (an *imaginary* revenge) is possible because the image is an image of *excess*, of what would be called in the lexicon of contemporary

ideology, “terrorism.” The political allegory in *Samson Agonistes* mistakes the particular forms of domination (whatever they may be at the time of the play’s composition) for an immutable structural domination from which there is no release except in fantasy. What emerges at the end of *Samson* is thus an intersubjective exchange, bypassing the polis, between Samson and the Hebrew youth who “inflare their breasts / To matchless valour, and adventures high” with the memory of Samson’s deed. The political has the status of an “occasion” for the individual agon, a narrative condition which has successfully frustrated political interpretations of the drama, or opened it to the most facile of allegories. The historical moment of the drama, if it is indeed bounded by the failure of the Commonwealth, is also the moment of that class *victory* consolidated by the alliance of aristocratic and bourgeois property, when Weber’s “ethic” of individual success establishes ideological hegemony.

The narrative of *Samson Agonistes* acknowledges the victory of this class rationality by negating it in the fantasy of desublimation, of “terrorism,” which is nothing other than an image of the abolition of all structural domination, the whole of political economy, in the face of its actual continuance.<sup>23</sup> Hence the law is dispensed, not abrogated. Milton’s first and still in some respects his subtlest critic, Andrew Marvell, recognized just this terrorist hyperbole in his sly identification of Milton with the Samson of *Samson Agonistes*: “(So *Sampson* grop’d the Temple’s Posts in spite) / The *World* o’erwhelming to revenge his sight” (italics mine). Samson’s act of destruction extends beyond the Philistine temple to the world itself. “Disestablishment” proceeds unchecked; all temples are demolished, all states, all societies. At the threshold of a new social formation, the bourgeois Canaan whose terrain can be mapped in the excesses and deformations of the pseudo-biblical narrative—at the moment of this Pisgah vision, there appears in the distance an apocalypse in which even the “free” relations of production (which we know to be objectively the rule of discipline, of “labor in a calling”) are utterly undone. This moment is folded back upon the destruction of the temple and the obsolete order it represents, in a collapsed temporality whose import is the possibility of destruction always present as a complement to production itself.

That this complementary fantasy of destruction is itself a function of the social economy is attested by the final lines of the drama, where the “servants” of the lord are dismissed, having drunk in the scene of destruction, with a greater accumulation (“acquist”) of “experience,” that is to say, a kind of usable *talent* as well as a *vocational* paradigm:

His servants he with new acquist  
Of true experience from this great event



With peace and consolation hath dismiss,  
 And calm of mind, all passion spent.  
 (1755–8)

The closing of the psychic account with both a surplus and an absolute expenditure argues that Milton's deepest protest was not against the Philistines (or the Stuarts) but against the very law of rational calculation, against the ceaseless counting of profit and loss. That protest is voiced by Peter in the first gospel: "We have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19:27). Calvin believed that Jesus answered Peter's question with the parable of the workers in the vineyard. This is of course not the answer that Milton would have wanted; he would surely have replied with the parable of the talents, by which he answered his own version of Peter's question, "Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?" And it is surely the parable of the talents to which Milton returns in the Chorus' final speech. I propose now to translate the concept of desublimation into a more historically specific economic cognate, which would comprehend Milton's transformation of Matthew's "talent" into what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital" (preeminently, "honor" or "fame").<sup>24</sup> Such a translation is intended not to reduce talent to capital but to recognize the specificity of that capital which goes by the name of talent.

The concept of "symbolic capital" acknowledges the distance that has opened up in theory between the "economy" in the restricted sense, and the general economy of such practices as the religious, the erotic, the aesthetic. Bourdieu does not describe the latter practices by analogy to the economy of production and exchange; on the contrary, he argues that "a *restricted definition of economic interest* ... is the historical product of capitalism" (177). There are important consequences in thus shifting the perspective upon economic interest from a restricted to a general "economy of practices," not the least of which is that the practice of Protestant vocation studied by Weber can be made more fully legible *as* a practice. For Bourdieu, a general theory of economic practice yields a concept of "symbolic capital," which is defined as "*credit*, in the widest sense of the word, i.e. a sort of advance which the group alone can grant those who give it the best material and symbolic *guarantees*" (181). The problem of the Calvinist *certitudo salutis*, of justification by *faith*, in so far as it is "surreptitiously appropriated" in the agon of Samson's election, is expressed as an operation of symbolic capital: his final act is the conspicuous guarantee of that "credit" which his group had been holding in abeyance, and which confirms the meaning of the sign of his election, his physical strength. Samson's symbolic capital is thus a complex structure of reciprocal interests (or "credit") flowing between himself, his society, and his two fathers, Manoa and God. The restoration of credit, the actual "regeneration" in the narrative, produces an immediate (posthumous)

profit of “honor” and “fame,” and this profit is returned with Samson’s body “to his father’s house.” As a form of symbolic capital, this honor or prestige might well be converted at some point into material capital. The interconvertibility of capital is attested in the narrative, although in the mode of denial, by a belated shadow plot of material capital, Manoah’s plan to ransom Samson. Another kind of expenditure completes the circuit of exchange, the expenditure not of money but of the body itself (“dearly bought revenge”).

The signal feature of the transaction defined by the sacrifice of the body can be identified, in Bourdieu’s words, as “the exhibition of symbolic capital ... one of the mechanisms which (no doubt universally) make capital go to capital” (181). As an economic practice, Calvinist election is organized in exactly this way; it has its mystery of primitive accumulation, a primal decree of election, which is nothing other than the arrogation of symbolic capital. Such capital is “exhibited” by the further accumulation of symbolic or material capital. Calvin’s God declares, like the master of Matthew’s parable, “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance” (25:29). Samson’s election shares this much with its Calvinist precursor: strength returns to strength, election cannot be withdrawn. Nevertheless, the formula “capital goes to capital” leaves out of the accounting the “great work” itself, or the particular form of symbolic capital’s exhibition. The distinction of Milton’s redaction of Matthew’s parable is not that it conforms to an economic paradigm but rather that it makes of the *denial* of rational calculation the most profitable of economic practices. As an economic figure for Samson’s violent end, the image of the phoenix expresses this impossibly calculating denial of calculation: everything is sacrificed and everything is returned. More precisely, the phoenix represents an unlimited return (fame) upon an absolute investment (the body): “though the body dies, the fame survives.” Here finally desublimation can be named for what it is, *spending*, the expenditure of “energy” or “libido” or “capital.” Milton is able to acknowledge this expenditure by invoking its negative reflection in the stream of the narrative, the theory of tragic catharsis (“all passion spent”). Nevertheless the phoenix image, as the embodiment of that cathartic expenditure, does not tell us why we need not count the loss of the body as an absolute loss; rather, the infinitude of expenditure works a kind of mathematical magic: spending everything is getting everything.

At this point it becomes difficult, if also quite necessary, to distinguish categorically between desublimation and sublimation, especially as the latter is for Freud the patient, disciplined investment (*Besetzung*) of psychic capital in the form of desexualized libido. Investment, of material or symbolic capital, is also a mode of spending. The significance of spending as such in the history of economic exchange has been well established by Mauss and Bataille; primitive economic exchange is founded on “expenditures,” gifts,

sacrifices, ritual destructions.<sup>25</sup> Hence it is possible to figure the transcendence of economic motives by recurring to the practice of the gift or the sacrifice, but this entails repressing the fact that these are economic transactions. The rational economy of capital accumulation is shadowed always by another, atavistic system of exchange. In Milton's *Samson*, the atavistic economy appears in the form of the narrative itself, the narrative of sacrifice, while the rational economy falls to the level of subtext and figuration. Samson's sacrifice is then both the repayment of a debt, his original "credit," and the *overpayment* of that debt. Only as such does it have the power to produce a profit, either for himself or his creditor.

Like desublimation, expenditure occupies a realm of fantasy set against the reality of rational calculation. The *discipline* of spending in the practice of investment makes all the difference historically; it has made a different world. That is not to say, however, that the fantasy of expenditure cannot be acted out, or that the acting out does not have real economic consequences. The transcendent economy of expenditure is not the survival of primitive exchange within an uncolonized territory of the capitalist economy; it is an atavism functionally integrated into the same economy. Just as investment seeks to conceal the labor that transforms capital into profit (in such "surplus labor," energy is absolutely expended), "sacrifice" denies that what is absolutely lost or ritually destroyed can be expressed as an *economic* value. Hence the very body that Manoa intended to purchase from the Philistine is, when sacrificed, the occasion for no grief at all, no accounting of loss ("Nothing is here for tears"). Manoa's position is that of spokesman for the restricted economy. He will not recognize the secret table by which material and symbolic capital are converted into one another, the body converted into fame, or Matthew's "talent" into Milton's. In this he makes possible a certain mystification Bourdieu describes as follows:

Economic calculation has hitherto managed to appropriate the territory objectively surrendered to the remorseless logic of what Marx calls "naked self-interest" only by setting aside a "sacred" island miraculously spared by the "icy waters of egotistical calculation" and left as a sanctuary for the priceless or worthless things it cannot assess.

(178)

That island has been for several hundred years the domain of art, but its appearance was prepared for by the segregation of the sacred itself, the religious life that Protestantism claimed to set apart not from everyday life but from the economic domain of legitimate self-interest. In the doctrine of election, the soul itself is beyond price, beyond any human effort to redeem it, and so relegated logically to the domain of the priceless or the worthless.

At the same time Calvinism established a most rigorous program of psychic accounting, which, if it did not institute the discipline of everyday life, provided that discipline with its system of symbolic book-keeping.<sup>26</sup> In retrospect, it would seem that the logical relation between the priceless and the worthless is the mechanism by which the concept of vocation is reduced historically to the legitimation of the bourgeois vocation, the end of which is the constant accumulation of material or symbolic capital. Milton enacts this peculiar derivation not by idealizing productive labor, but by indulging a fantasy of release from the calculus of economic rationality, a fantasy taking the narrative form of violent expenditure or ritual destruction. The interlocking laws of the psychic, domestic, and political economies project into fantasy their undoing, as desublimation, expenditure, or terrorism. The freedom constituting the individual as such is grounded in this fantasy; it is freedom from the law.

Milton sets an image of the law's undoing at the end of his poetic career, not as its telos but as its coda; the title page of his last book reads: "*Paradise Regained*, a poem in IV books, to which is added *Samson Agonistes*." The drama stands in relation to Milton's poetic *oeuvre* as Samson's final act stands in relation to his life, a coda in which the life of creation is signified by the life of destruction. The ambiguity of such a gesture has passed beneath the notice of Milton's critics, who see, where Milton places the rubble of the Philistine temple, the completed edifice of his *oeuvre*. Nevertheless by means of just such a narrative of destruction or "sacrifice" Milton transforms a life Perkins might have condemned as no calling at all into a vocation at once rationalized in economic terms, and yet transcending economy because not calculable in "species." Self-sacrifice, exceeding the motive of revenge, is no less the meaning of Milton's identification with Samson than the *ressentiment* of blindness or defeat. The suicide of Samson is the proto-typical self-sacrifice of the artist, a fantasy capable of realization when there comes to prevail in late capitalism a relentless distinction between the worthlessness of the artist's life and the pricelessness of art.<sup>27</sup> Post-artisanal "artistic labor" is neither undervalued nor overvalued, but rather *unvalued*. In the life and death of Samson a paradigmatic life-narrative emerges, founded no doubt on the "Christus Patiens" Milton never wrote, but sliding over that narrative, mutating into a new story, "the life of the poet." In this important sense, as Milton's readers have rightly intuited, Samson is a type not of Christ but of Milton, the Milton who, in Marx's famous phrase, "produced *Paradise Lost* as the silkworm produces silk," the inverted image of the figure who destroys the Philistines "as an Eagle."

Lodged between the narratives of saint and artist, the narrative of Samson's life records for Milton the transformation of the father's talents, the money-lender's material capital ("Fathers are wont to lay up for their sons"), into "talent," symbolic capital. The narrative that enacts this transformation

has its historical moment on the threshold of the new order; no other story will do. In the determinate choice of the Samson story, the distinction between material and symbolic capital is magnified, projected onto the largest possible screen, in the distinction between the conflicting demands of the two fathers, earthly and heavenly. So Milton himself scorns the material capital by which his career is made possible, while taking up as the deep paradigm of his poetic calling that relation between investment and profit which *was* his father's business. The poet reappears in his own narrative as the vocational double of the rational investor, the very figure with whom he is thought to have nothing in common. But "relation stands:" the poet is the "son" of the scrivener, the life of expenditure and sacrifice is the complement of investment and accumulation. Like Samson, Milton makes a return, with interest, upon his father's investment: "to himself and Father's house eternal fame." But within the drama, with its fantasmatic doubling of paternal figures, the final recognition of "talent" is reserved for the heavenly father, whose function is to foreshadow the accounting of those "sacrifices" constitutive of the artist's life-narrative as he once reckoned the value of the saint's. Such value is supposed to be beyond measure, whether or not the products of the sacred island are exchanged in an antithetical mainland economy, at whatever price. By means of such narrative fictions, capital marks off the boundaries of an aesthetic kingdom, within which it reappears disguised as the opposite of itself.

#### NOTES

1. *De Doctrina Christiana* defines regeneration as follows: "Regeneration means that the old man is destroyed and that the inner man is regenerated through the word and the spirit so that his whole mind is restored to the image of God, as if he were a new creature. Moreover, the whole man, both soul and body, is sanctified to God's service and to good works." *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don Wolfe et al., 8 vols (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973), VI.461. Further references to the Yale edition of the prose works will be included in the text. The linking of this passage to *Samson Agonistes* was made by William Riley Parker in *Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937), 235ff., and elaborated in an essay by Arthur Barker, "Structural and doctrinal pattern in Milton's later poems," in *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age*, ed. Millar MacLure and F. W. Watt (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1964), 1169–94. In the last several decades, Samson's "regeneration" has become a given of criticism; it is assumed to structure the narrative even where the context of *De Doctrina* is only distantly invoked.

2. *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (London, New Left Books, 1977), 12–9.

3. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. Talcott Parsons

(New York, Scribner's, 1958), 117. The distinction Weber is making is crucial to his argument and should defuse the misunderstanding of his position on the question of the specific relation between Protestantism and capitalism. The "structured life" is first of all an ideological practice, a retrospective or prospective working up of a life-narrative out of life-experience. At the same time such a narrative represents a genuinely material practice, since it comes to constitute a condition (not a cause) for other practices as well. For an extended discussion of the Weber controversy, see Gordon Marshall, *In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism: An Essay on Max Weber's Protestant Ethic Thesis* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982).

4. This is Milton's typical use of the Samson figure in his polemical prose, for example, in the *First Defense* (IV.402), in *Areopagitica* (II.558) and the *Reason of Church-Government* (I.858).

5. Hence the perennial dissatisfaction with the construction of Milton's plot, first voiced in Dr Johnson's complaint that the drama has a beginning and an end, "but it must be allowed to want a middle."

6. All quotations from the poetry are cited from *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, Odyssey, 1957).

7. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, genealogy, history," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, tr. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977), 151-1.

8. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1955), and Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, tr. Ben Brewster (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971).

9. William Perkins, *The Works of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ*, 3 vols (London, John Legatt, 1612), I.751.

10. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960), II.974.

11. That Milton tended to reserve the term "election" for what he elsewhere called "special vocation" or "special calling" is supported by the usage in *Paradise Lost* III.183-4—"Some I have chosen of peculiar grace / Elect above the rest"—where "the rest" are then immediately defined as those for whom repentance is still possible. Milton uses the term "elect" to make a distinction within the category of the saved or within the category of the reprobate but not between the saved and the reprobate.

12. Milton works out such a poetic economy in the Preface to Book II of *The Reason of Church-Government* (I.801ff.), again founding his economy on the parable of the talents: "remembering also that God even to a strictnesse requires the improvement of these his entrusted gifts." Later in the Preface the economy takes the specific form of a legal contract between creditor and debtor: "Neither doe I thinke it shame to covnant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted" (820). It will be worth noting in this context, the curious "Letter to a friend," in which the young Milton defends his leisurely years of study against a charge of idleness. The priority of talent to labor is argued by the radical means of transforming the parable of the workers of the vineyard, or the wage form of labor, into an allegory of investment (of talent):

Lastly if the Love of Learning as it is be the persuit of something good, it would sooner follow the more excellent & supreme good knowne & praesented and so be quickly diverted from the emptie & fantastick chase of shadows & notions to the solid good flowing from due & tymely obedience to that command in the gospel set out by the terrible seasing of him that hid the talent. It is more probable therefore that not the endlesse delight of speculation but this very consideration of that great commandment does not presse forward as soone as may be to undergoe but keeps off with a sacred reverence, & religious advisement how best to undergoe not taking thought of beeing late so it give advantage to be more fit, for those that were latest lost nothing when the maister of the vineyard came to give each one his hire.

(*The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allan Patterson et al., 20 vols (New York, Columbia University Press, 1931–8), XII.324)

Here Milton attempts to justify what appears to be his condition of idleness (his lack of a “credible employment”) by linking himself both to the holder of the talent and the latest of the workers in the vineyard. The design of the argument is clearly to transform Milton’s apparent idleness into an actual investment (an investment of time as opposed to a hoarding of talent). Similarly, Samson’s apparent idleness before his final burst of activity in the temple evokes investment, the quiet accumulation of strength.

13. Perkins, op. cit., I,757: “it is a Foule disorder in any Common-wealth, that there should be suffered rogues, beggars, vagabonds.... Againe, to wander up and downe from yeare to yeare to this end, to seeke & procure bodily maintenance, is no calling, but the life of a beast.”

14. Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household, and Sexuality*, tr. Richard Southern (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979), 139.

15. William Kerrigan, in *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983), discerns in the contradiction between the natural and the heavenly father’s will a religious version of the Oedipus complex. In the “sacred” complex, the wish to obey and the wish to disobey the father are both gratified. At a later point, I will argue the relation of what Kerrigan calls the sacred complex to what Milton perceives as the Father’s “sacrifice” of the Son in the Crucifixion.

16. The quotation is from the *First Defense* and reads in full: “[Samson] still made war single-handed on his masters, and, whether prompted by God or by his own valor, slew at one stroke not one but a host of his country’s tyrants, having first made prayer to God for his aid” (IV.402).

17. All quotations from Freud are cited from the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey et al., 24 vols (London, Hogarth Press, 1953–74). Freud is speaking rather loosely in equating the narcissistic, the aggressive, and the erotic as libidinal components, and I am both criticizing and following this loose procedure in proposing a theoretical “sublimation of aggression.” As the concept of sublimation is worked out in the earlier theory of the drives, it is always closely allied to a process of “desexualization” in which, nevertheless, libidinal

instincts are satisfied. The deficiency of that theory from an economic point of view is manifest and has been frequently remarked (for example, by Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York, W. W. Norton, 1973), 431–3; and by Jacques Lacan, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York, W. W. Norton, 1977), 165–6). Evidently Freud found no real use for sublimation until the later theory of the drives, when he was then able to find a place for the concept in the theory of aggressivity. An unexpected result of that revision of the metapsychology is the kind of marginal suggestion about the libidinal economy of work quoted above. “Professional work” is then conceived to sublimate aggressive instincts, no doubt by fusion with “desexualized libido” or narcissistic ego-libido, because “the death instincts are by their nature mute.” Hence the pleasure of certain kinds of labor, not unlike the puzzling “economy” of sadism or masochism. Freud is very close here to recognizing the legitimated competition (the actual and symbolic violence) of bourgeois labor, where work is not only the reproduction of the material conditions of existence, but the production of a profit (and the simultaneous production of a scarcity for others). Despite the brief for sublimation in the service of Eros, even “intellectual work” is agonistic, as François Roustang has shown so persuasively in the case of Freud’s own life work. See Roustang’s *Dire Mastery: Discipleship from Freud to Lacan*, tr. Ned Lukacher (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

I am much indebted to Marcuse’s discussion of the libidinal economy of labor in *Eros and Civilization*, 81ff., although I am reluctant to take at face value, as Marcuse seems to, the later theory of the drives, much less a “dialectic” of Eros and Thanatos. A theoretical sublimation of aggression is significant because only at this weak point of the metapsychology and in this “ideological” way does Freud approach the social reality of labor, either coerced or “freely chosen.”

18. In the following argument I extrapolate from Marcuse’s concept of “repressive desublimation,” elaborated in *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1964), and Jean Baudrillard’s similar use of the term in *The Mirror of Production* (St Louis, Telos Press, 1975).

19. On this subject Kenneth Burke’s discussion of the drama redresses the balance of criticism. See *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969), 3ff. It should finally be possible to take up the question of why aggression, self or other directed, is so crucial to the drama as a motivated act of writing (language for use, as Burke would say).

20. In deploying the concept of desublimation, I do not mean conversely to credit the theoretical validity of sublimation in the Freudian metapsychology. On the contrary, sublimation names the same specifically ideological assemblage as Weber’s “rationalization;” sublimation names the disciplining of the drives in the service of what is “finer and higher.” The theory of sublimation is therefore perfectly adequate to its ideological function, which is to prevent any form of the *Berufsarbeit* from being assimilated into the critique of culture-as-repression. For Freud it is only important that sublimation provide this area of shade, where the drives can be satisfied even though “aim-inhibited.” Hence the concept of sublimation remains theoretically unincorporated and functions liminally as a zone of legitimation between the more critical elements of psychoanalytic and sociological theory.



21. The analysis of the psychic economy governing the narrative can be generalized at this point to enclose the marriage of Samson and Dalila within the purview of its terms. Samson's marriage is both a submission to the disciplining of sexuality and a fantasized release from this discipline. The contradiction within the domestic economy is resolved by the institution of divorce, which reinstates discipline fully by dissolving the marital bond. Just as there would seem to be only a dubious sublimation of erotic drives, so the domestic sphere offers only a limited possibility of desublimation. Here we merely acknowledge a very mundane truth, that in the bourgeois distinction of public and private, as that distinction co-operates with the sexual division of labor, the private functions ultimately to block a complete relaxation of discipline, to drive the male back into the public arena. What appeared first as the realm of seduction and desublimation, seems in the end to be a surface of deflection.

22. Milton's subordinationism has the effect of forcing him to reconstrue the event of the Redemption as the Father's sacrifice of the Son, a consequence that would not follow from orthodox trinitarian theology. While Milton was evidently troubled by the primitive scene his theology placed at the center of Christianity (he seems unable, from "The Passion" onwards, ever to envision poetically the scene of the Crucifixion), that scene is in another sense the engine of his life and work, since it is the point at which his theology and his Oedipal conflicts converged.

23. See Baudrillard, *op. cit.*, 41: "Although the concept of non-labor can thus be fantasized as the abolition of political economy, it is bound to fall back into the sphere of political economy as the sign, and only the sign, of its abolition."

24. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 171ff.

25. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, tr. Ian Cunnison (New York, W. W. Norton, 1967), and Georges Bataille, "The notion of expenditure," tr. Allen Stoekl (*Raritan*, III, 1984, 62–79), particularly Bataille's comment on the major "unproductive value," glory.

26. The "spiritual accounting" metaphor is conventional, if also extremely popular with Protestant writers. My argument is intended to show that such accounting is not merely an economic metaphor—it represents an actual, economic practice, the disposition of symbolic capital. The "final account" to which Perkins refers, when "the bill of our receipts and expenses" is drawn out (I.777), thus has its referent in practice not only in the Last judgment, but also the everyday accounting to which Protestants subjected their souls in those diaries that were kept as faithfully as business ledgers. In *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1938), William Haller quotes the typical diary of John Beadle, published in 1656: the godly man should "keep a strict account of his effectual calling" (96).

27. To summarize (very roughly) a condition prevailing after the decline of the artist-artisan and the disappearance of the patronage system: When the work of art (whether or not it is fully commodified, as are paintings and novels) no longer has what Baudrillard calls the "alibi of use-value," the artist cannot be remunerated for labor whose value cannot be assessed. Without material capital, the artist faces as an always dire circumstance the problem of reproducing the conditions of daily

existence. Conversely, the exchange-value (material or symbolic) of the artwork becomes subject to extreme fluctuation, the mark of its “pricelessness.” Should the artist become “famous” the worthless life of unremunerated labor can be recuperated in narrative as “sacrifice,” that is, as the priceless correlative of the artwork itself. (Hence the material worth of artifacts such as manuscripts and letters, artifacts of the life-narrative.) Such a sketch is necessarily very rough, but it is intended only to throw into some relief the configuration of life, labor, and art which seems first clearly visible in the seventeenth century. On the function of “aesthetic values” in the fully developed capitalist system, see Jean Baudrillard, “The art auction,” in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, tr. Charles Levin (St Louis, Telos Press, 1981), 112–22.



C. A. PATRIDES

*Milton's Prose:  
The Adjustment of Idealism*

Presume not that I am the thing I was  
—2 Henry 4

I. "THE VERY VISIBLE SHAPE AND IMAGE OF VERTUE"

**H**as there been a vast conspiracy uncritically to foster on us Milton's prose? Do we not feel at times much as Dr. Johnson felt about Congreve's novel, that we would rather praise it than read it?

To be more precise: would we have read Milton's prose works had he not been the author of *Paradise Lost*? True, we are fully aware of the intrinsic merits of *Areopagitica*; but what comparable claim can be advanced for the embarrassing histrionics of the ecclesiastical tracts, the apparent narrowness of outlook in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, the laborious defensiveness of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, or the depressing dullness of the Latin treatise on Christian doctrine? Keats may have thought that Milton—"an active friend to Man all his Life"—had written "much delectable prose."<sup>1</sup> But might not Dr. Johnson have been more perceptive in his austere judgment on Milton's political convictions? In his words,

Milton's republicanism was, I am afraid, founded on an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; in

---

From *Figures in a Renaissance Context*, eds. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth. © 1989 by The University of Michigan.

petulance impatient of control, and pride disdainful of superiority. He hated monarchs in the State, and prelates in the Church; for he hated all whom he was required to obey. It is to be suspected that his predominant desire was to destroy rather than establish, and that he felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Johnson did not necessarily regard Milton as “an active friend to Man all his Life.”

Shelley, on the other hand, praised exactly what Dr. Johnson had elected to denounce: “the sacred Milton was, let it be remembered, a republican, and a bold inquirer into morals and religion.”<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth generalized even more. In 1802, adversely affected by the “vanity and Parade” of England in contrast to the revolutionary zeal of France, he composed the celebrated sonnet beginning

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this-hour:  
England hath need of thee.

He continued:

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free.  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

But to be aware of Milton's activities is to realize the extent to which Wordsworth like everyone else created Milton in his own image. Whether Milton's voice during the revolutionary period of the seventeenth century was consistently majestic is debatable; and whether always pure, doubtful. Cheerful godliness was in evidence only spasmodically, whenever he managed to rise above the smoke and stir of passionate controversies. Perennially embattled, he would have found Wordsworth's notion of his apartness “like a Star” a travesty of his total commitment to the causes he had espoused throughout his life.

Shelley's view of Milton as “a bold inquirer into morals and religion” likewise defines tendencies latent not so much in Milton as in Shelley; while Dr. Johnson's judgment on Milton's republicanism is descriptive less of Milton's actual sentiments than of Dr. Johnson's obsessive partiality to the established order in Augustan England. To have hated monarchs in the State and prelates in the Church may have appeared dangerous to Dr. Johnson; but

uncritically to have accepted either was, for Milton, unworthy of the dignity of man. As in *Paradise Lost* the Son of God reigns not so much by right of birth as by merit (III.309), so in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* sovereignty is reserved for the individual who is worthy of the consent of the governed. Variations on this theme abound, yet the ethical orientation of the central concept was never surrendered by Milton: "queen truth ought to be preferred to king Charles" (p. 74). Equally, however persuasive the rhetoric that claims Milton felt "not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority," it is imperative to recognize how insistently Milton held that nothing is "of more grave and urgent importance throughout the whole life of man, than is discipline." I quote from the paean to discipline at the outset of *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642). It continues:

What need I instance? He that hath read with judgement, of Nations and Common-wealths, of Cities and Camps, of peace and warre, sea and land, will readily agree that the flourishing and decaying of all civill societies, all the moments and turnings of humane occasions are mov'd to and fro as upon the axle of discipline. So that whatsoever power or sway in mortall things weaker men have attributed to fortune, I durst with more confidence (the honour of divine providence ever sav'd) ascribe either to the vigor, or the slacknesse of discipline. Nor is there any sociable perfection in this life civill or sacred that can be above discipline, but she is that which with her musicall cords preserves and holds all the parts thereof together. Hence in those perfect armies of Cyrus in *Xenophon*, and Scipio in the Roman stories, the excellence of military skill was esteem'd, not by the not needing, but by the readiest submitting to the edicts of their commander. And certainly discipline is not only the removall of disorder, but if any visible shape can be given to divine things, the very visible shape and image of vertue, whereby she is not only seene in the regular gestures and motions of her heavenly paces as she walkes, but also makes the harmony of her voice audible to mortall eares. Yea the Angels themselves, in whom no disorder is fear'd, as the Apostle that saw them in his rapture describes [Revelation 7:1], are distinguisht and quaterniond into their celestiaall Princedomes, and Satrapies, according as God himselfe hath writ his imperiaall decrees through the great provinces of heav'n. The state also of the blessed in Paradise, though never so perfect, is not therefore left without discipline, whose golden surveying reed marks out and measures every quarter and circuit of new Jerusalem. Yet is it not to be conceiv'd that those eternall effluences of sanctity and love in the glorified Saints should by

this meanes be confin'd and cloy'd with repetition of that which is prescrib'd, but that our happinesse may orbe it selfe into a thousand vagancies of glory and delight, and with a kinde of eccentricall equation be as it were an invariable Planet of joy and felicity, how much lesse can we believe that God would leave his fraile and feeble, though not lesse beloved Church here below to the perpetuall stumble of conjecture and disturbance in this our darke voyage without the card and compasse of Discipline.

(Columbia ed., 3:184–86; Yale ed., 1:751–53)

Yet Milton's celebration of discipline at the cosmic level does not terminate here. It reverberates across his prose and poetry, vesting man with that majesty of responsibility which is commensurate to his dignity as the favorite of God.

## II. "RECEIV'D WITH WRITTEN ENCOMIUMS"

The best account of Milton's life and work is in the three interpretations composed by himself: the idealistic account of his aspirations to contribute "to Gods glory by the honour and instruction of my own country" in *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642); the extension of the same view in terms of the poet as himself "a true Poem" in *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642); and the detailed exposition of his visit to the Continent and of his eventual commitment to the republican cause in the *Defensio Secunda* (1654).<sup>4</sup> The rest is commentary.

But commentary should suggest in particular the cumulative impressions registered by the more recent activities of our scholars. Yet as it is no less perilous to be categorical than impossible fully to represent the diversities of opinion, one development may be cited as providing testimony to the conclusions now laboriously arrived at. It concerns Milton's visit to the Continent from the spring of 1638 to the late summer of 1639, and the presence especially of five names among the numerous individuals he befriended: Hugo Grotius, Lucas Holstein, Pietro Frescobaldi, Antonio Malatesti, and Francesco Cardinal Barberini.

Grotius at the time of Milton's visit to Paris was Queen Christina's ambassador to the French Court. Among his achievements he could already count *Adamus Exul* (1601), a play in Latin on the Fall of Man, but also a vast reputation as the founder of international law in *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625). Later, in Rome, Milton also befriended the learned Lucas Holstein, secretary and librarian to Cardinal Barberini, and later librarian of the Vatican.<sup>5</sup> Might Milton have discussed with Grotius the problems inherent in the literary treatment of the Fall of Man, and with Holstein the visual representations of

the same subject by Raphael in the Stanze della Segnatura and especially by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel? Of these possibilities Milton himself is silent; yet his contacts with Grotius and Holstein are certainly significant, immediately because of their ready acceptance of Milton's company, and mediately because of the evolutionary nature of his plans for a major poem.

To credit the conventional view of Milton as a grim Puritan is to expect him fanatically to have eschewed the company of the representatives of the Antichrist in Rome. On the contrary, however, his Florentine friends included the devout Frescobaldi, soon to become a prince of the Catholic Church; while in Rome he not only dined at the English Jesuit College but even entered the circle of the one man certainly to have been regarded as anathema by any committed Puritan, Cardinal Barberini, prime minister and chief counselor to his uncle, Pope Urban VIII. Milton was impressed as much by Barberini's "submissive loftiness of mind" as by the musical entertainments which, performed at the theater recently completed (1632) in the Cardinal's palace, evinced those exuberant elements that constitute the *grandiosità monumentale* of the baroque. It was the period of Rome's transformation by Borromini and Bernini.<sup>6</sup>

No less instructive is Milton's friendship with the Florentine Antonio Malatesti, author of *La Tina*, a cycle of fifty amusingly obscene sonnets in the baroque idiom. *La Tina* was dedicated to Milton. Yet the expected strictures of that grim Puritan never materialized; instead, on his return to England, he sent Malatesti his warm regards.<sup>7</sup>

What do Milton's encounters on the Continent reveal? Above all, I think, a developing catholic taste, since the five men referred to represent achievements not so much incompatible as mutually exclusive: Milton in France and Italy had been studying the nature of multiform reality. But even more significant is the authority with which Milton on his return home articulated his future expectations:

In the privat Academies of *Italy*, whither I was favor'd to resort, perceiving that some trifles ... were receiv'd with written Encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the *Alps*, I began thus farre to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not lesse to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study (which I take to be my portion in this life) joyn'd with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die. (P. 54)

Thus inspired, Milton extended the range of his activities spectacularly. For the first time he set down detailed outlines of several subjects for a major



poem, even if, mindful less of Renaissance critical theory than of the practice of Grotius in *Adamus Exul*, the preferred form in each case is not an epic but a play—and in one particular instance a play on the Fall of Man under the title *Adam Unparadis'd*.<sup>8</sup> Shortly, too, Milton commenced writing in prose a number of works which by the end of his life were to include treatises on a vast range of subjects. He himself described them as labors of his left hand, yet they remain the most complete program actually carried out by any of the equally ambitious “universal men” of the English Renaissance. Reduced to its essentials, the program involved “three species of liberty”: ecclesiastical, domestic, and civil (p. 71).

### III. “THE BEST WAY TO BRING MEN TO THEIR SENSES”

By the middle of the 1640s royalists tended increasingly to lament the plight of “poore, miserable, distracted, almost destroyed *England*.”<sup>9</sup> But to others—were they the majority?—the Civil War offered the opportunity to confirm the self-evident truth that England was favored of God. In a sermon delivered less than a year before the execution of Charles I, Paul Knell upheld the widespread persuasion that

we may compare with *Israel* for a fruitfull scituation, being neither under the torrid nor the frozen Zone, neither burned away with parching heat, nor benumbed away with pinching cold, but seated in a temperate climate & a fertile soile; our folds are full of sheep, our rallies stand so thick with corne that we may laugh and sing. God hath also fenced us about, like the *Israelites* in the red sea with a wall of water, the waters are as a wall unto us on our right hand, and on our left. But especially God hath fenced us by his protection, salvation hath the Lord appointed for wals and bulwarks. He hath likewise gathered the stones out from us, he hath cast out the *Romish* rabble, and hath planted our Land with the choicest Religion, that of Protestants.<sup>10</sup>

Yet the Reformation was far from complete. The process initiated a century earlier by Luther was now threatened by the episcopalian or prelatical form of ecclesiastical government whose hierarchical structure and elaborate church services were in appearance, and plausibly in fact, extensions of Roman Catholicism. In the early 1640s one of the most vociferous attacks on episcopalianism was mounted by a group of five Presbyterians improbably signing themselves “Smectymnuus” (from the initials of their names: Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, William Spurstow). Arranged on the other side were in the main Archbishop

James Ussher of Armagh and Bishop Joseph Hall of Norwich. Milton was perhaps drawn into the controversy by one of the Smectymnuans, Thomas Young, who was once his tutor. Five pamphlets later, in any case, Milton's initially enthusiastic commitment was displaced by wary disenchantment, even acerbic disquiet.

Milton's experience parallels that of several of his contemporaries, for example, Henry More the Cambridge Platonist. More was in the 1650s to engage in a bitter controversy with Thomas Vaughan, the poet's brother; but his ambitious effort to curtail his antagonist's "preposterous and fortuitous imaginations" resulted first in Vaughan's abusive counterattack in *The Man-Mouse taken in a Trap*, then in More's biting satiric *Second Lash*, and finally in Vaughan's virulent attempt at a *Second Wash, or the Moore scour'd once more!* A badly shaken More sounding retreat concluded ruefully: "if ever *Christianity* be exterminated, it will be by *Enthusiasme*."<sup>11</sup>

Idealism adjusted in the face of brutal reality was also the lesson that embittered controversy impressed on Milton. His first tract, *Of Reformation touching Church-Discipline* (1641), combines a serene assurance that an appeal to reason would prove decisive, with an apocalyptic persuasion that the Primal Reason could hardly fail to intervene on behalf of so just a cause as Milton's. The tract ends with a prolonged prayer that looks back to the denunciation of the corrupt clergy in *Lycidas* (1637) and ahead to the celebration of the eventual triumph of goodness in *Paradise Lost* (1667):

Thou therefore that sits't in light & glory unapproachable, *Parent of Angels and Men!* next thee I implore Omnipotent King, Redeemer of that lost remnant whose nature thou didst assume, ineffable and everlasting *Love!* And thou the third subsistence of Divine infinitude, *illuminating Spirit,* the joy and solace of created *Things!* one *Tripersonall GODHEAD!* looke upon this thy poore and almost spent and expiring *Church,* leave her not thus a prey to these importunate *Wolves,* that wait and thinke long till they devoure thy tender *Flock,* these wilde *Boares* that have broke into thy *Vineyard,* and left the print of thir polluting hoofs on the Soules of thy Servants.... (P. 108)

The fervent prayer concludes first with the consecration of Milton's personal aspirations to the service of the Divine Purpose, and finally with the celebration of the beatific vision beyond the confines of time.<sup>12</sup>

But Milton's opponents were not impressed; and as their replies filled the air with barbarous dissonance, he tried again with a scholarly study *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* as well as with some satirical *Animadversions* (1641), and next with the rational and patient discourse entitled *The Reason of Church-Government urg'd against Prelaty* (1642). Frequently able to ascend from the

immediate controversy to general principles, Milton relates once more his personal aspirations to the larger pattern by outlining his expectations and defining the role of the poet within a narrowly partisan society. Yet already Milton's reasonable tone is decreasingly in evidence. Enthusiasm—the “enthusiasm” of the fanatic which Henry More would soon learn to fear—has intervened to sacrifice principles on the questionable altar of ephemeral abuse. Milton's opponents have now grown into a “whippe of Scorpions,” else “a continuall Hydra of mischiefe, and molestation,” or “unctuous, and epicurean paunches.”<sup>13</sup> However, Milton's abusive vocabulary and devastating scorn was common to any number of his contemporaries who likewise opposed the Anglicans' lukewarm *via media* by “the language of zeal.” The justification was apparently Biblical: “because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew [lit., vomit] thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16).<sup>14</sup> Equally, however, the justification was broadly traditional, witness in particular Pascal's lengthy exposition of the way in which “mockery is sometimes the best way to bring men to their senses, and in that case is a righteous action.”<sup>15</sup> Milton's view is not unlike Pascal's:

Although in the serious uncasing of a grand imposture (for to deale plainly with you Readers, Prelatry is no better) there be mixt here and there such a grim laughter, as may appeare at the same time in an austere visage, it cannot be taxt of levity or insolence: for even this vaine of laughing (as I could produce out of grave Authors) hath oft-times a strong and sinewy force in teaching and confuting; nor can there be a more proper object of indignation and scorne together then a false Prophet taken in the greatest dearest and most dangerous cheat, the cheat of soules.<sup>16</sup>

Later, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton would confine “blind Zeal” to the Limbo of Vanity (III.452); yet he retained scorn, boldly asserting that it is deployed by God in his derisive attitude towards the vain pursuits of Satan (II.188–91; V.735–37; VIII.75–79). Biblical precedent was again not far to seek: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord.... He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Psalm 2:2–4). Embarrassed by the implications, Biblical commentators often tried to evade the issue (“God laughs figuratively,” Alexander Ross suggested nervously in 1652).<sup>17</sup> But the “ever-memorable” John Hales of Eton perceptively concluded that

It is a sport, and as it were a kind of recreation to God to discover false play, to wash off the colour and paint from disguised actions, and openly expose them to the laughter and scorn of Men and Angels.<sup>18</sup>

Another Biblical precedent often invoked ("answer a fool according to his folly") was annotated by a commentator in 1638 thus:

*Answer therefore such a foole* lest hee thinke himself victorious, because there appeareth no one in the field against him. But if thou doe answer him, let it be *according to his folly*, and in such a manner as that it may declare his error and folly unto him, and that as it doth reprove him, for it may teach him the truth.<sup>19</sup>

Here as elsewhere, the consideration of Milton's activities in the light of seventeenth-century assumptions and practice should restrain our indecent haste to misconstrue as personal bias attitudes in fact widely upheld. More important aspects would then be readily apparent: that Milton's wary disenchantment after his last contribution to the controversy meaningfully testifies to vital experience gained; that such experience contributed greatly to his subsequent activities; and that it was a richly endowed poet who finally turned to *Paradise Lost*. To learn to temper "enthusiasm" and exorcise zeal are no mean achievements.

#### IV. "A COMMAND ABOVE ALL COMMANDS"

Milton in the five antiepiscopal tracts is increasingly emotional, even hysterical; yet he should have lapsed into insensate incoherence after his next experience, when, far more personally involved, he lifted his pen in defense of divorce. Married to Mary Powell in 1642, he was abandoned by her before the year was out; and faced with the unlikelihood of a divorce unless adultery was proved, he launched four treatises including in particular *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643, rev. ed. 1644). The four treatises should have been hastily prepared, ill considered, and highly partisan. Yet they are fully scanned, carefully wrought, and exceptionally liberal.

The background to *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* is partly the vast Puritan literature on domestic conduct, partly the infinity of courtesy books, but especially the liberal tradition of Christian humanism emanating from Erasmus.<sup>20</sup> Had Milton been chained to the emotions that Mary Powell's departure must have aroused, he should have argued for divorce on the grounds of desertion. But he consciously chose the far more difficult and controversial task of pleading for divorce on the basis of mental incompatibility. Its "first protagonist in Christendom,"<sup>21</sup> he anticipated the more compassionate laws of our own day by three centuries. But the price he paid for this distinction was certainly high. Instantly denounced by a number of his shocked contemporaries, he remained tarnished in reputation until the end of his life.<sup>22</sup>

The violent reaction of Milton's contemporaries is understandable. For centuries the single valid ground for divorce had been adultery; and as this was taken to be the attitude of Christ himself (Matthew 19:9), its "flat contradiction" by Milton naturally horrified his contemporaries and obliged them to protest against his defense of divorce "for many other causes besides that which our Saviour only approveth, namely, in case of Adultery."<sup>23</sup>

Milton rested his case in part upon an appeal to the often used (and as often abused) "fundamentall law book of nature" (p. 147). Here as elsewhere the basic premise was the well-known idea that "the first and most innocent lesson of nature [is] to turn away peacably from what afflicts and hazards our destruction" (*Tetrachordon*, Columbia ed. 4:117). But existing laws of divorce, Milton protested, violate "the reverend secret of nature" by frequently forcing "a mixture of minds that cannot unite." Surely the spiritual aspect of marriage ought to take precedence over the physical? "In marriage," St. Thomas Aquinas had written, "the union of souls ranks higher than union of bodies." Humanists agreed. According to the widely respected Juan Luis Vives, "There canne be [no] maryage or concorde" where man and wife "agree not in wyll and minde, the whyche twoo are the beginning & seate of all amitie & friendship."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, as in *Paradise Lost*, Raphael insists that where there is no love there can be no happiness but only gratification of the senses, mere bestiality (VIII.579ff., 621), so *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* maintains that "where love cannot be, there can be left of wedlock nothing, but the empty husk of an outside matrimony; as undelightfull and unpleasing to God, as any other kind of hypocrisie" (p. 140). God did not institute marriage "to remedy a sublunary and bestial burning," to have man and wife "grind in the mill of an undelighted and servil copulation" (pp. 144, 141).

God in the first ordaning of marriage, taught us to what end he did it, in words expresly implying the apt and cheerfull conversation [i.e., association] of man with woman, to comfort and refresh him against the evill of solitary life, not mentioning the purposes of generation till afterwards, as being but a secondary end in dignity, though not in necessity. (P. 124)

The generous compass of Milton's thesis was widened as he went on to comprehend his belief in the potentialities of "the divine and softening breath of charity." "Our Saviours doctrine," he affirmed in *Tetrachordon*, "is, that the end, and the fulfilling of every command is charity; no faith without it, no truth without it, no worship, no workes pleasing to God but as they partake of charity" (Columbia ed., 4:96 and 135). Charity is "a command above all commands," "the supreme dictate," "whose grand commission is to doe and to dispose over all the ordinances of God to man; that love & truth

may advance each other to everlasting" (pp. 180, 135, 168). As the concluding sentence of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* has it, "God the Son hath put all other things under his own feet; but his Commandments hee hath left all under the feet of Charity."

Milton's treatises on divorce have twice reappeared in English literature, first in the unexpected context of Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707), and later as "the tragic machinery of the tale" in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895).<sup>25</sup> But we read *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* not because of its influence on Farquhar or Hardy, much less as an excursion in autobiography. It is above all a remarkable testimony to a man's ability so to transcend his towering passions as to formulate principles of universal validity. At once a plea for liberty and a protest against institutionalism, it warrants also Milton's right proudly to claim: "Let not England forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live" (p. 120).

#### V. "ACCORDING TO CONSCIENCE ABOVE ALL LIBERTIES"

A year later, in 1644, the precedence was further confirmed in *Of Education* and *Areopagitica*. The obvious differences between the two works forcefully remind us how impossible it is to generalize on Milton's style. Each work possesses a style appropriate to the given occasion. *Of Education*, in assuming the reader's familiarity with humanist educational theories, does not argue; it posits. But *Areopagitica*, in professing a thesis contrary to received opinion, displaces assertion by argument, and mere allegation by cogent analysis. The stylistic consequences cannot possibly be missed. *Of Education* is authoritative in appearance, categorical in manner, and almost entirely devoid of rhetoric since its thesis is, as it were, self-evident. But *Areopagitica* advances cumulatively in a series of waves, until the gathered force of argument and rhetorical patterns overwhelms our reservations and commands our assent.

*Of Education* was, like the treatises on divorce, the direct result of Milton's experience. The experience was two-fold: on the practical level, the education and instruction of his sister's two sons; and on the theoretical, the extensive discussions then under way concerning the methods of Comenius, the great Czech educational reformer who had visited England in 1641 possibly at the invitation of Parliament and who numbered among his English friends Samuel Hartlib, the recipient of Milton's address. Milton's participation in these discussions significantly assumed the form of a reiteration of the great ideals of Renaissance humanism. The vast compass of the educational scheme he endorses is by no means peculiar to himself but displays the humanist aspiration to create the "universal man." The countless precedents include the idealistic vision which in Rabelais informs

Gargantua's famed letter to Pantagruel (bk. II. chap. 8); the all-encompassing nature of Vives' treatise *De disciplinis* in 1531; and, in England, Sir Philip Sidney's outline of a course of studies which extends from the Scriptures ("the foundation of foundations, the Wisdome of Wisdomes") to works on moral philosophy as on the art of war, and on geography as on history—the latter including all the major historians of ancient Greece, Rome, Byzantium, and Renaissance Europe! Milton like every humanist would have agreed with Sidney's disarming remark: "To me, the variety rather delights me, then confounds me."<sup>26</sup>

The program of studies outlined in *Of Education* is placed in *Areopagitica* within an even broader framework, the necessity of unlimited access to reading in order to exercise man's talents and issue in discrimination. The talents themselves, and man's ability to exercise them properly, are not called into question. Firm in his faith in man, Milton reserves the full weight of his ire against those who hubristically tamper with the individual's right to decide for himself. The emphasis is humanistic in general even while it is Protestant in particular: "Give me liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience above all liberties" (p. 241). It is noteworthy that fifteen years later, in *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* (1659), the plea was voiced yet again, on that occasion more particularly on behalf of religious liberty.

Originality of argument need not be sought in *Areopagitica* for it will not be found. Commonplaces, indeed, abound; but they are commonplaces raised to the level of great literature. Bishop Joseph Hall, Milton's antagonist in the antiepiscopal tracts, rephrased a familiar notion thus: "Ther can be but one truth: and that one Truth oft-times must be fetcht by peece-meal out of divers branches of contrary opinions."<sup>27</sup> But Milton's restatement is a touchstone of English prose:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after him were laid asleep, then strait arose a wicked race of deceivers, who as that story goes of the *Aegyptian Typhon* with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good *Osiris*, took the virgin truth, hewd her lovely form into a thousand peeces, and scatter'd them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the carefull search that *Isis* made for the mangled body of *Osiris*, went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall doe, till her Masters second coming; he shall bring together every joynt and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection. (P. 234)

The style *is* the work. It looks beyond Milton's other works—and other styles—to the only other classical oration in English literature, Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*. *Areopagitica* like the *Apology* weds style and argument in such a manner that while style and structure reflect the practice of classical rhetoricians, the thesis appeals to the most liberal instincts in man. Milton has appreciated by now what he would later transmute into poetry, that rhetoric by itself may be put to perverse uses, witness its deployment by Satan in *Paradise Lost*. But rhetoric exerted on behalf of truth—the truth of moral precepts immemorably upheld—could so imprint a cause upon the consciousness of men as they should not willingly let it die.

## VI. "PURE ZEALE TO THE LIBERTY OF MANKIND"

The liberty of the individual, threatened in Milton's time as in ours by societies militantly bent on conformity, was further defended by Milton in his several expressly political works. Whatever their nominal subjects, their one constant theme coincides with Blake's visionary denunciation of each and every effort to curtail the prerogatives of the individual ("One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression"). The fundamental principle of Milton's thought is lucidly stated: "No man who knows ought, can be so stupid as to deny that all men naturally were born free" (p. 255).

*The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), published within two weeks of the execution of Charles I, could be read as a straightforward justification of regicide. As with the treatises on divorce, however, Milton ascends beyond the immediate episode to formulate general principles, in this instance that free men having once entered into a voluntary contract with their governors may terminate it whenever tyranny is palpably in evidence. But *The Tenure* is also concerned with a development that was becoming increasingly apparent ever since the abolition of episcopacy in 1646: the tendency of the victorious Presbyterians "to sit the closest & the heaviest of all Tyrants, upon the conscience, and fall notoriously into the same sinns, wherof so lately and so loud they accus'd the Prelates" (p. 284). In the memorable words of a poem Milton wrote at this time, "*New Presbyter* is but *Old Priest* writ Large" ("On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament," I. 20).

As *The Tenure* was followed by the two *Defenses* of the republican regime (1651–54), and then by *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), Milton's thinking appears to have become less flexible until his endorsement in the latter work of government by a self-perpetuating grand council of the "worthiest." But wildest undulations in Milton's stated attitudes cannot obscure either his insistence that sovereignty may never be "transferrd, but delegated only," or his consistent and even exclusive opposition to rule by any single person, whether Charles I or



Cromwell.<sup>28</sup> On the very eve of the monarchy's restoration he warned: "that people must needs be madd or strangely infatuated, that build the chief hope of thir common happiness or safetie on a single person," "corruptible by the excess of his singular power and exaltation" (pp. 336, 348). The sage conclusion of John Aubrey in his brief life of Milton is apposite:

Whatever he wrote against Monarchie was out of no animosity to the King's person, or owt of any faction or interest, but out of a pure Zeale to the Liberty of Mankind, which he thought would be greater under a free state than under a Monarchiall government.<sup>29</sup>

Not that the consistency of Milton's opposition to rule by any single person should mislead us into thinking that his political views remained static. Development there was, partly in the inevitable disillusionment when his great expectations for a radical reformation were shattered, but especially in the increasing realization that his apocalyptic entreaties for an external reformation—the rule of the saints exorcizing malefic prelates and authoritarian monarchs—should be preceded by an internal reformation, "a paradise within."<sup>30</sup>

Milton's political thought may also be approached by way of its opposition to that of Hobbes. After the appearance of Salmasius' royalist apologia in *Defensio regia* (1649) and Milton's reply in the first *Defense*—the *Pro populo anglicano defensio* (1651)—Hobbes wrote:

I have seen them both. They are very good Latin both, and hardly to be judged which is better; and both very ill reasoning, hardly to be judged which is worse.<sup>31</sup>

Milton's judgment of Hobbes was equally generous. It is reported by Aubrey:

His widowe assures me that Mr. T. Hobbs was not one of his acquaintance, that her husband did not like him at all, but he would acknowledge him to be a man of great parts, and a learned man. Their Interests and Tenets did run counter to each other.<sup>32</sup>

Hobbes was a materialist, Milton an idealist. Hobbes upheld determinism in a universe obedient to inflexible laws, Milton maintained that the liberty of man is an inalienable right granted by God in perpetuity. Hobbes endorsed absolute authoritarianism, Milton vehemently rejected any doctrine that deprived man of his independence. The power of kings, argued Milton, is "derivative, transferr'd and committed to them in trust from the People, to the Common good of all" (p. 257). Hobbes would have agreed but for the

crucial qualification "in trust." It measures the abyss dividing two mutually exclusive responses to the predicament of man.

Milton also divides from Hobbes—and indeed from every other political philosopher of the seventeenth century—in terms of style. The magniloquent voice of the epic poet is heard throughout the two *Defenses* beginning with the preface to the first:

I shall relate no common things, or mean; but how a most puissant king, when he had trampled upon the laws, and stricken down religion, and was ruling at his own lust and wantonness, was at last subdued in the field by his own people, who had served a long term of slavery; how he was thereupon put under guard, and when he gave no ground whatever, by either word or action, to hope better things of him, was finally by the highest council of the realm condemned to die, and beheaded before his very palace gate. I shall likewise relate (which will much conduce to the easing men's minds of a great superstition) under what system of laws, especially what laws of England, this judgement was rendered and executed; and shall easily defend my valiant and worthy countrymen, who have extremely well deserved of all subjects and nations in the world, from the most wicked calumnies of both domestic and foreign railers, and chiefly from the reproaches of this utterly empty sophister [i.e., Salmasius], who sets up to be captain and ringleader of all the rest. For what king's majesty high enthroned ever shone so bright as did the people's majesty of England, when, shaking off that age-old superstition which had long prevailed, they overwhelmed with judgement their very king (or rather him who from their king had become their enemy), ensnared in his own laws him who alone among men claimed by divine right to go unpunished, and feared not to inflict upon this very culprit the same capital punishment which he would have inflicted upon any other.

As always in Milton, however, an apparently secular event is promptly placed within a metaphysical context. The preface to the first *Defense* continues:

Yet why do I proclaim as done by the people these actions, which themselves almost utter a voice, and witness everywhere the presence of God? Who, as often as it hath seemed good to his infinite wisdom, useth to cast down proud unbridled kings, puffed up above the measure of mankind, and often uprooteth them with their whole house. As for us, it was by His clear command we were on a sudden resolved upon the safety and

liberty that we had almost lost; it was He we followed as our Leader, and revered His divine footsteps imprinted everywhere; and thus we entered upon a path not dark but bright, and by His guidance shown and opened to us. I should be much in error if I hoped that by my diligence alone, such as it is, I might set forth all these matters as worthily as they deserve, and might make such records of them as, haply, all nations and all ages would read. For what eloquence can be august and magnificent enough, what man has parts sufficient, to undertake so great a task? Yea, since in so many ages as are gone over the world there has been but here and there a man found able to recount worthily the actions of great heroes and potent states, can any man have so good an opinion of himself as to think that by any style or language of his own he can compass these glorious and wonderful works—not of men, but, evidently, of almighty God?

(*Pro populo anglicano defensio*, trans.  
Samuel L. Wollf, Columbia ed., 7:3f)

The two *Defenses* like the five antiepiscopal tracts are intimately related to the point of view which, as we shall see, also pervades *The History of Britain*.

But the two *Defenses* and especially the third *Defense of Himself* (1655) are considerably marred by the frequently intemperate language which readers have often remarked, and as often deplored. Milton's earlier treatment of the bishops, indeed, pales before his personal attacks both against Salmasius, the author of the *Defensio regia*, and Alexander More, the presumed author of the *Regii sanguinis clamor* (1652). But here Milton appears to have relied not only on the weapons furnished by the traditional forms of mockery we noted in Pascal; he also depended on classical precedents, particularly the vituperation which in Cicero among others is intimately related to the ethical orientation of one's opponents.<sup>33</sup> The resort to abuse, at any rate, never propelled Milton towards distortion. Whether immersed in the broad argument of *The Tenure* or the narrow attacks on Salmasius and Alexander More, he remained throughout remarkably faithful to his sources.<sup>34</sup>

## VII. "ACCORDING TO HIS DIVINE RETALIATION"

We do not know when Milton composed *The History of Britain* or the controversial theological treatise *De doctrina christiana*. The former was published for the first time in 1670; the latter, following its discovery a century and a half after Milton's death, in 1825.

*The History of Britain* may well have been written in the early 1640s.

Edward Phillips, Milton's nephew, appears to have thought so, and at least one modern scholar places it even earlier.<sup>35</sup> But the work bears the mark of substantial revisions prior to its publication in 1670, most obviously in connection with the parallels Milton frequently and pointedly drew between the past and the present. Such "parallelism" was far from unknown during the Renaissance in England. Historians were adequately conditioned by Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* to agree with Thomas Heywood that "If wee present a forreigne History"—or indeed the history of Britain—"the subject is so intended, that in the lives of *Romans*, *Grecians*, or others, either the vertues of our Countrymen are extolled, or their vices reproved."<sup>36</sup>

Milton's endorsement of the same approach resides partly in his account of the usurpation of Britain by William the "outlandish Conquerer"—an obvious parallel to the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 but also in his more emphatic representations of sovereigns with a moral authority entirely lacking in Charles II, for instance that "mirror of Princes" Alfred the Great, whose life advanced "not idely nor voluptuously, but in all vertuous employments both of mind and body" (Columbia ed., 10:315, 223, 220; Yale ed., 5:402, 292, 289). But the "lessons" of history also comprehended the traditional belief that historical events are a record of divine mercies and judgments. This expressly Christian view of history reappears in Milton's work mostly in connection with the periodic invasions of Britain, now firmly interpreted as so many judgments on a wayward nation:

When God hath decreed servitude on a sinful Nation, fitted by thir own vices for no condition but servile, all Estates of Government are alike unable to avoid it. God hath purpos'd to punish ... according to his Divine retaliation; invasion for invasion, spoil for spoil, destruction for destruction.

(Columbia ed., 10:198; Yale ed., 5:259)

Even while embracing traditional beliefs, however, Milton pursued "truth" in accordance with the highest ideals of humanist historiography. Fables like Britain's mythical origins were not eschewed, "be it for nothing else but in favour of our English Poets, and Rhetoricians, who by thir Art will know, how to use them judiciously"; yet even then Milton drew the line, firmly, at Arthur ("who *Arthur* was, and whether ever any such reign'd in *Britain*, hath bin doubted heertofore, and may again with good reason" [Columbia ed., 10:3, 127–28; Yale ed., 5:3, 164]). On the other hand, Britain's documented past since the Roman invasion was so diligently and constructively researched that Milton is now generally regarded as "a judicious and conservative scholar."<sup>37</sup> Style was made subservient to truth. "I affect," he wrote in opposition to no less an authority than Thucydides,

I affect not set speeches in a Historie, unless known for certain to have bin so spok'n in effect as they are writt'n, nor then, unless worth rehearsal; and to invent such, though eloquently, as some Historians have done, is an abuse of posteritie, raising, in them that read, other conceptions of those times and persons then were true.  
(Columbia ed., 10:68; Yale ed., 5:80)

The pursuit of truth also led Milton boldly to question widely held beliefs, and even sacrosanct dogmas, in *De doctrina christiana*. As observed earlier (p. 217), Milton tampered with the doctrine of the Trinity, denying the equality of the Father and the Son; he argued that the soul dies with the body; and he claimed that polygamy is not contrary to divine law.

*De doctrina christiana* began to be compiled sometime after Milton's return from the Continent in 1639, as Edward Phillips testifies; but there is evidence to suggest that it was being amended well into the 1650s, and possibly into the 1660s. Yet Milton never published it. Did he hesitate because aware of the furor its controversial arguments would have generated? Where totally committed, however, Milton utterly disregarded the possibility of the public's disapprobation, witness his bold publication of the treatises on divorce and the perilous reaffirmation of his republican convictions mere weeks before the restoration of the monarchy. It may be that he simply regarded *De doctrina* as incomplete, still seeking on his death a way out of the labyrinthine mazes he had entered in pursuit of "truth."

Stillborn though the treatise may be, it merits our scrutiny because Milton's achievement in prose cannot be divorced from his sporadic failures in the same medium. Moreover, the opportunity to compare the ideas expressed in *De doctrina* and *Paradise Lost* may not be bypassed. Obvious differences in mode of expression, and more subtle ones in intent, will not lead us to regard the treatise as a "gloss" upon the poem but ought to clarify those vital issues which, boldly explored in *De doctrina*, were finally resolved only through the poetry of *Paradise Lost*.

#### VIII. "THE SERIOUS AND HEARTY LOVE OF TRUTH"

Milton's literary criticism is severely circumscribed, for he remarked on prose and poetry only occasionally, and sometimes almost accidentally. His brief remarks, extracted from their context, make an impressive if misleading collection;<sup>38</sup> but lengthy statements are extremely rare, except where called for by the immediate occasion. Instances include his views on the aims of scorn (quoted on pp. 255–56), the well-known passage in *The Reason of Church-Government* on his personal aspirations and the nature of poetry generally, and of course the preface to *Samson Agonistes*.

The passage in *The Reason of Church-Government* and the preface to *Samson* are alike meaningful in the light of Renaissance thought. Implicit in the first is the widespread fear that the abuse of poetry by inconsequential "poet-apes" (to borrow Sidney's term in the peroration of the *Apology for Poetry*) threatens not simply the art of poetry but, given Milton's idealistic view of the poet's mission, the very fiber of national life. Should the personal terms of Milton's utterance irritate us, it is well to remember that other Renaissance humanists display much the same vaulting pride in their achievements. But the personal "I" may also be regarded as an assumed persona expediting the transition from the particular to the general, from the merely personal to the expressly universal. In such a reading, the concluding statement on the office of the poet (p. 57) appears as a pronouncement of a poet-prophet, not unlike the dramatic peroration in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*.

The preface to *Samson Agonistes* is similarly comprehensible within the context of critical opinion in its time. In appearance but a personal defense of Milton's practice, it is in fact a "highly compressed treatment of complex critical problems" involving the major issues of English neoclassical criticism.<sup>39</sup> Incidentally, however, the preface also highlights the difference between Milton's poetry and Milton's prose; for while the preface censures the mixture of the tragic and the comic, the play itself reaches its crisis in the introduction of the giant Harapha whom we earlier discerned to be a distant relative of the braggarts in Continental comic literature (see the previous discussion).

The discrepancy—if indeed it is a discrepancy—has far-reaching implications. If Milton's engagement with prose differs in kind from his engagement with poetry, we would be well advised to hesitate before accepting the preface to *Samson* as entirely relevant to the play itself—or, further afield, before equating the prose of *De doctrina christiana* with the poetry of *Paradise Lost*. Milton's prose is after all unremittingly multiform, as noted in connection with *Of Education* and *Areopagitica*. Vastly different in style because vastly different in intent, *Of Education* and *Areopagitica* disarm any effort to generalize on Milton's prose. The "total effect" of this prose has been said to depend "more on an accumulation of convictions gained from individual sentences than on the logical progress of the argument through the complete work."<sup>40</sup> But however accurate an observation on Milton's polemical pamphlets, the statement misrepresents the method and effect of the eminently logical *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, the fully sustained *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, the relatively unemotional *Treatise of Civil Power*, the serenely progressive *History of Britain*, or the relentlessly unrhetorical *De doctrina christiana*. Only one generalization pertains to Milton's multiform prose, that it is distinguished by its impressively variable tonal range.

The multiformity of Milton's prose can best be defined negatively. Eschewing Senecan laconisms, it is not given to "Sentences by the Statute, as if all above three inches long were confiscat."<sup>41</sup> At the other extreme, it avoids also the stylistic extravagances that Milton enumerates in *Of Reformation* as

knotty Africanisms, the pamper'd metaphors; the intricat, and involv'd sentences of the Fathers; besides the fantastick, and declamatory flashes; the crosse-jingling periods which cannot but disturb, and come thwart a setl'd devotion worse then the din of bells, and rattles.

(Columbia ed., 3:34; Yale ed., 1:568)

Milton's own prose advances along the path marked by Cicero and his imitators. "I cannot say," he once wrote in a rare understatement, "that I am utterly untrain'd in those rules which best Rhetoricians have giv'n, or unacquainted with those examples which the prime authors of eloquence have written in any learned tongue (*An Apology for Smectymnuus*, Columbia ed., 3:362; Yale ed., 1:948-49). Yet the best precedent for the multiformity of his own prose Milton discovered not in "the prime authors of eloquence" but in the Bible. His claim deserves to be quoted at length:

Our Saviour who had all gifts in him was Lord to expresse his indoctrinating power in what sort him best seem'd; sometimes by a milde and familiar converse, sometimes with plaine and impartiall home-speaking regardlesse of those whom the auditors might think he should have had in more respect; otherwhiles with bitter and irefull rebukes if not teaching yet leaving excuselesse those his wilfull impugners. What was all in him, was divided among many others the teachers of his Church; some to be severe and ever of a sad gravity that they may win such, & check sometimes those who be of nature over-confident and jocond; others were sent more cheerefull, free, and still as it were at large, in the midst of an untrespassing honesty; that they who are so temper'd may have by whom they might be drawne to salvation, and they who are too scrupulous, and dejected of spirit might be often strengthn'd with wise consolations and revivings: no man being forc't wholly to dissolve that groundwork of nature which God created in him, the sanguine to empty out all his sociable liveliness, the cholerick to expell quite the unsinning predominance of his anger; but that each radicall humour and passion wrought upon and correct as it ought, might be made the

proper mould and foundation of every mans peculiar gifts, and virtues. Some also were indu'd with a staid moderation, and soundnesse of argument to teach and convince the rationall and sober-minded; yet not therefore that to be thought the only expedient course of teaching, for in times of opposition when either against new heresies arising, or old corruptions to be reform'd this coole unpassionate mildnesse of positive wisdom is not enough to damp and astonish the proud resistance of carnall, and false Doctors, then (that I may have leave to soare a while as the Poets use) then Zeale whose substance is ethereal, arming in compleat diamond ascends his fiery Chariot drawn with two blazing Meteors figur'd like beasts, but of a higher breed then any the Zodiack yeilds, resembling two of those four which *Ezechie*l and *S. John* saw, the one visag'd like a Lion to expresse power, high authority and indignation, the other of count'nance like a man to cast derision and scorne upon perverse and fraudulent seducers; with these the invincible warrior Zeale shaking loosely the slack reins drives over the heads of Scarlet Prelats, and such as are insolent to maintaine traditions, brusing their stiffe necks under his flaming wheels. Thus did the true Prophets of old combat with the false; thus Christ himselfe the fountaine of meeknesse found acrimony enough to be still galling and vexing the Prelaticall Pharisees.

(*An Apology for Smectymnuus*,  
Columbia ed., 3:312–14; Yale ed., 1:899–900)

The close relationship here said to exist between rhetoric and truth is emphasized throughout Milton's prose and poetry. In the *Apology for Smectymnuus*, for instance, Milton maintained that

true eloquence I find to be none, but the serious and hearty love of truth: And that whose mind so ever is fully possest with a fervent desire to know good things, and with the dearest charity to infuse knowledge of them into others, when such a man would speak, his words (by what I can expresse) like so many nimble and airy servitors trip about him at command, and in well order'd files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places.<sup>42</sup>

The principle, applied in *Paradise Lost*, issues in Milton's invitation that we discriminate sharply between Satan's seductive eloquence and his ambition to ruin man, a discrepancy amply confirmed in the harrowing episode involving the infernal trinity (II.648ff.). Satan's eventual reappearance in book IX as the



representative of corrupt eloquence (ll. 665–76) links with the Christ's pointed contrast in *Paradise Regained* between the orators of Greece and the prophets of Israel:

Thir Orators thou then extoll'st, as those  
 The top of Eloquence, Statists indeed,  
 And lovers of thir Country, as may seem;  
 But herein to our Prophets farr beneath,  
 As men divinely taught, and better teaching  
 The solid rules of Civil Government  
 In thir majestic unaffected stile  
 Then all the Oratory of *Greece* and *Rome*.  
 In them is plainest taught, and easiest learnt,  
 What makes a Nation happy, and keeps it so,  
 What ruins Kingdoms, and lays Cities flat;  
 These onely with our Law best form a King.  
 (IV.353–64)

The possession of a kingdom within that Milton's last poems persistently celebrate had been the aim of the poet himself many years since. As he wrote in 1642, "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem" (p. 62).

To what extent the poem has been realized will continue to be debated. But the aspiration itself commands respect.

## NOTES

Earlier versions of this chapter served as the introductions to *John Milton: Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1974), pp. 15–45; rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), pp. 15–46. Copyright 1974, C. A. Patrides; copyright 1985, the Curators of the University of Missouri. Reprinted with permission. Milton's prose is here quoted largely from the revised edition of *Selected Prose*. It is additionally quoted from *Works*, gen. ed. Frank A. Patterson (New York, 1931–40), 20 vols., and *Complete Prose Works*, gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven, 1953–82), 8 vols., hereafter abbreviated as "Columbia ed." and "Yale ed.," respectively.

1. Letter to James Rice, March 24, 1818.

2. *Lives of the English Poets*, Everyman ed. (London, 1925), 1:92–93. Edgar Allan Poe in 1845 firmly separated Milton's subject from Milton's style: "independently of the subject-matter, his treatises are among the most remarkable ever written" (in *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. T. O. Mabbot [New York, 1951], 362).

3. Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1818–19).

4. *The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London, 1932, reprint 1965), is also an indispensable collection.

5. See Milton's letter to Holstein in the Columbia ed., 12:38–45, and the holograph discussed by J. McG. Bottkol in *PMLA* 68 (1953): 617–27.

6. On Frescobaldi, see the account by Roland M. Frye in *Milton Quarterly* 7 (1973): 74–76; on Milton's visit to the Jesuit College, Leo Miller, *Milton Quarterly* 13 (1979), 142–46; and on Barberini, John Arthos, *Milton and the Italian Cities* (London, 1968), pp. 55f., 69ff.

7. Columbia ed., 12:53; Yale ed., 2:765. *La Tina* has been translated by Donald Sears in *Milton Studies* 13 (1979): 275–317.

8. The outlines are in the manuscript now in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge (reproduced in the Columbia ed., 18:231–32).

9. John Harris, *Englands Out-cry* (London, 1644), p. 1.

10. *Israel and England Paralelled* (London, 1648), p. 15. The sermon was delivered at Gray's Inn on April 6, 1648.

11. See the account of this controversy in the introduction to my edition of *The Cambridge Platonists* (London, 1969; reprint Cambridge, 1980).

12. The imagery of warfare in *Of Reformation*, often present in Milton's more militant prose works, has been noted frequently. See Theodore H. Banks, *Milton's Imagery* (New York, 1950), pp. 76–92; James H. Hanford, *John Milton: Poet and Humanist* (Cleveland, 1966), chap. 5; and Joan Webber, *The Eloquent "I"* (Madison, Wis., 1968), pp. 204ff. Consult also the broader contexts provided by Robert T. Fallon, *Captain or Colonel: The Soldier in Milton's Life and Art* (Columbia, Mo., 1984), and James A. Freeman, *Milton and the Martial Muse: "Paradise Lost" and European Traditions of War* (Princeton, 1980).

13. These are only three of the phrases rather lovingly collected in the Yale edition (1:113) as testimony to Milton's "bitter hatred." But they should be judged in the light of the period's vocabulary in controversy. Well into the Restoration, for example, Andrew Marvell, having written *The Rebeersal Transpros'd* (1672), was denounced in Samuel Parker's *Reproof* as "Thou Rat-Divine! thou hast not the Wit and Learning of a Mouse...."

14. See the excellent study by Thomas Kranidas, "Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 6 (1965): 423–32.

15. *The Provincial Letters*, trans. A. O. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth, England, 1967), p. 165 [letter 11, dated August 18, 1656].

16. From the Preface to *Animadversions* (Columbia ed., 2:107; Yale ed., 1:663–64). Milton's "grave Authors" are fully set forth by Pascal (in *Provincial Letters*, 164ff.). Elsewhere Milton sought support in the origin and nature of satire: "a Satyr as it was borne out of a Tragedy, so ought to resemble his parentage, to strike high, and adventure dangerously at the most eminent vices among the greatest persons" (*An Apology for Smectymnuus*, in Columbia ed., 3:329; Yale ed., 1:916).

17. *Arcana Microcosmi* (London, 1652), p. 177.

18. *Sermons preach'd at Eton*, 2d ed. (London, 1673), p. 36. The first edition appeared posthumously in 1660.

19. Proverbs 26.5; as annotated by Michael Jermin, *Paraphrasticall Meditations, by Way of Commentarie, upon the Whole Booke of the Proverbs of Solomon* (London, 1638), p. 598.

20. The Puritan literature is emphasized by Chilton L. Powell, *English Domestic Relations 1487–1653* (New York, 1917), pp. 147–48, and William and Malleville Haller, “The Puritan Art of Love,” *HLQ* 5 (1941–42): 235–72; the courtesy books, by John Halkett, *Milton and the Idea of Matrimony* (New Haven, 1970); and the Christian humanist tradition, by V. Norskov Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce: A Study of their Interpretation from Erasmus to Milton* (Tübingen, West Germany, 1971).

21. Edward A. Westermarck, *Christianity and Morals* (London, 1939), p. 385. One of the best studies of the treatises on divorce is Halkett’s *Milton and the Idea of Matrimony* to which I am indebted; but I have also drawn liberally on my own remarks in *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 178–86.

22. See William Haller, *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1934), vol. I, appendix B, and the passages collected by William R. Parker, *Milton’s Contemporary Reputation* (Columbus, Ohio, 1940), pp. 73ff., 170ff. Cf. Milton’s two sonnets, XII (“I did but prompt the age to quit their cloggs”) and XI (“A Book was writ of late call’d *Tetrachordon*”).

23. Ephraim Pagitt, *Heresiography*, 3d ed. (London, 1647), p. 150, and Daniel Featley, *The Dippers Dipt*, 5th ed. (London, 1647), sig. A4.

24. St. Thomas, *Summa theologia* III.iv.1, trans. by the English Dominican Fathers (London, 1911–25), and Vives, *The Office and Duetie of an Husband*, trans. Thomas Paynell (London, 1550?), sigs. K8–K8v.

25. See M. A. Larson, “The Influence of Milton’s Divorce Tracts on Farquhar’s *Beaux’ Stratagem*,” *PMLA* 39 (1924): 174–78. Milton’s influence on Hardy has not yet been studied.

26. John Buxton, “An Elizabethan Reading List: An Unpublished Letter from Sir Philip Sidney,” *TLS*, March 24, 1972, pp. 343–44. Vives’ treatise is available in English, trans. Foster Watson (London, 1913, reprint Totowa, NJ., 1971). The humanist burden of Milton’s *Of Education* is most ably expounded by William R. Parker, “Education: Milton’s Ideas and Ours,” *College English* 24 (1962): 1–14.

27. *Holy Observations* (London, 1607), p. 52.

28. The thesis is persuasively argued by Merritt Y. Hughes, *Ten Perspectives on Milton* (New Haven, 1965), pp. 267–68. See also his essay “Milton’s *Eikon Basilike*,” in *Calm of Mind*, ed. Joseph Wittreich (Cleveland, 1971), pp. 1–24. 29. *Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver L. Dick, 3d ed. (London, 1960), p. 203.

30. *Paradise Lost* XII.587. For an interpretation of Milton’s development along the lines suggested, see Michael Fixler, *Milton and the Kingdoms of God* (London, 1964). See also my discussion of the nature of Milton’s apocalyptic emphases on pp. 181–214.

31. *English Works*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London, 1839), 6:368; quoted by Don M. Wolfe, “Milton and Hobbes: A Contrast in Social Temper,” *SP* 41 (1944): 410–26.

32. *Brief Lives*, p. 203.

33. See Diane P. Speer, "Milton's *Defensio Prima*: Ethos and Vituperation in a Polemic Engagement," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 277–83.

34. See Hughes, *Ten Perspectives*, chap. 9. Milton's charges against More have been largely substantiated: consult the studies by Kester Svendsen in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 1 (1959): 11–29; *JEGP* 60 (1961): 796–807; and *Th' Upright Heart and Pure*, ed. A. P. Fiore (Pittsburgh, 1967), pp. 117–30.

35. As early as 1632–38, according to Lloyd E. Berry in *RES*, n.s. 11 (1960): 150–56.

36. *An Apology for Actors* (London, 1612), sig. F3v.

37. Harry Glicksman, "The Sources of Milton's *History of Britain*," *University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature* 11 (1920): 105–44.

38. Ida Langdon, *Milton's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts* (New Haven, 1924).

39. See Annette C. Flower, "The Critical Context of the Preface to *Samson Agonistes*," *SEL* 10 (1970): 409–23.

40. K. G. Hamilton, "The Structure of Milton's Prose," in *Language and Style in Milton*, ed. R. D. Emma and John T. Shawcross (New York, 1967), chap. 10.

41. That is, like the style of Milton's opponent Joseph Hall, the so-called "English Seneca" (*An Apology for Smectymnuus*, in the Columbia ed., 3:268, and the Yale ed., 1:873).

42. The passage is crucial to the antiprelatical tracts because of Milton's insistent censure of the bishops' abuse of language. See Thomas Kranidas's exposition of Milton's "*decorum*" in *The Fierce Equation* (The Hague, 1965), chap. 2.



PRICE McMURRAY

*Aristotle on the Pinnacle:*  
*Paradise Regained and the Limits of Theory*

THE final confrontation between Christ and Satan on the pinnacle of the temple continues to be a problem for Milton's interpreters.<sup>1</sup> Because *Paradise Regained* chronicles both Christ's role as the second Adam and his journey of self-discovery, many readers have understood his rebuke as an illuminating reduction to essentials of the poem's thematic burden—temptation is presumption—and as evidence that the Son has come into full self-knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This reading is not without its difficulties, of course, and whether Milton means us to infer some hypostatization of the Son has been debated. If Christ's words are a declaration of godhead, the argument runs, then Milton is guilty, either of allowing the dramatic texture of his poem to obscure its theology or of endorsing a rather heterodox Christology.<sup>3</sup> Thus, most interpretations fall on a sliding scale between the obvious extremes, attempting to reconcile the requirements of dogmatic theology with our sense that, as Empson puts it on another occasion, Christ has finally and deservedly gotten his spurs. While the situation is reminiscent of *Paradise Lost*, in which epic heroism is weighed against the ideal of Christian conduct and found wanting, the passage remains recalcitrant, if for no other reason than that it pushes the minimalist or less-is-more logic of Christian heroism to the breaking point. At the risk of giving short shrift to the interpretive energy expended on the problem, one can hardly quarrel with Hugh

---

From *Milton Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1998). © 1998 by Roy C. Flannagan and the Johns Hopkins University Press.

MacCallum's wry characterization of the pinnacle as an "uneasy station for criticism" (313n32).

An adequate reading of the crux may require something like a suspension of critical and theological belief. We need not make an extra-textual detour to the pages of *De Doctrina Christiana*, where MacCallum finds evidence of Milton's subordinationism in the analysis of Colossians 2.9, or pretend to any sophistication with theology, to realize that if Christ's rebuke implies a hypostatization of the Son, then Milton's reference to the "uneasy station" is a peculiar estimate of divinity indeed. By the same token, we should not read the theology without the poetry. To do so would have been troubling to Milton, and doctrinal interpretations of his poetry are often less illuminating than obviously misplaced aesthetic accounts. Rather than dismiss readings of Christ's rebuke which deviate from an orthodox Christology, might we not grant that Milton's text is unclear? This is at odds with what most readers recognize as Milton's prodigious control over his material, but perhaps the epiphany on the pinnacle of the temple is meant to be puzzling. Perhaps Milton's praxis is in the service of a theory which aims to point out certain expressive and cognitive limits.<sup>4</sup>

It bears recalling that the common-sensical if theologically problematic notion that Christ declares himself God is not necessarily of modern or post-Romantic derivation. In her discussion of *Paradise Regained*, for instance, Irene Samuel uses two eighteenth-century commentaries to focus the conflicting readings of the final temptation. One reader for whom Milton's poem is not perplexing is Reverend Calton of Lincolnshire, who writes: "Here is what we may call after Aristotle the *anagnorisis*, or the discovery. Christ declares himself to be the God and Lord of the Tempter; and to prove it, stands upon the pinnacle" (qtd. in Samuel 112). We may reject the good Reverend's gloss on account of its implications for Milton's Christology, but it is a richly suggestive comment. While eighteenth-century readers were obviously inclined to read poetry in Aristotelian terms, finding, for example, that the authorial intrusions in *Paradise Lost* violated neoclassical principles of literary decorum, Milton's work is anything but theoretically naive, and he wrote in the wake of the great Italian commentaries to the *Poetics*. Calton's designation of Christ's rebuke as an *anagnorisis*, perhaps a banality for an eighteenth-century reader, is provocative because it suggests that Aristotle was a heuristic tool for Milton's reading of the Bible.

Such a possibility becomes more likely when we compare Milton's narrative with its primary source, Luke 4.9–13.

And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from here;

For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee;

And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

And Jesus, answering, said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not put the Lord, thy God, to the test.

And when the devil had ended all the testing, he departed from him for a season.

Turning from the gospel account to *Paradise Regained*, we cannot but think that Milton's rendition of the final conflict between Satan and Christ is tighter, more sharply focused in its drama, and more unequivocal in its sense of closure.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Milton's procedure seems to reverse or repress the enigmatic open-endedness of a phrase like "all the testing." The point is not so much that Milton distorted scripture, for he doubtless would have felt justified in making good faith extrapolations from the narrative itself, as it is that his modifications of the story suggest a great deal about his habits of mind.

If Milton in this instance seems bent on heightening the dramatic interest and moral clarity of the scriptural episode, more than one critic has described the larger shape of *Paradise Regained* in terms assimilable to an Aristotelian logic. The dialogues between Christ and Satan, characterized by Satan's rhetorical range and sophistication on the one hand, and Christ's simplicity and increasing terseness on the other, are a case in point. More than a dramatic expedient, the dialogues are part of a dialectical "narrowing" which leads Satan to defeat and, Fish suggests, man to God: "On the dramatic level the definition of the relationship between man and God takes the form of a progressive narrowing of the area in which the self is preeminent.... On the verbal level there is a progressive diminishing" ("Inaction" 27). Regardless of whether the logic of a "progressive diminishing" ultimately exposes plot as the main (literary) temptation of *Paradise Regained*, the idea that the poem contracts into a climactic moment of recognition and misrecognition would seem generally agreed upon.<sup>6</sup>

The principal source for Milton's understanding of recognition or *anagnorisis* was, of course, Aristotle's *Poetics*. Without digressing at length to summarize the argument of the *Poetics* or its reception in the Renaissance, suffice it to say that Aristotle rates highest those tragic plots which achieve narrowness and concentration.<sup>7</sup> Crucial to this effect of narrowness and concentration are the moments of recognition and reversal. Because recognition and reversal arrest events, turning them back upon themselves, they shift the emphasis of drama from plot and the narrative of adventures to the expression of character. In tragedy, and especially in *Oedipus*, Aristotle's prime example of the genre, the moment of recognition is wrenching



because it reveals relations which might well have remained hidden. Thus, recognition is the motive or *raison d'être* for tragic poetry, particularly to the extent that it takes as its subject the transgression of familial boundaries.

Milton's description of Satan's fall is suggestive in this respect. Evoking a world of tangled and tragic relationships, it betrays an almost Aristotelian concern for the vicissitudes of recognition.

But Satan smitten with amazement fell  
 As when Earths Son Antaeus (to compare  
 Small things with greatest) in *Irassa* strove  
 With *Joves Alcides*, and oft foil'd still rose,  
 Receiving from his mother Earth new strength,  
 Fresh from his fall, and fiercer grapple joyn'd,  
 Thrott'l'd at length in th' Air, expir'd and fell;  
 So after many a foil the Tempter proud,  
 Renewing fresh assaults, amidst his pride  
 Fell whence he stood to see his Victor fall.  
 And as that Theban Monster that propos'd  
 Her riddle, and him, who solv'd it not, devour'd;  
 That once found out and solv'd, for grief and spight  
 Cast herself headlong from th' *Ismenian* steep,  
 So strook with dread and anguish fell the Fiend.  
 (4.562–76)

Inasmuch as classical heroism here consists of the ability to unravel riddles, and Milton telescopes the oedipal and familial within the existential (i.e., Hercules triumphs because he knows the source of Antaeus's strength, while Oedipus triumphs because he understands the nature of man), it does not take a great deal of imagination to see that Milton is weighing one of the major narratives of antiquity against a central mystery of Christian theology.<sup>8</sup> Yet if Milton's point is presumably that Oedipus's insight into the human condition, which hastens rather than forestalls his ultimate fate, is a poor substitute for an understanding of what it means to be a Son of God, his evocation of the Greek myth is oddly disruptive. Although the paired classical allusions are likely to strike modern readers as sufficiently Freudian, the narrative of Antaeus's defeat serving as a subliminal reminder of the sexual content of Sophocles' play, the comparison of Christ and Oedipus startles and seems almost a *contaminatio*. Moreover, the second simile is an awkward fit, for Satan is less the speaker of a riddle than one driven to solve a riddle, and what is most Sphinxlike about the events on the "uneasie station" is the meaning of Christ's rebuke. Without diluting Milton's theology, one might wonder that the carefully-wrought formalism of *Paradise Regained* should blur at this crucial moment. Unless we want to characterize

the similes as blunt instruments which serve only to illustrate the action of falling, or rationalize the text with an appeal to some notion of artistic clumsiness, it would appear that Milton is critiquing the logic of recognition. Much as Oedipus's ability to see affinities both enables his triumph and leads to his destruction, so too, one surmises, tragedy can replay but never transcend its constitutive formalism.

Lest this seem abrupt, we might recall Satan's elaborate rationalization of his own conduct, for he is initially much the Oedipus of the piece.

Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view  
And narrower Scrutiny, that I might learn  
In what degree or meaning thou art call'd  
The Son of God, which bears no single sence;  
The Son of God I also am, or was,  
And if I was, I am; relation stands;  
All men are Sons of God; yet thee I thought  
In some respects far higher so declar'd.  
(4.514–21)

Suffering from a theological version of sibling rivalry, Satan betrays his familiar confusion with the assertion "relation stands." While he probably means that relation "obtains" or "endures," Satan's final temptation of Christ, the ironic exhortation to "stand," is a wild and unwitting literalization of his own trope, one which is turned against him when Christ stands and he does not. Moreover, Milton's allusion to the riddle of the Sphinx, which serves as a gloss on Satan's fall, reveals that his quest was never more than one of co-option. While Oedipus's mastery of the riddle—one version of which asks, "What is it that has one voice, but becomes four-footed, and two-footed, and three-footed, and is weakest when it has most feet?" (qtd. in MacKellar 243)—would seem a vindication in extremis of the proposition "relation stands," it is Christ, or so Milton's simile suggests, who has this knowledge. Implicit then in Christ's rebuke, not to mention his balancing act, is the idea that relation does indeed stand. Howsoever enigmatic the phrase "Son of God" or the relationship between the Father and the Son, Milton might have argued, these mysteries are the ultimate basis for reality.

More than a bit of preemptory one-upmanship, Milton's partisan likening of Christ and Oedipus creates a textual double focus and enacts a complex polemic. Because Oedipus's triumph, that of a mind supple enough to reduce the ages of man to one term, is a figure for the transgressions of incest and foreshadows his tragic fate, the wisdom of antiquity is found lacking and the familial entanglements traced in tragic drama are exposed as a demonic parody of the Trinity. If this parody is reenacted in Satan's failed attempt to make Christ reveal the mystery of his paternity, the issue is as

much one of literary theory as theology, for Satan, as Milton's simile indicates, is not Oedipus. What distinguishes Satan from the great tragic hero, with whom he shares an eye for affinities and experience in the ways of incest, is that his belief in his own powers looks decidedly like Aristotelian rationalism. The assertion "if I was, I am" is the defensive gesture of an embattled logician, and Satan's confidence in the power of "narrower Scrutiny" is the bias of the formalist, an apparently ironic and "tragic" misappropriation of Milton's larger strategy for investigating his biblical sources.

What I hope is clear by now is that the climax of *Paradise Regained* skirts the territory of *Oedipus* and the Aristotelian construction of tragedy. If Satan's plight seems richly oedipal, perhaps it is only fitting that an Aristotelian structure of recognition and reversal—albeit anatomized somewhat differently, for Satan falls without ever fully recognizing what he has seen—should modulate to an allusion to the poem Aristotle took as the model par excellence of the tragic mode. Nor does it seem special pleading to see Milton's restyling of the biblical narrative as the product of a formalist sensibility. The difficulty with this reading is what to make of Satan's Aristotelianism. Since Satan and Milton investigate the Bible in seemingly similar fashion, what, one wonders, are the implications of Satan's fall?

On the face of it, Satan's defeat is consistent with the larger impulses of *Paradise Regained*, for the poem is memorably antagonistic toward classical learning and culture.<sup>9</sup> Although a tradition at least as old as Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* held that Christians might legitimately appropriate the intellectual and rhetorical tools of antiquity in the battle of the faith, Milton takes great pains to dramatize Christ's rejection of the temptation of learning. Personally and pointedly polemical, this conservatism reverses both the argument in Milton's treatise *Of Education* and the defense of poetry in the preface to the second book of *The Reason of Church-Government*. Given the overt anti-classicism of *Paradise Regained*, it is not surprising that Satan, who is at once an Oedipus *manqué* and a slightly baffled Aristotelian, should be undone on the pinnacle of the temple. In effect, Satan's fall recapitulates the horrors of ancient tragedy and functions as a cautionary tale about the dangers of rationalism in literary criticism.

Yet to say as much is not entirely sufficient. Not only does this explanation make Milton's Aristotelian refashioning of the biblical narrative more rather than less striking, but it discounts the difficulty which Christ's rebuke has posed for countless commentators as well. I want to insist on this, for if the events on the temple pinnacle constitute Milton's recognition scene, this recognition scene is almost disciplinary in its assertion of conceptual and experiential limits. In simplest terms, readers of all stripes have had to follow Satan's lead and disentangle a riddle of paternity which is presented at the poem's climax. While we are likely to feel comfortable in the knowledge that we trust dogmatic theology rather than "narrower Scrutiny,"

there is, pragmatically considered, little difference between Satan's determination to find out what is meant by the phrase "Son of God" and our own critical worrying over a possible hypostatization of the Son. Should we be inclined to think otherwise, Milton's double-edged Aristotelianism would seem to imply, we need to be prepared for a shock of recognition.

Milton's procedure may not intimate an anti-rationalist bias in his theology, but it does suggest that his attitude toward ancient tragedy and literary theory is more complex than Christ's dismissive speeches indicate. We might account for both the larger issue of Milton's apparently mixed motives and the disruptions in his recognition scene by arguing that his text recapitulates (at a critical distance) a problematic at work in the *Poetics*. In a recent discussion of Aristotle, Paul Fry identifies a crucial tension in the formalist position:

Aristotle's rage for order, the "narrower" and more "concentrated" the better (ch. 26), leads to moments, primarily though not entirely at the level of tragic plot, in which characters who are too intimate overcrowd one another and threaten to break out of their confines with violence. The pathos, or "tragic incident," that occurs in such close quarters is brought on by the recognition of what could have been kept hidden in a less constricting situation, the recognition, that is, of the kinship or intimacy (*philia*) of antagonists. The irony of Aristotle's critical predicament is that his formalism, with its bringing to the fore of likenesses and affinities ... tends to ensure the coming to light of just the sort of unruliness that the observance of proportion is meant to suppress. (12)<sup>10</sup>

Something like the "unruliness" Fry describes clearly inhabits the climax of *Paradise Regained*, and it is not so much grudgingly admitted as actively sought. Since Milton probably assumed readers who were theologically literate and unlikely to be shaken in their faith by textual ambiguity, the confounding of formal and categorical clarity on the pinnacle of the temple may serve to indicate certain "interpretive" limits. If Aristotle acts as a heuristic device for the scriptural account, perhaps this works both ways, and the Bible is being used to interrogate Aristotelian formalism, exposing its inadequacies and charting a transcendence which is as much aesthetic as moral and theological.

Essential to this proposition is the debate between Christ and Satan over the putative merits of classical tragedy and rhetoric. Satan:

Thence what the lofty grave Tragoedians taught  
In *Chorus* or *Iambic*, teachers best

Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd  
 In brief sententious precepts, while they treat  
 Of fate, and chance, and change in human life;  
 High actions, and high passions best describing:  
 Thence to the famous Orators repair,  
 Those antient, whose resistless eloquence  
 Wielded at will that fierce Democratie,  
 Shook the Arsenal and fulmin'd over *Greece*,  
 To *Macedon*, and *Artaxerxes* Throne;  
 To sage Philosophy next lend thine ear. (4.261–72)

In Satan's hands, tragedy and rhetoric have a crucial proximity. Doubtless part of the point of this is to underscore the Satanic distortion of classical ideals, for Satan's celebration of bellicose oratory reverses the fundamental assumption of Ciceronian humanism, namely, that rhetoric civilizes man and establishes the political order. Satan's unwitting use of the word "repair"—a crucial and charged entry in the Miltonic lexicon—sets up a complex relay, simultaneously exposing his rejection of the civilizing potential of rhetoric and reminding us of the gulf between antiquity's noblest imaginings and the Christian promise of Paradise restored.

Yet there is more to it. In addition to marking the crossing between tragedy and rhetoric, "repair" calls attention to the unstated proposition in Satan's account of tragedy. Specifically, the formula "moral prudence, with delight receiv'd / In brief sententious precepts" is puzzling and seems to suggest that tragedy is not so much tragic as pleurably didactic. Regardless of Satan's ultimate theoretical source, we would seem to be at some remove from Aristotelian fear and pity. Yet Satan's explanation is Aristotle's, or at least that of Milton's Aristotle, and his odd construction of tragic delight is reminiscent of the preface to *Samson Agonistes*, where Milton writes that tragedy is "said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight..." (149). Without insisting that Milton's discussion of catharsis is revisionary, we should not ignore the way in which it reverses a common sense understanding of fear and pity."

What distinguishes Satan's account of tragedy from Milton's is that it is even more optimistic. While Milton's equivocation ("a kind of delight") in the preface to *Samson* reflects an uneasiness with the categorical juggling needed to find delight in fear and pity, we would be hard pressed to know from Satan that tragedies have unhappy endings. To the extent that he rehearses tragedy as the pleasures of didacticism, Satan is the mouthpiece for a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Aristotelian gesture of evading or repressing the unruliness of tragedy. That Satan's bad faith optimism is not the same thing

as Milton's reconstructed Aristotelianism could be deduced from the dramatic irony of the poem's climax. Christ's final rebuke ("Tempt not the Lord thy God" [4.561]) fulfills the Satanic requirements of prudence, brevity, and sententiousness, but does so in a fashion which refutes the affective flattening in Satan's definition of tragedy. We may feel delight, but Satan is treated to a double-dose of the Aristotelian medicine he would repress: "So strook with dread and anguish fell the Fiend" (4.576).

Satan's fall, then, is meaningful as narrative and meta-narrative, for it exposes both the limits of his power and the partiality of his critical position. Casting Satan as a faux Aristotelian, one begins to suspect, is Milton's way of intimating a solution to the contradictions in the formalist position. After all, Satan's unwitting use of "repair" is Milton's wilting or conscious strategy. While the word marks the contradictions in Satan's position—he is a too cheerful Aristotelian and deeply invested in the art of war—it is also a convenient shorthand designation for the motive behind the rigorous *askesis* which is the Son's testing in *Paradise Regained*. An emblem of both the exilic experience of post-lapsarian man and its typological redemption, "repair" is the concept which allows Milton to absorb and transcend the contradictions of history.

This crossing between tragedy and rhetoric, their suggestive proximity in Satan's defense of classical learning, raises several questions. Should we assume that both arts are suspect and cannot transcend the downward spiral of unredeemed history? Or does the strategic placement of "repair" imply that rhetoric might be redeemed? If rhetoric can be retrieved, under what terms is this possible, and what implications does this have for Milton's art? To answer these questions we need to understand that Satan's argument depends on the supposition that rhetoric, in both matter and manner, is sublime (e.g., "fulmin'd"). It is with this idea, arguably yet another complication in Satan's Aristotelianism, that Christ most directly takes issue. A point-by-point refutation of Satan's defense of oratory, Christ's speech reappropriates and dramatically recasts the constitutive (ontological) ground of rhetoric.

Thir Orators thou then extoll'st, as those  
 The top of Eloquence, Statists indeed,  
 And lovers of thir Country, as may seem;  
 But herein to our Prophets far beneath,  
 As men divinely taught, and better teaching  
 The solid rules of Civil Government  
 In thir majestic unaffected stile  
 Then all the Oratory of *Greece* and *Rome*.  
 (4.353–60)

If Christ underscores the moral ambiguity of rhetoric with a categorical *ad hominem* attack (“Statists ... as may seem”), his response also describes a counter-sublime, specifically, the “majestic unaffected stile.” This version of the sublime confounds classical distinctions between high and low styles, yet the result, as the phrase “solid rules of Civil Government” would imply, is anything but chaos. While Satan’s “resistless eloquence” energizes speaker and hearer alike, with tragic consequences for the state, Christian rhetoric devolves from and ensures a sort of politico-ontological stability.

Satan’s argument is of a piece with his performance in the first two books of *Paradise Lost*, for the common denominator in this account of rhetoric and the sublime is that which characterizes Satanic activity generally, mobility. Although the etymology of “sublime” implies that it is an activity of standing, its liminality presupposes the sudden discovery of great depths or heights. In this regard, the sublime is the experience of what Emerson, projecting a poet for the matter of America, would call the “tyrannous eye,” and its pleasures are of a piece with those provided by the rhetor’s afflatus and the spectacles of epic heroism. Thus, just as Satan’s early adventurism in *Paradise Lost* is instructively undercut by God’s irony (“Onely begotten Son, seest thou what rage / Transports our adversarie ...” [3.80–81]), so too his celebration of the sublime sight of “that fierce Democratie” should be resisted, for it glamorizes both the demiurgic pretensions of the demagogue and the transporting violence of war.

The crucial element in Christ’s reappropriation of the sublime—underscored by the fact that he triumphs by standing—is the idea of stability or solidity. Milton’s aim is not so much to repropose the formalist gambit, a partial or too cheerful version of which is the enabling assumption behind Satan’s bad faith rehearsal of the power of eloquence, as it is to point a way beyond the contradictions of tragic formalism. Marked by humility and lack of pretense, the “unaffected stile” is untroubled by the unruliness of tragic affect. Nor is this merely proscriptive, a “thou shalt not” which requires us to be satisfied with less, for the humble style is “majestic” and speaks the language of the prophets. While tragedy courts the sublime only by disrupting its own formal order, rather the reverse is true of the Miltonic ideal: anchored to prophecy and typology, its incursions into the sublime necessarily presuppose faith in a “formalism” of the highest order.

Returning to the crux of the “uneasie station,” we might hazard the assertion that Milton’s Aristotelianism is to good purpose. While Christ’s words are perhaps the supreme example of the “majestic unaffected stile,” and carry with them a promise of Paradise regained which refutes all political and aesthetic tragedies, their meaning, or so the critical debate would suggest, is anything but clear. Perhaps Milton means to teach a negative lesson, and his “theorized” restyling of the biblical narrative calls attention to that which can barely be expressed, much less contained, in his text. We can

domesticate the crux and argue that the passage moves within the boundaries of an orthodox Christology, but to do so diminishes Milton's poem. If we must recognize our interpretive quest in Satan's determination to understand who is properly a Son of God, we need not share his confidence in the power of "narrower Scrutiny." Skirting the unruliness of classical tragedy, the climax of *Paradise Regained* maps a counter-sublime which is poetic, political, and theological. Yet the eschatological promise of the brief epic, which requires of us a commitment to the arduous work of reading and repairing, is also a reminder of the limitations of theory and the necessity of faith.

#### NOTES

1. Interpretations of the crux constitute a cottage industry within the voluminous and ever-growing scholarship on Milton and his work. Rather than try and review all the studies in a note, I would refer the reader to the guides by Parides and Klemp.

2. For a recent refutation of the idea that the final temptation should be understood as an "identity test," see Rushdy.

3. Stein, for instance, writes: "What has happened? Surely not that Christ is directly replying to Satan's challenge by finally declaring himself, by saying: thou shalt not tempt me, the Lord thy God! That would be to violate the whole discipline ... of Christ's moral and intellectual example: the witness of whence he is by the seeking of glory not for himself but for Him who sent him ... The flesh becomes word. Christ says it, and then becomes it. The full revelation occurs, the miracle of epiphany, theophany, but not as an act of will, not from the self" (128–29). It might be invidious to say that Stein's insistent orthodoxy deconstructs itself, but epiphany and theophany are not the same thing, and this terminological slippage, if not quite sufficient to readmit a hypostatized Son, is testimony to the difficulty of Milton's text.

4. Somewhat differently, Pearce finds the Milton of *Paradise Regained* probing the limits of humanist rhetoric.

5. Almost any interpretation of *Paradise Regained* must sooner or later consider Milton's reading of the Bible. See, for example, Ades and Radzinowicz.

6. Fish's "Things and Actions Indifferent" is a provocative essay which pushes the logic of a "narrowed" plot to its ultimate conclusion.

7. Weinberg's study of the development of critical theory in the Italian Renaissance (and especially of the shaping presence of Aristotle) is still authoritative.

8. For a fine discussion of the Oedipus Complex, Freud, Milton's similes, and the odd disruptions present in the poem's climax, see Kerrigan, who has the distinction of being one of the few commentators to note that Milton's description of Satan's fall, especially in the syntax of 4.581–85, has the peculiar effect of making us confuse Christ and Satan.

9. The temptation of learning has been a problem at least since the time of



Pope's study, which found that there were not significant precedents for Milton's procedure. More recent treatments include Rajan and Swanson and Mulryan.

10. Fry's discussion of Aristotle and Longinus is situated in the context of contemporary post-structuralist debates and meant to offer a way out of the impasse of deconstruction. To oversimplify considerably, one of the theses of the book is that the (Longinian) sublime, particularly in its capacity for disrupting formal order, exposes the ground of being; thus, it is an alternative to the "aporias" which deconstruction almost inevitably registers as absence or loss. Much has been written about Milton and Aristotle. See, for example, the studies by Rees and Wood.

11. The problem of Milton and the sublime dates from the eighteenth-century commentaries to *Paradise Lost*. A standard (albeit somewhat dated) reference for the transmission of the sublime is Monk, who takes a dim view of the idea that Milton was a theorized poet of the sublime: "It is a strange paradox that the most sublime of English poets should not have caught from Longinus the suggestion of the sublime as the expression of the ultimate values in art, beyond the reach of rhetoric and her rules. He did not; and it was left to the propounders of an adolescent aesthetic in the next century to find in John Milton's poems ... the supreme illustration of whatever particular type of the sublime they advocated" (20). While it is perhaps true that Milton was not explicitly a theoretician of the sublime, he could have learned all he needed to know from Tasso and Ariosto. Indeed, the description of Christ and Satan flying through the air ("and without wing / Of *Hippogrif* bore through the Air sublime" [4.541–12]) is suggestive in this respect. If it seems late in the game to remind us that *Paradise Regained* is not romance, the allusion nonetheless implies that Milton means to reclaim the sublime for Christian poetry. For a recent and illuminating discussion of Milton's negotiation of the romance tradition, see Patterson.

#### WORKS CITED

- Ades, John I. "Paradise Regained: The Gospel According to John Milton." *CEA Critic* 51.1 (1988): 74–87.
- The Bible. (Authorized King James Version). New York: Oxford UP, 1967.
- Fish, Stanley. "Inaction and Silence: The Reader in *Paradise Regained*." *Calm of Mind*. Ed. J.A. Wittreich, Jr. Cleveland and London: Case Western Reserve UP, 1971. 25–47.
- . "Things and Actions Indifferent: The Temptation of Plot in *Paradise Regained*." *Milton Studies* 17 (1983): 163–85.
- Fry, Paul. *The Reach of Criticism*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1983.
- Kerrigan, William. "The Riddle of *Paradise Regained*." *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature*. Ed. Jan Wojcik and Raymond-Jean Frontain. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1984. 64–80.
- Klemp, Paul. *The Essential Milton*. New York: G.K. Hall, 1989.
- MacCallum, Hugh. *Milton and the Sons of God*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1986.

- MacKellar, Walter, ed. *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*. Vol. 4. New York: Columbia UP, 1975.
- Milton, John. *The Complete English Poetry of John Milton*. Ed. John T. Shawcross. New York UP, 1963.
- Monk, Samuel H. *The Sublime: A Study of the Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England*. 1935. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960.
- Patrides, C.A. *An Annotated Critical Bibliography of John Milton*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1987.
- Patterson, Annabel. "Paradise Regained: A Last Chance at True Romance." *Milton Studies* 17 (1983): 187–208.
- Pearce, James M. "The Theology of Representation: The Meta-Argument of *Paradise Regained*." *Milton Studies* 24 (1989): 277–96.
- Pope, Elizabeth Marie. *Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins P, 1947.
- Radzinowicz, Mary Ann. "How Milton Read the Bible: The Case of *Paradise Regained*." *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*. Ed. Dennis Danielson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. 207–23.
- Rajan, Balachandra. "Jerusalem and Athens: The Temptation of Learning in *Paradise Regained*." *The Upright Heart and Pun*. Ed. Amadeus P. Fiore. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1967. 61–74.
- Rees, B.R. *Aristotle's Theory and Milton's Practice: Samson Agonistes*. Birmingham: U of Birmingham P, 1972.
- Rushdy, Ashraf H.A. "Standing Alone on the Pinnacle: Milton in 1752." *Milton Studies* 26 (1991): 193–218.
- Stein, Arnold. *Heroic Knowledge*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1957.
- Swanson, Donald, and John Mulryan. "The Son's Presumed Contempt For Learning in *Paradise Regained*: A Biblical and Patristic Resolution." *Milton Studies* 27 (1992): 243–61.
- Weinberg, Bernard. *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961.
- Wood, Derek N.C. "Catharsis and 'Passion Spent': *Samson Agonistes* and Some Problems in Aristotle." *Milton Quarterly* 26 (1992): 1–9.



J. MARTIN EVANS

*The Birth of the Author:  
Milton's Poetic Self-Construction*

Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

**F**or a writer with such a notoriously strong personality, Milton was surprisingly reticent about taking public credit for his poems. His first published work, *On Shakespeare*, was printed anonymously in the second *Folio* (1632), his second, *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1637) was "not openly acknowledged by the Author," as Henry Lawes put it in the dedication, and his third, *Lycidas* (1638), had affixed to it only his initials, "J. M." Not until the collected edition of 1645 was "Mr. John Milton" openly acknowledged as the author of any of his published poems, and even there his identity was immediately problematized by the Greek epigram that was printed under what purports to be his portrait:

That an unskilful hand had carved this print  
You'd say at once, seeing the living face;  
But, finding here no jot of me, my friends,  
Laugh at the botching artist's misattempt.<sup>1</sup>

No sooner does Milton appear in person, as it were, than we are told that it

---

From *Milton Studies* XXXVIII (2000). © 2000 by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

really isn't him at all. Now you see him, now you don't. Even as late as 1667 there is some typographical hesitancy about affirming Milton's authorship. On the first two title pages of the first edition of *Paradise Lost*, we are told that the poem was "Written in TEN BOOKS By JOHN MILTON," but Milton's name shrinks visibly between the first and second issues, and on the title page of the third it has been reduced once again to his initials: "The Author J. M." "The Author JOHN MILTON" is announced for the first time on the title page of the fourth issue of the epic in 1668, and his name appears thus in all his subsequent poetic works. It is almost as if the poet had gradually materialized before our eyes during the course of his career. A similar progression from initial anonymity to ultimate self-assertion, I will argue, takes place within Milton's poems themselves. What we seem to be witnessing as we read his non-dramatic verse is exactly the opposite of the process Roland Barthes describes in the epigraph: the birth of the author.<sup>2</sup>

In an area as hotly contested as that of literary authorship a few preliminary distinctions and caveats are in order. The first and most important is the distinction between what Patricia M. Spacks calls the "poet-as-creator-of-the-poem" and the "poet-as-imagined-presence-in-the-poem."<sup>3</sup> I will be concerned almost exclusively with the latter, with Milton's "author function," as Michel Foucault would have it.<sup>4</sup> As a result, I will have little to say about the vexed question of the relationship between the two figures. In a sense, of course, they can never be the same person, for as C. S. Lewis pointed out a long time ago, it is impossible "for anyone to describe himself, even in prose, without making of himself, to some extent, a dramatic creation," and it is consequently "quite impossible that the character represented in the poem should be identically the same with that of the poet."<sup>5</sup> To take a concrete instance, the Milton who grieves for the death of Edward King in *Lycidas* is not the same person as the Milton who put that grief into words. Between the "poet-as-creator-of-the-poem" and the "poet-as-imagined-presence-in-the-poem" yawns the unfathomable mystery of composition.

On the other hand, it seems to me that Robert McMahan pushes this argument rather too far when he insists that the speaker in *Paradise Lost* is a purely fictional character whose intellectual and moral growth is one of the poem's major themes.<sup>6</sup> Granted that it may be misleading to conflate Milton with his authorial persona, the fact remains that the correspondences between the two figures are remarkably close, far closer than those between, say, the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* and the still shadowy figure of his creator.<sup>7</sup> The characteristics that Milton the historical author attributed to Milton the narrator of *Paradise Lost*—blindness, old age, social and political isolation, religious faith—positively invite us to identify the one with the other. As Janet Adelman notes, "it is clear that the narrator is a consciously controlled character in the poem; but it is equally clear that Milton is anxious

to ensure that we recognize him in the narrator."<sup>8</sup> It is probably no accident that, despite what Leah Marcus has called the "vast interplay of poststructuralist energies" that has been brought to bear on the issue of "the writing subject,"<sup>9</sup> Milton for the most part remains Milton "without the deauthorizing bracket of quotation marks."<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the "poet-as-imagined-presence-in-the-poem" may present himself to us in two quite different ways. On the one hand, he may simply be the unidentified source of the voice that utters the poetic text. We know someone is there because we can hear the words he is speaking, but because he never talks about himself we have no idea who he is or what he looks like. To borrow the cinematic vocabulary Herbert Phelan uses to analyse *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, he is an invisible "off-screen" presence, projecting a scene which he either witnessed or imagined but in which he does not himself appear. On the other hand, the poet may be an identifiable character in his own poem, an "on-screen" figure whom we can both hear and see.<sup>11</sup> Using the first person singular, he presents himself to us as a self-referential reality, an actor whose thoughts and deeds, feelings and appearance, are themselves part of the poem's subject matter. He no longer simply produces the text; he actively participates in it. If the first kind of poetic presence remains steadfastly outside the poem, this second kind of authorial persona operates inside it as well.

## I. THE 1645 *POEMS*

Bearing these distinctions and qualifications in mind, I propose to trace the gradual emergence of an individualized poetic presence in the editions which appeared in public under Milton's name, beginning with the 1645 collection of his shorter works.<sup>12</sup> According to Marcus, this extraordinary volume presents us already with a full fledged portrait of the artist as a young man, a portrait which is constructed partly by the order in which the texts are printed, partly by the poet's running commentary on his own poems. No other English poet, she points out, "had so overtly inserted his own voice in the text as a commentary on what he had achieved (and even the age at which he had achieved it)." His authorial interventions "are quite unprecedented in an English volume of poems" and would have "looked much newer ... to his contemporaries" than they do to us today. Their effect, she concludes, is to inaugurate "a new view of literary subjecthood," namely "the invention of an individual literary life."<sup>13</sup> The Milton of the 1645 edition is a highly self-conscious imaginative construct, the precursor of all those "authors" whose "lives and works" furnished the material for the kind of literary biography that became so popular in succeeding centuries.

So far as the volume as a whole is concerned, Marcus's argument seems

to me to be entirely persuasive. As John K. Hale put it in an almost contemporaneous article on “Milton’s Self-Presentation in *Poems ... 1645*,” “the editorial acts of selection and grouping and sequential arrangement ... add up to a major personal statement. They declare, so to speak, ‘This is my self; these are its powers.’”<sup>14</sup> But both critics base their arguments almost exclusively on evidence that resides *outside* the poems themselves, the order in which they appear and the external prefaces (“In this monody the author laments”) and postscripts (“This subject the author finding to be above his years”) that enclose but rarely, if ever, penetrate them. The “new historical subject” that Marcus describes presides over the poems like a guardian angel, but he does not appear inside them. His relationship to the texts themselves is not unlike that between the portrait of Milton gazing out from the foreground of Marshall’s engraving and the youthful figures cavorting in the pastoral background, inhabitants of a contiguous but separate world.

The texts of the poems themselves, free of the editorial apparatus that surrounds them, tell a rather different story, and it is on this story that I would like to focus. (All quotations are from Merritt Y. Hughes, editor, *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* [New York: 1957].) To begin at the beginning, the first poem in the 1645 volume, *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity*, has often been described as a kind of literary epiphany, either heralding Milton’s coming of age as a poet, or, still more egocentrically, using “the occasion of Christ’s birth to announce his own poetic nativity.”<sup>15</sup> Attractive as they may be from a purely historical point of view—Milton did indeed reach the age of twenty one in December of 1629, when he composed the poem, and he did place it at the front of his volume, ahead of several earlier works—these autobiographical readings begin to seem rather less plausible once we start reading the opening stanzas. For Milton emphatically disclaims any responsibility for the poem at all. The “voice” (27) that welcomes the Christ-child, and the “humble ode” (24) with which it celebrates his birth, both belong to the “Heavenly Muse” (15). No sooner do we hear “Mr. John Milton” begin to speak than he abruptly silences himself and consigns the rest of the poem to a third party, who begins a new poem in a new verse form. Like the “holy song” that promises to “run back and fetch the age of gold” in stanza fourteen, the author’s speech is interrupted and displaced by a stronger force which takes over the rest of the poem—“this must *not yet* be so” (150). It is almost as if Milton had made his entrance too soon.

The hymn that follows consistently enacts the premise that it is being sung by the Heavenly Muse, in concert with “the angel choir” (27), rather than by the individual who spoke the poem. For the notion that the “joyous news of heav’nly infant’s birth / My muse with Angels did divide to sing,” as Milton put it later,<sup>16</sup> is powerfully reinforced by the fact that their song is simultaneously an “ode” (24) and a “hymn” (17), both of which are

essentially choric in nature. As the insistently plural pronouns keep reminding us—"our" ears, "our" senses, "our" fancy, "our" song (126, 127, 134, 239)—we are listening to "a choir-poem that harmoniously effaces the individual."<sup>17</sup> indeed, the *Nativity Ode* is the most rigorously depersonalized of all the poet's nondramatic works, with not a single "I," "me," or "my" in its entire thirty-one stanzas. If Milton ever wrote a poem in which "the very identity of the body writing" is lost, as Barthes put it, this surely is it. In one of the most recent studies of the poem to appear in print, Richard Halpern argues that "by putting off epic expansiveness to dwell in the 'humble ode'" Milton enacts a *kenosis* or "emptying out" analogous to "Christ's decision to forego heaven and lie 'meanly wrapt in the rude manger.'" Milton's *kenosis* is even more radical than Halpern recognizes: he has effectively erased himself from his own poem.<sup>18</sup>

Having withdrawn at the end of the introduction, he never makes his presence felt again. One of the most striking features of the *Nativity Ode* is the absence of any closing epilogue in which the poet might reassume the authorial control he gave away in the prologue. The next time we encounter him is not at the end of the *Nativity Ode*, as we might have expected, but at the beginning of *The Passion*, where he emphatically asserts both his own presence and his responsibility for the ensuing poem:

For now to sorrow must I tune *my* song,  
And set *my* Harp to notes of saddest woe.

(8–9; italics mine)

The disembodied voice we heard in the opening four stanzas of the *Nativity Ode*, still speaks to us in the same verse form, but it has now assumed a concrete physical identity. In both grammatical and existential terms, the speaker has become a "person" that we can see as well as hear. Yet despite the bardic pose he attempts to strike, he looks and sounds like nothing so much as a nervous young child performing for the first time in front of an audience of grown-ups, striving self-consciously to assume the right posture and to compose his features into the appropriate expression:

Befriend me Night, best Patroness of grief,  
Over the Pole thy thickest mantle throw,  
And work my flatter'd fancy to belief,  
That Heav'n and Earth are color'd with my woe;  
My sorrows are too dark for day to know:  
The leaves should all be black whereon I write,  
And letters where my tears have washt, a warmish white.

(29–35)



In this stanza alone there are six first person singular pronouns, and the poem as a whole is so relentlessly self-referential that we can scarcely glimpse its ostensible subject through the veil of the poet's "woe" (32). In W. R. Parker's words, "Milton was writing a poem about himself writing a poem."<sup>19</sup> The passion that he describes is his own rather than Christ's.

After this unsuccessful debut, in the following eight poems the poet disappears from view almost entirely. With the exception of a fleeting appearance in the *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*, where Milton writes "So have I seen some tender slip / Sav'd with care from Winter's nip" (35–36), we don't see him again until *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. What is more, in the first three of the poems following *The Passion*, the odes *On Time*, *Upon the Circumcision*, and *At a Solemn Music*, we hear not the voice of the poet himself but a communal voice that sounds very much like those of the Heavenly Muse and the angel choir in the *Nativity Ode*. For here, too, in strict accordance with generic decorum, the first person pronouns are consistently plural:

For *we* by rightful doom remediless  
 Were lost in death, till he that dwelt above  
 . . . . .  
 Emptied his glory, ev'n to nakedness;  
 And that great Cov'nant which *we* still transgress  
 Entirely satisfi'd,  
 And the full wrath beside  
 Of vengeful justice bore for our excess.

(*Upon the Circumcision*, 17–24; italics mine)

This is the voice of fallen humanity rather than that of John Milton; once again the individual poet has been submerged in a multiple consciousness that transcends any specific personal identity.

In a radical change from the *Nativity Ode* and *The Passion*, the three odes are addressed, not to the reader, but to a series of superhuman entities: to Time, to the angels who celebrated Christ's nativity, and to Voice and Verse. As a result, our relationship to the text is transformed from that of a direct participant to that of an eavesdropper: we are no longer the recipients of the speaker's utterance but its overhearers, no longer the silent partners in a potential dialogue but its auditors. And this shift from what we might call the declarative to the dramatic lyric affects the speaker, too, for it opens up the possibility that the voice we are listening to belongs not to the poet but to a *dramatis persona*, a purely imaginary construct whose thoughts and feelings do not necessarily correspond to those of the author any more than the sentiments uttered by a character in a play correspond to those of the dramatist.<sup>20</sup> In the odes this possibility remains largely unexploited—in all

three cases, the feelings the voice expresses and the values it celebrates are clearly Milton's own—but as we shall see shortly it has a crucial bearing on the way we interpret *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.

The five poems that follow the odes revert to the anonymous voice we last heard in the proem to the *Nativity Ode*, but in the first three of them it is now directed to two quite different audiences, first to the reader, and then to the poet's subject. In line 47 of *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*, for instance, the poet suddenly stops referring to the dead woman in the third person and turns to address her directly in the second:

And those Pearls of dew *she* wears,  
 Prove to be presaging tears  
 Which the sad morn had let fall  
 On *her* hast'ning funerall.  
 Gentle Lady, may *thy* grave  
 Peace and quiet ever have;  
 After this *thy* travail sore  
 Sweet rest seize thee evermore. (43–50; italics mine)

The same thing happens, albeit less dramatically, in line 5 of *Song on May Morning*:

Now the bright morning Star, Day's harbinger,  
 Comes dancing from the East, and leads with her  
 The Flow'ry May, who from *her* green lap throws  
 The yellow Cowslip, and the pale Primrose.  
 Hail bounteous May that dost inspire  
 Mirth and youth and warm desire! (1–6, italics mine)

And again in the short tribute to Shakespeare:

What needs my Shakespeare for *his* honor'd Bones  
 The labor of an age in piled Stones,  
 Or that *his* hallow'd relics should be hid  
 Under a Star-ypointing Pyramid?  
 Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame,  
 What need'st *thou* such weak witness of thy name?  
 (*On Shakespeare*, 1–6; italics mine)

In each case, the sudden change of direction calls attention to the role of the unidentified speaker by creating a second discursive coordinate by which we can plot his position in the text. He acquires, as it were, an extra dimension; we see him both bead-on and in profile.

In none of these poems, however, whether they are declarative (like the two Hobson elegies), dramatic (like the three odes), or both (like the three works I have just discussed), does the poet appear in person, as he did, so disastrously, in *The Passion*. Not until *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, which immediately follow the twin tributes to the university carrier, does he finally reenter the text, albeit somewhat cautiously. When we first encounter the poet in line 37 of *L'Allegro*, for instance, his presence is hedged about by a condition that has not yet been completely fulfilled:

And if I give thee honor due,  
Mirth, admit me of thy crew. (37–38)

For most of the remainder of the poem he is a mere shadow, a “generalized receiver of shifting impressions,” in Louis L. Martz’s memorable phrase,<sup>21</sup> whose participation is implied but never clearly affirmed by the repeated infinitives—“to live” (39), “to hear” (41), “to come” (45)—and present participles—“list’ning” (53), “walking” (57)—that describe his various activities. Indeed, the very process of seeing is described in terms so depersonalized—“Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures” (69)—that it can be narrated in the third rather than the first person: “it measures” (70), “it sees” (77). And when the speaker, for only the second time, refers to himself directly in the final lines, his presence is once again deprived of any significant impact by the surrounding conditional:

These delights, if thou canst give,  
Mirth, with thee, I mean to live. (151–52)

As Dana Brand has noted, the self of *L'Allegro* lacks psychological as well as physical substance.<sup>22</sup>

Initially, at least, the speaker in *Il Penseroso* is far more fully realized. The “walking” and “listening” are now performed by a visible “I” who “not only receives impressions from without, but also actively addresses and ‘woos’ their action.”<sup>23</sup>

Thee Chantress oft the Woods among  
I woo to hear thy Even-Song;  
And missing thee, I walk unseen  
On the dry smooth-shaven Green,  
. . . . .  
I hear the far-off Curfew sound,  
Over some wide-water’d shore. (63–75)

But as the poem continues, this energetic presence becomes increasingly passive as the mood shifts from indicative to hortative—"Or let my lamp at midnight hour / Be seen" (85–88), "And let some strange mysterious dream / Wave at his Wings" (147–48), "But let my due feet never fail / To walk" (156–57), "There let the pealing organ blow" (1–62)—and the speaker becomes in turn the object rather than the subject of the desired actions—"see me" (121), "me goddess bring" (132), "Hide me" (141), "Dissolve me" (165). After the last two requests, for concealment and dissolution, respectively, it comes as no surprise when the speaker concludes with a variation of the same self-effacing formula that his mirthful predecessor had used to bring his address to a close:

These pleasures Melancholy give,  
And I with thee will choose to live. (175–76)

The consciousness presented in *Il Penseroso* may be more continuous than that in *L'Allegro* as Brand has persuasively argued,<sup>24</sup> but it is ultimately just as tentative in its self-assertion.

Which brings us to a question that critics have been debating since the eighteenth century. Are *l'allegro* and *il penseroso*, "the same man as he is differently disposed," in Theobald's words, or are they two different people, as Dr. Johnson appears to have believed?<sup>25</sup> To put the question in a slightly different way, was Milton speaking in his own voice in both poems, or was he impersonating two quite different fictional characters, neither of whom represented his personal values and beliefs?<sup>26</sup> The external evidence is thoroughly ambiguous. Whereas the obvious similarities of phraseology and verse form suggest the first alternative, the titles themselves argue for the second. For our purposes, however, it does not really matter how we answer the question. For whether or not James Holly Hanford is right that "there is, of course, no question of two individuals. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are equally Milton,"<sup>27</sup> we are confronted by an authorial presence that has split into two competing selves. The poetic "I" we last encountered in *The Passion* has become not the kind of unified "we" who sang the three odes but a radically divided dual consciousness.

The process of reintegration begins in the first of the ten sonnets that follow the two companion poems—"Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate, / Both them I serve, and of their train am I" (13–14)—but it achieves its most complete realization in sonnet seven on the poet's twenty-third birthday. This is by far the most deeply personal poem up to this point in the volume. The nervous schoolboy of *The Passion*, who attempted unsuccessfully to treat a topic "above the years he had when he wrote it," has given way to a steadfast young man, fully aware now of the lack of "inward

ripeness" (7) that made the earlier poem a failure and determined to wait patiently upon the will of heaven. The passiveness that undermined the last part of *Il Penseroso* has become "wise," as the poet declares that his growth:

shall be *still* in strictest measure even,  
 To that same lot, however mean or high,  
 Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n.  
 (10–12)

And the conditionality which qualified the self-assertions at the end of both *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* has been transformed into a pious recognition of human dependence upon divine providence:

All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
 As ever in my great task Master's eye. (13–14)

Yet powerful as it may be in comparison with the poems that preceded it in the collection, sonnet seven is finally about a self that is still unformed and unproductive. The poet is "near" his "manhood" (6), but he has not yet arrived. His spring is "late" and the tree has not yet blossomed. "The Author John Milton" is still a work in progress. Indeed, in the very next poem, sonnet eight, he splits once again into two distinct entities, the confident speaker issuing a series of orders to the military officer who has captured the poet's home—"Guard them, and him within protect from harms" (4)—and the silent (though potentially eloquent) occupant on whose behalf the speaker has intervened as if he were quite literally another human being—"He can requite thee" (5), "he knows" (5), "he can spread" (7). With the exception of the editorial comment at the end of *The Passion*, this is the first time Milton has referred to himself in the third person. It is almost as if he had become simultaneously the magisterial reader who announced that the poem's topic "was above the years [the author] had when he wrote it" and the youthful writer who actually "left it unfinished."

After two sonnets addressed to virtuous women and a masque presented to the countess of Derby, the "poet-as-imagined-presence-in-the-poem" makes his final appearance in the famous elegy that concludes this section of the volume. Referring to himself once again in the third person, Milton informs us in the headnote that *Lycidas* is a "monody" sung by a single "author," and indeed the poem begins as if it were a species of personal monologue delivered by an "on-screen" speaker in the dramatic present:

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more  
 Ye Myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,  
 I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude. (1–3)

But as the authorial voice continues to speak, it gradually begins to shed its initial identity. The first hint that we are not in the presence of a stable and unified self comes in line 56, when the speaker suddenly corrects the question he has just posed:

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep  
 Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?  
 . . . . .  
 Ay me, I fondly dream!  
 Had ye been there—for what could that have done? (50–57)

As I have noted elsewhere, the second thoughts open up a tiny fissure in the poet's consciousness between the self that interrogated the nymphs and the self that subsequently realizes the pointlessness of doing so.<sup>28</sup> The fissure widens in line 76, when Phoebus Apollo intervenes to remind the rebellious poet that true fame is to be found in heaven:

But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,  
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
 Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,  
 And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"  
 Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears. (73–77)

The unexpected preterite verbs create a temporal and epistemological gap between the speaker who revolted against the Muse's discipline (64–76) and the speaker who learns to submit himself to the authority of "all-judging Jove" (76–84).<sup>29</sup> The two figures are still the same person—Phoebus touches "my trembling ears" not "his"—but from this point on, his perspective has been transformed by the revelations of the god of poetry.

What is more, Phoebus's interruption—advice from a source outside the speaker's consciousness—momentarily deprives the poet of his authorial function. He heard these words, and recorded them, but he did not compose them; for a few lines, the "author" has disappeared, just as he did at the end of the proem to the *Nativity Ode*. The same thing happens on an even larger scale when the "Pilot of the Galilean lake" (109) arrives on the scene to condemn the hireling shepherds and predict the day of judgement. As Stanley Fish has pointed out in a brilliant analysis of the first person voice in *Lycidas*, this rival speaker completely ignores the grieving swain and addresses his diatribe not to the poet, as Phoebus Apollo had done, but to the dead Lycidas.<sup>30</sup> Milton has virtually ceased to be a presence in his own poem, or, to put it slightly differently, he has so completely submerged himself in the figure of St. Peter that he has left a temporary vacuum in the rhetorical space he once occupied.

By the time he returns to invoke the assistance of Alpheus (132), his identity has been compromised to such an extent that it has apparently disintegrated, for, as the plural possessive pronouns imply, the “frail thoughts” that “dally with false surmise” (153) and the “moist vows” that are eventually “denied” (159) belong not to a single but to a multiple personality. For a few lines, at least, the choric voice we last heard in the ode *At a solemn Music* has taken over a poem that began as a monologue. At line 165, however, the poet suddenly reasserts himself by abruptly silencing the speakers who had just displaced him:

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,  
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead. (165–66)

So violent is this reentry that more than one critic has attributed these words to a completely new character.<sup>31</sup> But as the rhythmic and verbal echoes of the opening line seem to insist, this is the same voice we heard addressing the laurels and myrtles at the beginning of the elegy. The poem is starting all over again.

No sooner has the speaker regained control of his authorial role, however, than he undergoes a still more drastic transformation. Once again the tense changes from the dramatic present to the narrative past, but this time the author and the genre of *Lycidas* change with it:

Thus sang the uncouth swain to th'Oaks and rills,  
While the still morn went out with Sandals gray;  
He touch't the tender stops of various Quills,  
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay. (186–189)

The historical “author” bewailing “a learned friend” has become a fictional “swain,” and his “Doric lay” has become part of a larger meta-narrative, the existence of which Phoebus Apollo’s earlier interruption had only hinted at. Fish describes this phenomenon solely in terms of the speaker’s disappearance from the scene of his own poem,<sup>32</sup> but there is more involved here than a disappearance. As the old speaker disappears, the poem acquires a new author, who begins what is essentially a new poem in a new verse form. As I have shown elsewhere, the unidentified voice that speaks the final ottava rima belongs to a speaker we have never heard before, either in *Lycidas* or in the poems preceding it, a speaker who hails from the violent and erotic world of sixteenth-century romantic epic.<sup>33</sup> The elegy and the poet who sang it fade away into the distance, together with the rest of Milton’s youthful creations, and we are left with the sense that for the second time in this volume we have witnessed a “nativity.” A mysterious new self has been born

out of the speaker's anguish, but we will have to wait until "Tomorrow" (193) before we find out who he is.

As even this brief analysis may suggest, *Lycidas* repeats in miniature most of the evasive maneuvers I have traced in the poems that preceded it. The shifts back and forth between a single and a multiple consciousness, the recurring disappearances and reappearances of an authorial persona, the unexpected changes of direction in the speaker's discourse, and the pervasive impression that these are the words of someone who is not yet "too much of a poet," as Milton put it in the verse letter to John Rouse,<sup>34</sup> all combine to create a poetic presence that is radically unstable, a tentative and hesitant self whose position is finally usurped by the anonymous figure who invades line 186 of *Lycidas*. Far from painting a coherent "portrait of the artist" as Marcus suggests, or telling the story of a "rising poet" steadily advancing towards maturity, as Martz has argued, the constantly shifting forms of poetic selfhood we encounter in the poems of the 1645 volume call into question the very possibility of a unified and fully realized poetic consciousness.<sup>35</sup> Like Montaigne's *Essays*, the poems read like a series of experiments in self-presentation, sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, sometimes singular, sometimes plural, sometimes direct, sometimes oblique, but always inherently provisional in their efforts to construct the "poet-as-imagined-presence-in-the-poem." As the Virgilian motto on the title page seems to imply, Milton is still only a "future bard."

## II. *PARADISE LOST*

A seventeenth-century reader familiar with *The Poems of Mr John Milton* might well have expected to encounter a rather more fully developed and mature authorial persona when he began to read *Paradise Lost. A Poem Written in Ten Books By John Milton* (or *J. M.*) some twenty-two years later. This expectation would be sadly disappointed, at least in the opening lines. For the self-confident epic narrator who expelled the swain in the final ottava rima of *Lycidas* has disappeared, along with the verse form in which he spoke. In his place we are confronted with a speaker who has adopted the verse form associated with the one genre in which the figure of the author normally plays no role whatsoever: drama. What is more, this speaker almost immediately excludes himself from the poem he has just begun:

Of Man's First Disobedience and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,... (1.1-5)



At this point of the epic's opening sentence, as Janet Adelman has observed, anyone with the slightest knowledge of either classical or Renaissance epic would have expected the next line to begin "I sing."<sup>36</sup> Instead, the unidentified voice invites an external force to assume the narrative burden: "Sing heavenly Muse" (1.6). As in the proem to the *Nativity Ode*, a self-effacing speaker has consigned the rest of the poem to a third party.

In this case, however, the poet's abdication is less clear-cut, for shortly afterwards he relegates the Muse to the role of assistant in an enterprise in which he is still the prime mover:

I thence

Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous Song,  
That with no middle flight intends to soar  
Above th'Aonian Mount  
. . . . .  
Instruct me  
. . . . .

What in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support;  
That to the highth of this great Argument  
I may assert Eternal Providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men. (1.12–26)

In the *Nativity Ode* the Heavenly Muse was asked to present "*thy* humble ode" (24) to the infant Christ-child. Here she is only invoked as an aid to "my adventurous song." The burden of authorial responsibility has shifted significantly. Not for very long, though. Just two lines later the speaker once again surrenders control of the poem to the Muse as he urges her not only to assist him but also to take over the role of narrator herself:

Say first, for Heav'n hides nothing from thy view,  
Nor the deep Tract of Hell, say first what cause  
Mov'd our Grand Parents in that happy State,  
Favor'd of Heav'n so highly, to fall off  
From thir Creator  
. . . . .  
Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt? (1.27–33)

Strictly speaking, everything that follows is an answer to that question, provided by the poet's divine informant.<sup>37</sup> Hence the repeated references to "Men," in lines 685 and 740 of Book One and in lines 496–97 of Book Two; the voice that describes human folly and corruption in these passages clearly belongs to a higher order of being than the human.

The authorial persona here behaves in much the same way as the figure of the poet in the 1645 edition, continually vacillating between self-erasure and self-assertion as he struggles to find a place for himself in his own text. But as *Paradise Lost* continues, the speaker gradually begins to assume a rather more stable poetic identity. In the proem to Book Three, for instance, we learn that he himself has voyaged with Satan to the shores of hell and back again:

Thee I revisit now with bolder wing,  
 Escap't the Stygian Pool, though long detain'd  
 In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight  
 Through utter and through middle darkness borne  
 With other notes than to th' Orphean Lyre  
 I sung of Chaos and Eternal Night,  
 Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down  
 The dark descent, and up to reascend,  
 Though hard and rare, thee I revisit safe. (3.13–21)

The Muse has served as his Sibyl, guiding him through the underworld, but both the infernal experiences and the words that have described them have been his, not hers. And from this point on the narrator writes consistently as if he has been physically present in the various locales he portrays. In the prologue to Book Seven we learn that the Muse has conducted him up to the heaven of heavens where he has drawn "Empyrean Air" (7.14) and then back to earth, his "Native Element" (7.16), where:

More safe I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd  
 To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,  
 On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;  
 In darkness, and with dangers compast round  
 And solitude. (7.24–28)

A second-hand third-person narrative has turned into a first-hand first-person account of a story in which the poet is himself involved,<sup>38</sup> and in which he turns from the reader to address his characters directly just as he had done in the elegies for Shakespeare and the Marchioness of Winchester:

These lull'd by Nightingales imbracing slept,  
 And on thir naked limbs the flow'ry roof  
 Show'r'd Roses, which the Morn repair'd. Sleep on,  
 Blest pair; and O yet happiest if ye seek  
 No happier state, and know to know no more.  
 (4.771–75; italics mine)<sup>39</sup>

“The Author John Milton” has finally taken charge of his own poem, with the result that in the prologue to Book Nine he no longer prays directly to the Muse, as he had in the prologues to Books One, Three, and Seven, but delivers a literary manifesto to his readers:

No more of talk where God or Angel Guest  
 With Man, as with his Friend, familiar us'd  
 To sit indulgent, and with him partake  
 Rural repast, permitting him the while  
 Venial discourse unblam'd: I now must change  
 Those Notes to Tragic. (9.1–6)

He acknowledges his “Celestial Patroness” (9.21), but in the third person, and no longer does he ask her for further information. Now the story resumes on its own, without the customary act of interrogation: “The Sun was sunk, and after him the Star” (9.48).<sup>40</sup> By Book Ten, the mortal voice that began the poem so diffidently has acquired almost superhuman authority, scolding the fallen pair for their forgetfulness and bullying the reader with strident rhetorical questions:

For still they knew, and ought to have still remember'd  
 The high Injunction not to taste that Fruit,  
 Whoever tempted; which they not obeying,  
 Incurr'd, what could they less, the penalty,  
 And manifold in sin, deserv'd to fall. (10.12–16)

The poet has begun to sound like his Muse.

### III. *PARADISE REGAINED*

Four years later the evolution of Milton's literary persona reaches its climax in the opening lines of *Paradise Regained*:

I who erewhile the happy Garden sung  
 By one man's disobedience lost, now sing  
 Recover'd Paradise to all mankind,  
 By one man's firm obedience fully tried. (1.1–4)

Here for the first (and last) time in Milton's poetic career is a full-blooded authorial presence, a self-assertive “I” who takes immediate responsibility not only for the poem we are about to read but for the great poem that preceded it as well. Shortly afterwards, to be sure, he pays tribute to the

Muse's inspiring power. But even though his song may be "prompted," it is unequivocally "my" song (12). Unlike his previous incarnations, this speaker is in total control of the poem from the very beginning, freely editorializing in his own person—"Alas how simple, to these cates compar'd, / Was that crude apple that diverted Eve" (2.348–49)<sup>41</sup>—and on at least one occasion turning his back on the reader in order to relate part of the story to the character who actually lived it:

ill wast thou shrouded then,  
 O patient Son of God, yet only stood'st  
 Unshaken; nor yet stay'd the terror there.  
 Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies, round  
 Environ'd thee, some howl'd, some yell'd, some shriek'd,  
 Some bent at thee thir fiery darts, while thou  
 Satt'st unappall'd in calm and sinless peace. (4.419–25)

It is an extraordinary moment. For a few lines, at least, we are completely excluded from the narrative scene while the poet engages in a private act of reminiscence with his hero. The rhetorical device that gave an extra dimension to the speaker in the elegies on Shakespeare and the Marchioness of Winchester has been enlisted in the service of a narrator so powerful that he can turn his protagonist into his audience. The birth of the author is finally complete.

In Milton's literary career, Stanley Fish wrote, "the poet's fierce egoism is but one half of the story."<sup>42</sup> The other half, I have suggested, is a long, drawn out process of somewhat tentative experimentation which produced an authentic and fully integrated poetic self only after a lifetime of false starts, unexpected retreats, and detours into passivity and plurality. The slowly evolving figure whose various twists and turns, entries and exits, divisions and unifications I have traced was anything but the self-confident patriarch we have recently been taught to discern in his poetry. "The Author John Milton" took a long time to be born.

## NOTES

1. David Masson, *The Life of John Milton* (Gloucester, Mass., 1965), vol. 3, 459. The relationship between the portrait and the Greek text underneath it has been the subject of a good deal of critical attention in recent years. See, in particular, John Hale, "Milton's Self Presentation in *Poems ... 1645*," *MQ* 25 (1991): 37–48; Leah Marcus, "Milton as Historical Subject," *MQ* 25 (1991): 120–27; Gary Spear, "Reading before the Lines: Typography, Iconography, and the Author in Milton's 1645 Frontispiece," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985–1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton, N.Y., 1993), 187–94;

and Randall Ingram, "The Writing Poet: The Descent from Song in *The Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin (1645)*," in *Milton Studies* 34, ed. Albert C. Labriola (Pittsburgh, 1996), 179–97.

2. I do not treat either Milton's translations or his dramatic works, because, of course, for these texts, questions of authorial presence would be irrelevant. For reasons of length I omit any consideration of his poems in languages other than English.

3. Introduction to Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams, *The Author in His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism* (New Haven, 1978), x.

4. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josue V Harari (Ithaca, 1979), 148.

5. C.S. Lewis and E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Personal Heresy* (Oxford, 1965), 9–10.

6. Robert McMahon, *The Two Poets of Paradise Lost* (Baton Rouge, 1998), especially the introduction and chapter 5.

7. See Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, 1965), ch. 2.

8. Janet Adelman, "Creation and the Place of the Poet in *Paradise Lost*," in *The Author in His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism*, ed. Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams (New Haven, 1978), 65, n. 4. Cf. Annabel Patterson's comment in the introduction to *John Milton* (London, 1992): "Yet the fact remains that anyone reading *Paradise Lost* ... runs up against the irreducible and insistent presence of Milton the author, 'presence,' 'Milton' and 'author' all, of course, being subject to our inference that Milton was (carefully or anxiously) constructing them for us and for himself" (7).

9. Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 143.

10. Marcus, "Milton as Historical Subject," 120.

11. Herbert J. Phelan, "What Is the Persona Doing in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*?" in *Milton Studies* 22, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh, 1986), 3–19.

12. A rather different pattern might emerge if the poems were treated in the order in which Milton actually wrote them, and if my interests were psychological and biographical that would no doubt be the appropriate way to proceed. My concern here, however, is with the way in which Milton presented his authorial persona to his readers, and for that reason I have focused on the poems as they appeared in print in the seventeenth century. As Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy put it many years ago, "from the viewpoint of literary history there are clear reasons for preserving and emphasizing [the 1645 edition] as a volume in its own right, keeping the arrangement which Milton himself made" (*Poems of Mr John Milton: The 1649 Edition with Essays in Analysis* [New York, 1951]), vi.

13. Marcus, "Milton as Historical Subject," 121, 124.

14. Hale, "Milton's Self-Presentation," 41.

15. Richard Halpern, "The Great Instauration: Imaginary Narratives in Milton's 'Nativity Ode,'" in *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (New York, 1987), 6. See also C. W. R. D. Moseley, *The Poetic Birth: Milton's Poems of 1645* (Aldershot, U.K. 1991), 97–114.

16. *The Passion*, lines 3–4.

17. Paul H. Fry, *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* (New Haven, 1980), 44. 18. "The Great Instauration," 4.

19. W.R. Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1968), vol. I, 72.

20. It is theoretically possible, of course, that the voice in a declarative poem belongs to a persona rather than to the author, as I have argued it does in the hymn in the *Nativity Ode*. The sentiments of the "Heav'nly Muse" correspond so closely to Milton's, however, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish them from each other.

21. Louis L. Martz, "The Rising Poet," in *Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry* (New Haven, 1980), 47. Cf. Dana Brand's observation that "Everything appears as a pure, spontaneous experience, not as an experience 'had' by a self-conscious observer" ("Self-Construction and Self-Dissolution in 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,'" *MQ* 15 [1981]: 117).

22. Brand, "Self-Construction and Self-Dissolution," 116–19.

23. Martz, "The Rising Poet," 48.

24. Brand, "Self-Construction and Self-Dissolution," 116–19.

25. *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. by George B. Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1905), vol. I, 165–67.

26. The recurrent use of the term "persona" in recent discussions of the two poems suggests that the latter alternative has come to dominate critical thinking about them.

27. James Holly Hanford, "The Youth of Milton: An Interpretation of His Early Development," in *Studies in Shakespeare, Milton, and Donne* (New York, 1925), 131–33.

28. J. Martin Evans, *The Road from Horton: Looking Backwards in Lycidas* (Victoria, 1983), 68.

29. John Crowe Ransom originally called attention to this anomaly in his essay "A Poem Nearly Anonymous," in *The American Review* 1 (1933), 179–203, 444–467.

30. Stanley Fish, "Lycidas: A Poem Finally Anonymous," *Glyph* 8 (1981): 12.

31. In "The Dread Voice in *Lycidas*," in *Milton Studies* 9, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh, 1976), 238, W. B. Madsen argues that they are spoken by the archangel Michael whose protective powers the shepherds had invoked in lines 162–64. Fish, too, believes that "these are entirely new accents spoken by an entirely new voice" ("*Lycidas*," 14), but he does not attribute them to Saint Michael.

32. Fish concludes that *Lycidas* is "a poem that relentlessly denies the privilege of the speaking subject ... and is finally, and triumphantly, anonymous" ("*Lycidas*," 16).

33. See Evans, *The Road from Horton*, 71–72.

34. *Ad Ioannem Rousium*, line 6.

35. In a trenchant critique of Martz's argument, Randall Ingram points out that, in order to read the 1645 volume as a narrative of poetic development, Martz is forced

to discuss the poems themselves in reverse order, concluding rather than beginning with the *Nativity Ode*. See “The Writing Poet,” 192.

36. Adelman, “Creation and the Place of the Poet in *Paradise Lost*,” 58.

37. The poet makes a brief reappearance in Book One, 376, to renew his questions; “Say Muse, thir Names then known, who first, who last; / Rous’d from the slumber?” The Muse replies in line 381ff.

38. Stanley Fish notes that the announcement “I sing” is “in marked contrast to the more deferential yielding of agency in the invocation to Book I” (“With Mortal Voice: Milton Defends against the Muse,” *ELH* 62 [1995]: 518).

39. In Book Nine, 404–407, the narrator intervenes again: “O much deceiv’d, much failing, hapless Eve, / Of thy presum’d return! event perverse!” On neither occasion, however, can Adam and Eve actually hear him.

40. Adelman contends that the prologue to Book Nine contains both “the strongest statement of the muse’s aid” and “the strongest statement of Milton’s doubt of the muse’s aid” and that this “radical combination of self-assertion and self-denial” is “characteristic of Milton’s stance throughout the poem” (“Creation and the Place of the Poet in *Paradise Lost*,” 57). It seems to me, rather, that as the poem continues, the self-assertions become progressively stronger and the self-denials progressively weaker, and that the prologue to Book Nine marks a key moment in this process.

41. See also Book Two, 264, 295; Book Three, 443; and Book Four, 6–7, 563–64.

42. Fish, “*Lycidas*,” 17.

STANLEY FISH

*Gently Raised*

SEMBLANCE NOT SUBSTANCE

**I**t may have seemed that in stressing the indeterminacy and indecipherability of *Samson Agonistes* I have moved far beyond the “simple” picture of a Milton who rests confidently in his knowledge of the truth and in his ability easily to discern the one obligation that it would be death to slight. But I intend no retreat from that picture, and if I complicate it I do so only to foreground a difficulty present in it from the beginning. Discerning the one true obligation is easy; it is the obligation to do God’s will. The difficulty is to determine which of the many courses of possible action is the appropriate location and fulfillment of that obligation. Given the multiple paths available to us as fallen men and women, how does one decide which of them to choose? Milton cannot give us an answer to that question—cannot give us a formula or a set of criteria—because by interiorizing the landscape of choice, he has detached it from the realm of empirical evidence and set us on a journey much like that of Abraham, who, in response to God’s call, went out not knowing whither he went. The result is a life like Samson’s, made up in equal parts of certainty (“My trust is in the living God” [1140]) and radical hazard (“I with this Messenger will go along” [1384]). At times in his prose and poetry Milton emphasizes the certainty; at other times he confronts us with the hazard; but in either mood, the basic imperative he

---

From *How Milton Works*. © 2001 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.



urges is the same: refuse external guides and work from the inside out. The unpacking and exfoliation of this imperative has been the single aim of this book from the outset, and here, in the concluding section, I return to it yet again, beginning as I did in Chapter 1 with a single word.

More than sixty-five years ago, F. R. Leavis charged Milton with two crimes of which he has never been, and should not be, acquitted. The first charge is that his style does not sufficiently register the diversity and complexity of human life, especially in comparison with the styles of Donne and Shakespeare. The second charge is that he has an excess of character, by which Leavis means that he is “disastrously single-minded and simple minded, ... reveal[ing] everywhere a dominating sense of righteousness and a complete incapacity to question or explore its significance and conditions.”<sup>1</sup> (This is the same charge leveled more recently at Milton by some New Historicists and feminists.) The two charges fit together perfectly: it is because he is single-minded, and self-righteously so, that his style admits variety only in order to either banish or condemn it. The result is something akin to claustrophobia, and it is described by Leavis in terms that are justly famous: “In this Grand Style, the medium calls pervasively for a kind of attention, compels an attitude toward itself, that is incompatible with sharp, concrete realization; just as it would seem to be, in the mind of the poet, incompatible with an interest in sensuous particularity. He exhibits a feeling *for* words rather than a capacity for feeling *through* words” (21–22). That is, Milton’s language does not direct us to a referent outside itself, but, rather, traps us within its own confines, demanding that we attend to the connections it is itself forging; the reality of the *medium* privileges itself over any reality that we might think prior to it. It is, in short, a jealous medium, saying: Thou shalt not accept any truths I do not offer you. The experience of reading such verse (or, more precisely, of being read by it) is, says Leavis, like combat, “a matter of resisting, of standing up against, the verse-movement ... and in the end our resistance is worn down” (16). Leavis names this effect “tyrannical stylization” and says that it “forbids” (23), says no, again and again, in thunder. Milton, he concludes, “offers ... for our worship mere brute assertive will” (28); that will, which finds expression in the style, has its origin first in the will of the poet (“I, John Milton, thus manipulate you”) and second (that is, finally, ultimately) in the will of God (“I am the Lord thy God”). As J. B. Broadbent, another Cambridge Miltonist, put it, “Milton’s learned vocabulary, with its demand for conscious construing and his distant perspectives, represents the authoritative unintelligibility of the parents’ speech as heard by a child.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not my intention to dispute this judgment; instead I would expand on it and turn it, perhaps, to Milton’s advantage, and I will begin with a passage from *Paradise Lost* that illustrates much of what Leavis and

Broadbent have to say. In book I, Satan stands before the host he has roused from its slumber on the fiery lake:

he his wonted pride  
 Soon recollecting, with high words, that bore  
 Semblance of worth, not substance, gently rais'd  
 Thir fainting courage.<sup>3</sup>

The key word here is “rais’d,” a unit of sound that can bear several meanings; in this case the relevant homonyms point in opposite semantic directions: “rais’d,” in the sense of elevated or honored, versus “razed”—that is, destroyed, made into nothing—which is itself closely allied to “ras’d,” as in “erased” or wiped clear of marks. Milton is always alert to the possibilities of such puns, and this is in part what Leavis means when he speaks of the poet’s feeling *for* words rather than *through* words. The self-consciousness of Milton’s feeling for this word cannot be doubted; one need only recall “Satan exalted sat, by merit rais’d / To that bad eminence” (*PL*, II, 5–6), where the positive homonym is reinforced by “exalted” only to be undercut by “bad,” which at the same time activates its negative opposite.

In both instances the wordplay is more than just that: it compels us to acts of cognitive reflection on crucial moral and philosophical issues; for what the two readings of “rais’d” alert us to is the equivocal nature of the action we are being asked to visualize. What Satan is doing, after all, is further encouraging his fellows in their rebellion against God; and in a universe in which identity depends on one’s relation to godhead, to be alienated from deity is no longer to be, to be destroyed, to be razed. Once we see this (as I believe Milton intends us to), we see also that the adverb “gently” is precisely inappropriate, for gentleness and destruction are simply antithetical. Indeed, the point is even deeper: since gentleness is a positive virtue, and virtues cannot exist apart from the good of which they are the extension, an agent who has broken union with God (the source and very definition of the good) cannot possibly be acting virtuously, cannot be gentle (or courageous, or compassionate, or trustworthy, or anything else, for that matter). It becomes difficult to tell even what “gently” means here, or if it means anything; the one thing it cannot mean is gently; at the very most, the word refers to some surface features of Satan’s physical behavior; he may be speaking in a low voice or extending his hands in a sympathetic or consoling gesture; but beneath that gesture, that surface, is nothing, a hollow core.

This, in fact, is just what the verse says about “gently” even before the word appears. “Semblance of worth, not substance” is a judgment that anticipates the judgment we will make on “gently” once we are moved to reflect on the adverb by the pun in “rais’d.” The effect is a complicated and subtle one, and must be described carefully. As we first encounter it, the

compound phrase “Semblance of worth, not substance” is read as referring to the “high words” Satan will soon utter; but we never hear them, and the energy of our anticipation is absorbed by “gently,” which, as we finally come to understand it, is itself a “high” (lofty, honorific) word signifying nothing, a mere verbal semblance that is unattached to any substance. Here is a prime instance of what Leavis describes as the tendency of Milton’s language to value itself (26); rather than directing us to the world of concrete experience, the words direct us to the experience of themselves, asking us to shuttle backward and forward between locations that have a merely textual existence: “Rais’d” is a comment on “gently,” which is then seen to be glossed (proleptically) by “semblance of worth, not substance” (two words not sufficiently unlike), which is itself a retroactive gloss on “high words,” which finds its true (and wholly textual) referent in “gently rais’d.”

“Self-reflexive” is almost too weak a word for this sequence, or rather nonsequence; for one part of the effect is to retard forward movement, to prevent us from going in a straight line and therefore from following *a* line of story. Once the ambiguity of “rais’d” is registered, there are at least two stories occupying the same linguistic space, one in which a skilled and empathetic leader rallies his weary troops (in the manner of Shakespeare’s Henry V) and another in which a malevolent force (indeed, *the* malevolent force) wreaks further havoc on those he has already led astray. Since one cannot decide between the stories except on the basis of evidence provided by one or the other of them, the reader’s efforts to make narrative sense of what he or she is processing are frustrated. Moreover, this rupture of narrative continuity is intensified by the fact that in response to the demand of the verse the reader moves *backward*, stopped in his or her tracks by “rais’d” and then provoked to retrace steps that now point in different and multiple directions.

This feature of the verse’s experience is answerable to the criticism of still another British Miltonist. In a well-known essay, Donald Davie complains that Milton’s elaborate syntax “is employed characteristically to check narrative impetus.”<sup>4</sup> Most narratives, Davie observes, are built on “the recognition, by poet and reader alike, that language and therefore the arts of language operate through and over spans of time, in terms of successive events, each new sentence a new small action with its own sometimes complicated plot” (74); but in Milton’s poem, “the story, the narrative, is only a convenient skeleton; its function is to provoke interesting and important speculative questions” (76). This seems exactly right, and for reasons that Davie never quite tumbles to: the “speculative questions” the verse provokes are not questions of the kind Davie finds slighted, questions like “‘What happened next?’ or ‘This happened—yes, to whom?’” (76); rather, they are questions that refer us to events that know no particular time and to issues that are relevant not to a moment of suspense but to *every* moment, questions

like: “To what or to whom are you loyal?” “In what or whom do you believe?” “How do you decide what is right?” “How is the universe structured?”

It is not merely that such questions are larger and more inclusive than those raised in the course of a forward-leaning narrative that explores cause and effect on the micro-level of quotidian experience; it is also that these larger questions are obscured and overwhelmed if narrative considerations are allowed to occupy the foreground of attention. The fact that “Milton often deploys his ‘plot,’ the action of his story, in such a way as to frustrate our interest in it” (Davie, 83) points to a strategy by means of which the poet would alert us to the dangers of what I have called “plot-thinking,” that form of thinking which refers issues to the configuration of some accidental convergence of opportunity, exigency, and crisis, rather than to the essential and abiding configurations of a world presided over by an eternal, omniscient, and benevolent deity. The question of whether Satan is gentle cannot, Milton would tell us, be settled by examining the empirical evidence—by looking, for example, at the present distress of his cohorts and assessing his efforts to comfort them; rather, we must look at Satan’s underlying relationship to the value that founds and grounds the universe, and reason (if that is the word) from that relationship to the meaning of what he—or someone like him, someone who has “broken union”—does, no matter what the particular circumstances of his doing it.

In plot-thinking, one proceeds from the observable features of local contexts (who is doing what to whom, and for what apparent reasons) to the drawing of general conclusions; in antiplot or antinarrative thinking, one proceeds from general conclusions already assumed to the features of local contexts. In one kind of thinking, the visible and measurable world gives us our answers; in the other, answers antecedently derived and tenaciously adhered to give us the visible world. When Milton first provokes and then frustrates our narrative desires and expectations in the manner described by Davie, he is doing so in order to protect us from the limited perspectives that time urges on us in succession (perspectival limitation is, in fact, a definition of the temporal realm); and if this is in fact Milton’s strategy, Leavis’ strictures become less damaging. Although it remains true that the verse is preoccupied with valuing itself, it is at the same time *de-valuing* itself, for it is no less a temporal and corporeal medium than the mediums from which it would wean us. If the answers to the great questions of life do not reside in appearances thrown up by the shifting panorama of the visible world, neither do they reside (in the sense of being embedded) in the formal features of a poem, even of Milton’s poem.

Where, then, do they reside? The answer is inevitable, given the strongly antinomian cast of Milton’s thinking. They reside in us, in each reader who is asked to decide among the different scenarios projected by the

multiple meanings of “rais’d.” The decision is not made for us; for even though we are alerted to those meanings, nothing in the verse compels us to choose any one of them. It is certainly true that in a God-centered universe, a universe in which no value can exist apart from a commitment to deity, gentleness is a virtue Satan cannot claim; but the thesis of a universe so radically homogeneous is just that—a thesis, a proposition; its truth is not self-evident and universally compelling. Indeed, if it were, Satan himself would not have—could not have—thought himself into a state of rebellion. That state, of imagining a place not yet occupied by the “Omnific Word” (*PL*, VII, 217) is a possibility for anyone who (and I mean this literally) sets his or her mind to it. The crucial act is an act of the will, the act of a consciousness that must choose the story it is going to tell about itself, and, in telling, constitute the self so told. The reader who moves from the experience of “rais’d” to a rejection of the claim made in “gently” will be performing an act that not only structures (or rather unstructures) the narrative, but structures the mode of perception, the way of seeing, that will henceforth inform subsequent acts of reading; and the reader who grants even the slightest share of gentleness to Satan will have fashioned quite another narrative and quite another reading self. Again, nothing in the verse necessarily tips the balance; one can go as easily in one direction as the other.<sup>5</sup>

#### TELLING THE DIFFERENCE

Both the ease and the extraordinary difficulty of which it is the flip side are on display in a single line, also from book I: “And Devils to adore for Deities” (373). The line precedes the roll call of the fallen angels and follows the narrator’s account of their having been “blotted out and ras’d / By thir Rebellion, from the Books of Life” (362–363). Now their fame depends on those whom they “corrupted to forsake / God thir Creator” (368–369), those who were induced to worship devils rather than deities. The tone is one of incredulity: How could anyone be so stupid? How could anyone fail to tell the difference between devils and deities? But even as the line implies these questions, it answers them by blurring the difference it proclaims as obvious. The supposed great opposites are linked together by alliteration, assonance, and final consonant; and these two verbal mirror images themselves frame an internal duplication in the nearly identical sounds of “adore” and “for.” The entire line breathes sameness at the same time that it insists on the perspicuousness of a distinction.

What then is the line saying? The question is itself another form of the question that provokes it: just as the line says both that devils and deities are easily distinguishable and that they are not, so does it provide no sure way of

determining which of these assertions it is really making. That is, the line disclaims responsibility for delivering its own meaning and transfers it to what the reader does or does not bring to its experience. The lesson is the same one taught by “gently rais’d”: the true significance of an action or an event or a text does not lie on its surface, waiting to be read off; rather, significance is conferred—read in—by the participant or observer, whose vision does not passively receive phenomena but gives them their shape. When Abdiel says of Satan and his cohorts, “I see thy fall / Determin’d” (V, 878–879), he is not claiming a special insight into God’s future plans; it is just that within the assumptions he holds (in fact they hold him) about the nature of God and of the universe that God informs, the fate of the rebels—cut off willfully from the world’s only source of energy—is a forgone conclusion. Abdiel has no difficulty at all telling the difference between devils and deities, not because they wear these labels on their respective faces, but because by his lights—the light of the beliefs that structure his perception and therefore structure what there is to be “seen”—the labels literally apply themselves (“the things themselves conclude it”).<sup>6</sup> On the other side, Satan is himself no less an extension of a set of beliefs, of assumptions that deliver to him a landscape complete with distinctions and basic categories. He too can tell the difference between devils and deities, but he tells it differently. He knows a tyrant when he sees one, and because he knows a tyrant, he knows that the struggle against tyranny will be an uphill one and that one must never give up trying (“courage never to submit or yield”; “And if one day, why not Eternal days?” [PL, VI, 424]). Telling the difference, then, is not an activity in which one simply recognizes from the position of an observer distinctions already in place, but an activity in which the distinctions one sees are constituted by one’s ways of seeing, by what is inside one. “Telling the difference” should be understood in the strong sense of “telling,” as stipulating the difference rather than merely noting it.

In that strong sense, telling the difference is for Milton the chief and only form of action. Whereas in plot-thinking action has as many forms as there are worldly circumstances (has therefore an infinite number of forms), in Milton’s world circumstances are but the raw and ambiguous material offered up by time for configuring by an inward disposition. What is important on any occasion is not how things have turned out (as a historian might determine it), but whether or not one’s inner loyalties have been maintained and strengthened. Success is measured not by the battles you have won or books you have written, but by the strength of your testimony, by the witness you give to what you believe. As we saw in Chapter 2, for Milton the moral life is an endless succession of occasions for giving witness, for testifying. That is why he declares in *Areopagitica* that what he is about to write “will be a certaine testimony, if not a Trophey”;<sup>7</sup> whether or not the tract succeeds in its persuasive efforts and wins the day, it will already have

succeeded as an outward manifestation of Milton's inner commitment. Later, in quite another mood, he attempts to dissuade his countrymen from choosing them a captain back to Egypt, and while he knows how little chance he has of success he nevertheless persists because he must say what is in his heart, even "though I were sure I should have spoken only to trees and stones, and had none to cry to, but with the Prophet, O *earth, earth, earth!* to tell the very soil it self what her perverse inhabitants are deaf to."<sup>8</sup> In the same period he proposes a reform in the financing of church ministers, and he does so with a similar lack of confidence in the empirical results of his efforts. "If I be not heard nor beleevd, the event will bear me witnes to have spoken truth; and I in the mean while have borne my witnes not out of season to the church and to my countrey."<sup>9</sup> The phrase "out of season" is a (Miltonic) joke: any season is the season for bearing witness to truth, even if the truth borne witness to is received as unseasonable by those to whom it is directed. In *The Reason of Church Government* Milton identifies with Jeremiah as one whose inner promptings will not allow him to keep silent, no matter how disagreeable or unhappy the event: "when God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in mans will what he shall say or what he shall conceal."<sup>10</sup> The man who resists the command will find himself reproached on the Day of Judgment for not having been among the "true servants that stood up in [the church's] defence" (805). In *Paradise Lost* God himself praises Abdiel, who "hast borne": "for the testimony of Truth hast borne / Universal reproach" (VI, 33–34), a stance later assumed by Noah when, in response to the "civil Broils" of his people, he "of thir doings great dislike declar'd, / And testified against thir ways" (XI, 718, 720–721).

In each of these textual moments a voice testifies to its ownership by another, and the radical nature of the act is recognized even by Comus, in words we have several times revisited:

Can any mortal mixture of Earth's mold  
 Breathe such Divine enchanting ravishment?  
 Sure something holy lodges in that breast,  
 And with these raptures moves the vocal air  
 To testify his hidd'n residence.<sup>11</sup>

Here the aesthetic of testimony is displayed in both its positive and negative aspects. The doctrine is positive in that it allies the testifier with deity ("something holy") against the pressures of mere temporal (plot-centered) appearances; it is negative in that the testifier is so subordinate to the something holy of which she is the residence that she, as a separate individual, scarcely exists. Of course these are not really two separate poles, but differing perspectives on the same condition—the condition of being an

incorporate member of God's body; nevertheless the two perspectives are real and correspond to the different relationships you can have to the notion of an all-powerful God: you can affirm it joyfully, as the loyal angels do at a number of moments, or you can murmur at it, experiencing it not as a glorious promise but as an unbearable threat.

The one thing you cannot do is escape it, for there is nowhere to go. This limitation on a creature's maneuverability follows from "Milton's monism," and the key formulation is to be found in the seventh book of the *Christian Doctrine*. The subject is "Of the Creation," and Milton's purpose is to protect God from an account of creation in which either the matter of creation preexists Him (for then he would not be God, but would be secondary to the material he employs) or he creates matter out of nothing ("because it was necessary that something should have existed previously, so that it could be acted upon by his supremely powerful active efficacy").<sup>12</sup> "There remains only this solution," concludes Milton, "namely, that all things came from God." Moreover, although "there are ... as everyone knows, four kinds of causes, efficient, material, formal and final. Since God is the first, absolute and sole cause of all things, he unquestionably contains and comprehends within himself all these causes" (307–308). That is, do not imagine that there is any place where God is not, any effect that has a cause other than him. The Latin word that is translated as "comprehend" is *complectatur*, which means "to encircle," "to surround," "to enclose"—all verbs that bring home the point: there is no way out, God is on all sides, you are inside him even when you think to contemplate him or oppose him ("Who can impair thee, mighty King?" [*PL*, VII, 608]). This is containment in the strongest possible sense—not an action directed at some recalcitrant other, but a prior action (of creation) so total and preempting that no other is ever allowed to exist.

This, after all, is what monism means: there is only one; variety is only a surface phenomenon beneath which there is a single unchanging substance; the many forms in which deity expresses itself reduce finally to one; in short, there is nothing that is *different*. To be sure, the world will display the appearance of difference, and that appearance will often be alluring, but in the end it will always be countered and dissolved by the revelation of absolute power, as it is in this sentence from the same chapter: "It is, I say, a demonstration of God's supreme power and goodness that he should not shut up this heterogeneous and substantial virtue within himself, but should disperse, propagate and extend it as far as, and in whatever way, he wills" (*Christian Doctrine*, 308). The heterogeneity exists only in the cul-de-sac of the sentence's middle, hemmed in on one side by God's power and on the other by his will. The effect is even stronger in the Latin, where the world translated as "heterogeneous" is *omnimodam*, which, while it means "of several kinds," has as its base *omni*—that is, "all" or "wholly"; the word itself



at once proclaims and denies diversity. God's virtue is dispersed only so that it can be called back to its origin, so that it can more strongly testify to its containment.

This is in fact exactly the plan of creation, the production by God of creatures whose every movement will redound to his glory. The account in book VII of the creation of man makes just that point, and in a way that mimes the power it celebrates. Man, says Raphael, is to be "the Master work" (*PL*, 505), and while it seems for a moment that it will be man's work to be master ("endu'd / With Sanctity of Reason" he shall "Govern the rest" [507–508, 510]), the point of his mastery will be to acknowledge its source in the true Master: "But grateful to acknowledge whence his good / Descends" (512–513). "Directed in Devotion," he will take it as his chief business "to adore / And worship God Supreme who made him chief / Of all his works" (514–516). Technically the pronoun reference of "his" is ambiguous, but we understand it immediately as God's possessive which reaches backward to include the work (of being "chief") that man will supposedly be doing.

In the lines that follow, the prevenience of God, his prior occupation of all realms and states that might appear to indicate freedom and genuine difference, is insisted upon (one might say hammered home) again and again. Here, for example, is God's charge to mankind: "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth, / Subdue it" (531–532). At first the command to multiply suggests that God wishes the world to be diversely populated, but then the verb "Subdue" reveals that diversity will not really be tolerated. A few lines later the pattern is repeated: first the promise of variety—Adam is given "all sorts ... all th' Earth yields, / Variety without end" (541–542)—and then the qualification that (quite literally) takes everything back: "but of the Tree / Which tasted works knowledge of Good and Evil, / Thou may'st not" (542–544). The variety is always and already reined in by an interdiction whose pressure is always being felt, even when the unfallen pair is "on holiday"; the freedom they supposedly enjoy is bounded by a reference point provided by another. In short, they enjoy it only by leave; no matter how wide their choices seem, they live in a condition of constraint. They may be "Lords of the World" except for "one restraint" (I, 32), but that restraint casts its shadow over everything. The angelic chorus that greets the great Creator sings the message, lest any reader miss it: anyone who would "from thee withdraw" or seek "To lessen thee, against his purpose serves / To manifest the more thy might" (VII, 612, 614–615). The account of creation ends with one more rehearsal of man's expansive yet straitened situation: "dwell / And worship him, and in reward to rule / Over his Works, on Earth, in Sea, or Air, / And multiply a Race of Worshippers" (627–630). As before, man's rule is hedged in on either side by the power that permits and that, by permitting, negates it; the price of rule is worship, the acknowledgment that the right of rule belongs to another. Line 630 says it all: multiplication (of

difference) is allowed, even enjoined, but only if its product is more of the same, an endless replication of the image imprinted on every living thing, a succession of acolytes to dance and sing before the throne of the Lord.

#### DIFFERENCE AND WRITING

*Paradise Lost* is full of moments like these, moments that reassert the power of omnipotence, moments that slam the door shut on those differences that would, if they were allowed a genuine existence, threaten the homogeneity of a monistic universe. Such moments can be brutal, as when God's dreadful chariot simply rolls over the would-be rebels, or softly indirect, as when Raphael mildly explains that "one Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed, and up to him return" (V, 469–470). They can be extended, as in the War in Heaven or as in Eve's narration of the subordination of her own image to God's image in Adam, or they can be as brief as the realization that "gently" is not an adverb Satan can truly claim. The entire poem on every level—stylistic, thematic, narrative—is an act of vigilance in which any effort, large or small, to escape its totalizing sway is detected and then contained. Every movement outward from a still center must be blocked; every vehicle of that movement must be identified for what it is and then stigmatized as a form of idolatry.

And the forms of idolatry are innumerable; indeed they constitute almost everything that fills up the poem. Narrative and plot are vehicles of idolatry because they locate significance in some insight to be generated by time, rather than in the timeless, always present obligation to be aligned with the will of deity;<sup>13</sup> plot and narrative tell us that there is somewhere to go, whereas the true question (posed by every indifferent moment) is: What way shall one *be*? Drama is a vehicle of idolatry for similar reasons: it nominates moments of crisis (will she or won't she? what shall he do now?) and therefore presents a picture of the moral life in which crisis occurs only at special times rather than at every and all times. Like narrative and plot (which are its constituents), drama insists that some moments are different from others, whereas in Milton's vision all moments are the same. Sameness is threatened in a more general and pervasive way by any and all acts of representation; for representation—the imaging of something not present—is by definition a sign of distance from the real, and anyone who has recourse to it signifies his or her dependence on signifying, on secondhand knowledge, on the inauthentic.<sup>14</sup> In *Paradise Lost* the genealogy of representation is itself represented with geometric precision: its birth is the birth of Sin.

a Goddess arm'd  
out of thy head I sprung: amazement seiz'd

All th' Host of Heav'n; back they recoil'd afraid  
 At first, and call'd me Sin, and for a Sign  
 Portentous held me; but familiar grown,  
 I pleas'd, and with attractive graces won  
 The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft  
 Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing  
 Becam'st enamor'd, and such joy thou took'st  
 With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd  
 A growing burden. (II, 757–767)

Sin is born of a being who has broken union—born, that is, out of a state of distance; she is a derivation of a derivation, a further removal from the center of reality; she is a sign rather than the thing itself, and the danger she represents is described precisely: those who look on her for a time (“familiar grown”) will forget that she is secondary, something that came after, and will mistake the substitute for the genuine article. That is what Satan does when he takes joy in an image of an image and thereby produces (conceives) still more images (“A growing burden”); sign begets sign begets sign, all of which are forms of sin—that is, of idolatry. Nor is it an accident that Sin is a woman; for in the tradition Milton inherits and by and large accepts, woman is the chief vehicle of idolatry, the very essence (or nonessence) of difference, something created *after*, the first sign—the first, that is, not intimately related to the first—the primary form of temptation, of erroneous (wandering) worship, as the Son reminds Adam when he asks with devastating brevity: “Was shee thy God?” (X, 145).

Plot, narrative, drama, crisis, movement, change, representation, sign, woman—if the poem is continually on guard against the pull of these material and discursive forms, then it is continually on guard against itself, against the impiety of writing, of adding to or covering over a truth that is self-declaring and self-sufficient.<sup>15</sup> No wonder Davie concludes that *Paradise Lost* “never or hardly ever profits by what is a fact about it as about any poem—that it exists as a shape cut in time” (84); the poem’s temporal existence, its desire to lean forward, is precisely what must be resisted, lest the monism of which it is intended to be the celebration be compromised. Resistance, however, especially resistance continually required, cannot but give life and energy to that which it pushes away. The very vigor with which the poem performs its task of vigilance tells us that there may be something to be vigilant against, that the eruption of difference may be an essential rather than an accidental phenomenon; it is, after all, at least curious that a discourse proclaiming the oneness of all life spends so much of its time fending off the challenges of supposedly illusory others. Everywhere one looks in the poem something or someone is trying to get away, set up a separate shop, escape to a private retreat, break out of a suffocating homogeneity.

One of those trying to break out, at least intermittently, is John Milton, whose relationship to the official morality of his own poem is at the very least ambiguous. The ambiguity surfaces now and then, but is always present when the ownership of the poem is itself an issue—whenever, that is, the poet is in dialogue with his muse. On those occasions (occurring famously in the invocations to books I, III, VII, and IX) the poet seems to be engaged in a paradoxical, even contradictory, effort to achieve humility, to lose the credit for his action, the action he is even now performing, the action of writing. He wants at once to leave his mark and have it erased; he wants at once to be raised (“with no middle flight ... to soar / Above th’ *Aonian* Mount” [I, 14–15]) and to be ras’d—that is, erased (“still govern thou my Song” [VII, 30]). This double and impossible position is perfectly reflected in the two halves of line 25, book I: “I may assert Eternal Providence.” The line enacts the pattern we see so often: the momentary granting of agential independence, the “I” that stands alone and in relation to which “assert” is less a verb than a repetition (I assert I), is followed immediately by the assertion-dissolving assertion of “Eternal Providence.” No sooner does a space open up for the emergence of individual initiative than it is closed, and closed by an authority that leaves no room for anything or anyone else. The single-mindedness of which Leavis accuses Milton turns back to claim the poet as its victim; the Milton for whom “everything is simply and absolutely so” is in danger of being silenced by that absoluteness; by offering “for our worship mere brute assertive will,” he makes the (supposed) exercise of his own will an act of impiety. By celebrating the “Omnific Word” (VII, 217), he deprives his own words of a reason for being.

To put the matter as simply as possible: writing is itself an effect of difference, a sign of distance from that which, if truly known, would obviate the need for any addition, would make representation superfluous. One writes only if there is something that has not yet been said or someone to whom the good news has not yet been delivered; but in a universe, a homogeneous space in which all locations and all agents are occupied by the same informing spirit, there is only one thing to say—God is the creator and sustainer of all life—and everyone is already saying it simply by breathing out what God has breathed into his creatures. In such a world communication itself would be beside the point, since the circuit of knowledge would always and already be established and no one would be outside it; there would be no gap to be bridged, no secret to be revealed, no message to be completed. No one would speak in order either to perform or persuade another, because every other would already know what you know and be where you are. Sounds would be produced not because they meant something—meaning, after all, is always elsewhere, something to which one’s words point, something that emerges—but because they echoed the meaning already fully present, the meaning of universal presence.

Such sounds would issue not from anyone—from any isolated, free-standing agent—but from everybody, from the incorporate beings that lived in and through God's body; and they would constitute the tautological, circular sound of the world singing to itself, the sound of pure—that is, without purpose, design, or desire—testimony. This is the sound Milton does *not* describe in the closing lines of "At a Solemn Music": "O may we soon again renew that Song, / And keep in tune with Heaven."<sup>16</sup> To keep in tune is to avoid being heard in a way that could be identified; it is only when one is out of tune that one is discordant and makes a "harsh din" (20), an unharmonious note, a note that stands out, a note that can be measured, a note that is noted. The ideal, then, is to be silent, to lose oneself in a chorus that has been "Singing everlastingly" (16) and whose song originates nowhere and everywhere.

#### THE POLITICS OF TESTIMONY

But is this really what Milton wants? Is it what anyone can want, especially someone who conceives of himself (another phrase that should be taken literally) as a writer? What is it that Milton is doing when he puts pen to paper? He himself poses and considers that question endlessly in his prose and poetry, but it may be that he gives a deeper answer when the issue is displaced onto others. I am thinking of the participants in the War in Heaven, none of whom are writers in the narrow sense, but all of whom are engaged in an activity of which writing in the narrow sense is a mere token. That activity is inscribing, the making of marks, the institution of divisions and distinctions. The instrument is not the pen, but the sword; in the course of the battle, many a warrior on either side raises his sword with the expectation that with a single stroke (as is written of Michael) he might "end / Intestine War in Heav'n" (*PL*, VI, 258–259). The paradox is patent; the divisions of civil war—or, as Michael calls it, "hateful strife" (264)—are to be healed by another dividing gesture; the unity of heaven's undifferentiated surface will be restored by a stroke designed precisely to make a difference. Exactly the same thing is true of the stroke of the pen. Just as Michael and Abdiel (who lifts high "a noble stroke" [189]) and Satan hope to settle matters once and for all by a single blow, by "one stroke ... / That might determine, and not need repeat" (317–318)—an act so efficacious that it is both the first and the last—so does Milton hope to resolve all doubts, set the affections in right tune, proclaim the first and last word, justify the ways of God to men.

But over both projects—the one military, the other discursive—hangs the reality acknowledged by Abdiel when he steps forward to challenge Satan:

Proud, art thou met? thy hope was to have reacht  
 The highth of thy aspiring unoppos'd,  
 The Throne of God unguarded, and his side  
 Abandon'd at the terror of thy Power  
 Or potent tongue; fool, not to think how vain  
 Against th' Omnipotent to rise in Arms;  
 Who out of smallest things could without end  
 Have rais'd incessant Armies to defeat  
 Thy folly; or with solitary hand  
 Reaching beyond all limit, at one blow  
 Unaided could have finisht thee. (131–141)

These lines abound in ironies, some at the expense of their speaker. They begin by stigmatizing the stance of reaching, of aspiring, of standing up, of standing out—the stance of opposition to deity. Moreover, that opposition (at least as Satan conceives it) takes the form both of arms and tongues, a distinction without a difference. The uplifting of a sword and the extension of a tongue are alike gestures of independence and aggression, and both, according to the verse, are “vain.” How can any one “Against th’ Omnipotent ... rise,” since by definition the Omnipotent is Himself at once the cause and the location of all rising? If you rise against him, you are razed, and if you rise within him, wholly subordinate to his will and agency, you are also razed, as Abdiel is razed, when he rises to declare that he is one of those smallest things conscripted into an “incessant” army. Incessant armies perform incessant actions, actions without end, in two senses of the word. Action as it is conventionally understood is discrete and punctual; it alters circumstances, completes a project, brings something new into the world. But in the world of *Paradise Lost*, only one agent is capable of discrete action, of making a difference which, even as it is made, is reabsorbed into a new seamless unity. Only He can reach beyond all limit and not be engaged in a paradox, because “limit” is defined by where he has reached (“I am who fill / Infinitude” [VII, 168–169]). As soon as He has reached beyond, beyond is no longer, and since no one can reach beyond Him, “beyond” is not an operative category. In the same way, his hand is the only one that can be solitary—that is, efficacious with reference only to itself, “Unaided” because it is the aid and support of all other hands, a hand whose “one blow” need not be repeated because it is struck not in time but in eternity and therefore at all times. “At one blow,” “at one word”—only God can do or speak so decisively that all other deeds and speeches are foredone and forewritten. The attempts of other agents to be thus decisive—to make everything right, to say all that need be said—is either unnecessary, as Abdiel acknowledges, or presumptuous, as Satan illustrates with his every word and gesture.

Nevertheless, one must act and live in time, and the question is how. One answer is given, at least in outline, in the description of the angelic warriors (a description that significantly applies to those on both sides): “each on himself reli’d, / As only in his arm the moment lay / Of victory” (VI, 238–240). Here is still another version of the ethic of testimony, with its union of assertion and humility: one acts positively, but within the knowledge that the effect (if there is any) belongs to another. The saving qualification is contained in “As”—as if the arm of each warrior held the balance of victory. But even as the formula is proffered, it reproduces the problem it supposedly resolves: “As” can either indicate the reservation that baptizes an otherwise presumptuous action (“not me, but my Master in me”) or indicate a state of prideful delusion (each relies on himself, as if he could be the architect of victory). Which is it? This is the same question that was posed before by “gently rais’d” and by the devils that some adore for deities in the conviction (no more or less grounded than any other) that they *are* deities. And the answer is also the same: it is impossible to tell; no surface feature marks a difference that is supplied by an inner disposition that does not present itself for inspection and may even be opaque to the agent who lodges it. When the epic voice tells us that hypocrisy is an “evil that walks / Invisible, except to God alone” (III, 683–684), he includes in the group of those who cannot see it those who practice it. No one can plumb the depths of his own motives, know for certain that the gesture he proffers in the name of humility is not in fact (a fact only God would discern) a reemergence of pride.

Nor does it necessarily help to be aware of the danger. When, within a few lines of his stern lecture, Abdiel is said to lift “a noble stroke ... high” (VI, 189), is that stroke free of the ambitions of which he has accused Satan? Is it “noble” in the sense of being delivered with no claim of individual efficacy whatsoever—nobly humble—or does “noble” (which is of course Raphael’s word; his presence as narrator further complicates matters) make precisely that claim? Again, one cannot say; and indeed, the number of things about which one cannot say or about which one can say too much, too variously, is remarkable for a poem written in response to and in celebration of the absolute, the One. If it is Milton’s conviction, as it surely is, that the world is everywhere informed by the same sustaining spirit, and if it is the case, as Leavis, Broadbent, Davie, and countless others argue it to be, that Milton relentlessly presses the totalizing claims of that spirit, why are so many moments in the poem marked by a radical openness and indeterminacy? Why at almost every juncture are important interpretive decisions at once demanded and rendered radically indeterminate?

One kind of answer to this question posits a conflict between the poet’s republican politics and his “repressive” theology. Thus Herman Rapaport’s account of “a mind committed to the republicanism of Rome and to ideals of freedom and liberty ... but a mind also harboring a darker fascination with a

dictatorial takeover, with what amounts to another absolutism much bleaker and more calculating than the foppery of Charles I.”<sup>17</sup> But while Milton may indeed harbor a conflicted consciousness (and who, aside from God, does not), there may be a way of thinking about his project that accommodates and even reconciles its diverse impulses. The key is to recognize the relationship between his absolutism—his monism—and his epistemology, which is radically antinomian. That is to say, Milton’s antiformalism, his refusal to identify truth with any of its local and temporary instantiations, his insistence on referring all decisions to the light of the individual conscience rather than to any external measure or prepackaged formula, precludes him from laying down the law even though he preaches the necessity of conforming to it. The law is simply to do the will of God, to align one’s actions with His great design. The difficulty is in knowing, in particular circumstances, exactly what that will is, a difficulty that would be obviated if the task of identifying God’s will were given over to some authority—a church, a king, a book—which one might then consult. Milton, however, consistently inveighs against any such “implicit faith,” any turning over “to another ... the charge and care of ... Religion,”<sup>18</sup> and insists that one respond to crisis by looking inward to the law written on the fleshly tables of the heart. The trouble, of course, is that not all hearts are similarly inscribed. By rendering value wholly interior, a matter not of specific actions urged or proscribed but of intentions holy or impious, Milton eliminates any basis for adjudicating the differences that will certainly arise among diversely energized agents. The downside of the privileging of the inner light over any and all external compulsions is that one’s convictions are supported (at least as far as one knows) by nothing firmer than themselves. In response to a challenge, one can only reassert what one believes; and in response to a doubt—a challenge from within—one can only hope that what one believes is answerable to a truth that withholds her full presence.

The resulting epistemological condition is eloquently described in *Areopagitica*: once “a perfect shape most glorious to look on,” Truth now lies in “a thousand peeces” and her “sad friends” are left with the task of “gathering up limb by limb” the remnants of her body. The task, however, is endless—“We have not yet found them all ... nor ever shall doe, till her Masters second comming”—and therefore we can only “continue seeking,” “searching what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is *homogeneous* and proportional).”<sup>19</sup> Here is a concise formulation of the vision that unites monism and the proliferation of difference: there is only one Truth and it is everywhere the same (“*homogeneous*”), but its form is not available to us in our present state, and we must rely on whatever state of illumination we may have reached while at the same time resisting the temptation to identify that state with the fuller one we shall know at our master’s second coming.



The politics that follows from this vision is one of tolerance and the welcoming of diversity, not because, as in some liberal traditions, tolerance and diversity are valued for their own sake, but because, given the dimness of our individual perceptions, one cannot be sure which of the paths we are urged to go down is the right one. No insight can be automatically dismissed, for “if it come to prohibiting there is not ought more likely to be prohibited than truth it self, whose first appearance to our eyes blear’d and dimn’d with prejudice and custom, is more unsightly and unplausible than many errors.”<sup>20</sup> One must always be alert to the possibilities excluded by the limits of one’s present understanding. No situation wears its meaning on its face, and thus every moment brings both the obligation to do the right thing and the risk that is attendant upon imperfect knowledge. The world, in short, is a place where the one thing needful (truth, God) is already known, yet access to it is always veiled. Action is enjoined, and one cannot hold back, but the grounds of action are always shifting and challengeable. From the vantage point of eternity all is settled and in place, but in the temporal crucible of human life one experiences only provisionality and the continual hazarding of being. Crisis awaits us at every juncture even though, in the last (which is also the first) analysis, crisis will always be recuperated by a God who effortlessly transubstantiates evil into “more good” (*PL*, VII, 616), taking back into himself what he had originally produced.

One can see, then, that the supposed contradiction between Milton’s radical republicanism (the heart of his politics) and his equally radical absolutism (the heart of his theology) is a function of his having joined the ontology of monism—there is only one thing real—to an antinomian epistemology—the real is known only perspectively, according to the various lights of individual knowers. Milton is at once postmodern in that he believes all determinations of truth to be local and revisable, and a hard-core objectivist in that he believes truth to be independent, stable, and unchanging. It is just that the objectivity and unchanging nature of truth is of no immediate help to those who must apprehend her through lenses that are limited and darkened, those who in the absence of direct access to her “glorious shape” must produce her in the approximated shapes of interpretive labor.

It is that labor which is enjoined on man by his epistemological condition (again *Areopagitica* is the relevant text), and its requirements and difficulties are anatomized in the first chapter of the second book of *The Christian Doctrine*. The chapter begins by declaring that “What chiefly constitutes the true worship of God is eagerness to do good works” (637) and then proceeds to a definition: “*Good works* are those which *we do when the Spirit of God works within us, through true faith, to God’s glory.*”<sup>21</sup> In place of the list of works we might have expected, we receive an account of them that places them behind a double screen. First, works are removed from the

empirical world and given a residence in the Spirit—that is, in the attitude with which they are performed (this is a basic tenet of antinomianism). This is bad enough, since in order to determine whether or not a work is good one must look into the heart; but then it turns out that what one looks for is not the spirit of the agent, but the spirit working within him. Behind the observable work is an animating intention, and behind that intention is the animation of another. It is only when that other is present that a work is good and true, but the presence of that other leaves no palpable (formal, external) mark on its issue. One cannot tell good works from bad except by an exercise of faith that bears all the liabilities of its indeterminate object. Whether one is judging the actions of another or the actions performed by oneself, the same radical uncertainty obtains. “If I keep the Sabbath, in accordance with the ten commandments, when my faith prompts me to do otherwise, my precise compliance ... will be counted as sin” (639).

But how does one know whether the impulse to set the written law aside stems from the prompting of faith or from some baser prompting? “How can one know, in the absence of required external laws, when one’s decision to act is based on the direction of God’s spirit dwelling in one’s heart and when on personal desire?”<sup>22</sup> How can one know that when one writes “to justify the ways of God to men,” that one wholeheartedly intends “justify” in a sense that yields all the glory to God (which would make the writing of the poem a work of “true faith,” according to Milton’s own definition) and does not reserve at least part of that glory (“that with no middle flight intends to soar”) to oneself? The answer to all of these questions is that one cannot know and that the actions one performs must be hazarded without any external confirmation of their rightness. Not only does this mean that one cannot turn in moments of decision to a ready-made calculation of moral value like the Ten Commandments, but that one cannot infer with confidence from what was done yesterday to what should be done today. I rely once more on Northrop Frye’s formulation: “At each crisis of life the important factor is not the consequences of previous actions, but the confrontation, across a vast apocalyptic gulf, with the source of deliverance.”<sup>23</sup>

It isn’t that previous actions don’t matter (we shall see in our analysis of the morning quarrel in book IX how they are at least partly constitutive of present moments of choice), but that they are not determinative. In a crucial sense each situation is a fresh one, not because the obligation it presents is unique—the source of deliverance with which we would be joined is ever the same—but because the precise shape of that obligation is obscured, both by the shifting theater of a variegated world and by the darkened sight of men whose eyes are “blear’d” by desires they can never fully know. Frye’s vocabulary helps us once again to understand the co-presence in Milton’s universe of absolute certainty and a pervasive indeterminacy. The deity is

omnipresent, but the “apocalyptic gulf” that divides us from him renders our attempts to apprehend him provisional and fraught with danger. Nor can that gulf be bridged, because the very efforts to bridge it are its consequences and therefore reconstitute it in the performing. There is nothing we can do but go on, in “continual seeking,” in “perpetual progression,” following a light we are never quite able to see and are prone to misidentify, like Abraham who in response to the call of God “went out, not knowing where he went” (Hebrews 11:8).

#### FREEDOM AND RISK

I said earlier that representation—along with plot, narrative, movement, woman—is a vehicle of idolatry because it is by definition at a distance from God and therefore stands between men and their primary obligation. The implication was that representation should be shunned in favor of that which it obscures; but in the light of Milton’s mature views, first fully emergent in the *Areopagitica*, any such implication must be withdrawn because representation—the interpretive conjecturing of what God is really like and what he really wants—is all we have, until our master’s second coming. Although the prose and poetry are replete with exhortations to resist the appeal of secondary forms and embrace the one true way, it is amid secondary forms that Milton and his readers live, and the choice he and they face is not between the one and the many but among the many that assert, with a distressingly plural plausibility, the claim to be the one’s authorized representative. This is, if anything is, the plot of Milton’s work, and especially of *Paradise Lost*—verse after verse, line after line in which testimony takes the form of choosing between alternatives that are indifferently authorized.

Nowhere is the pattern more perspicuously on display than when Michael meets Satan and they exchange taunts. “Author of evil,” Michael cries, and Satan replies, “The strife which thou call’st evil ... wee style / The strife of Glory” (VI, 262, 289–290). That is to say, *who* is to say? In a world of free agents—agents not programmed by nature to reach certain conclusions—there are an infinite number of characterizations of any situation or issue. It is a question, finally, of what one believes; and belief, rather than being vulnerable to evidence, determines what will be recognized as evidence. We are always “styling”—constructing the details, small and large, of our lives, on the basis of assumptions that are their own and only support—and living as characters in the narratives we thus fashion. Satan and his cohorts style the strife of glory and live in a world where a tyrant unfairly armed with homemade thunderbolts seeks to restrict their freedom; they heroically struggle against overwhelming odds, exercising their ingenuity in

efforts to match his arsenal (thus the invention of gunpowder) and managing at least to survive (“And if one day, why not Eternal days?” [424]). Michael and his friends style a different strife, not of glory but of obedience; in their world an all-powerful but inscrutable deity assigns them impossible tasks as a way of testing their loyalty, and they respond joyfully to conditions others might consider humiliating. It is not that Milton believes the choice between these stylings to be indifferent; it is just that choosing (deciding, affirming, testifying) is an action for which there are no guidelines and no guarantees; it is just that the choice can be made only on faith, and that no one who chooses is in a more secure position than anyone else—not Satan when he chooses to think himself impaired by the Son’s exaltation, nor the Son when he chooses to believe that God “will not leave me in the loathsome grave” (III, 247), nor Adam when he concludes that he “came ... here / Not of myself” but “by some great Maker” (VIII, 277–278), nor Satan again when he concludes (in direct opposition) that he was “self-begot, self-rai’d” (V, 860).

Here of course is another (and, indeed, climactic) instance of the pun with which this chapter began, and it encodes the same two scenarios: one in which the agent pulls himself up out of nowhere by his bootstraps (self-raised), and a second in which, by casting himself in the first, the agent destroys himself (self-razed). On its face (a face provided by Raphael), Satan’s assertion is absurd: I am not a creature—something made by another—because I don’t remember being created: “We know no time when we were not as now” (V, 859). But in fact this is an assertion no more absurd (without any grounds) than Adam’s, for Adam is in the same position, knowing nothing before he was as he is now, constructing the reality of an inaccessible past, and proceeding on the basis of what he has constructed. “I can’t remember my own origin, thus I must have spontaneously generated myself,” or “I can’t remember my own origin, thus I must have been made by a superior intelligence.” The two stories are equally plausible and implausible—and who is to say which is the true one? Not Adam or Raphael, who in response to challenges can point only to signs that are a function of the story to which they are precommitted. Not the reader, who is himself already in a relation to some story and commitment when he arrives at moments like this one. Not even Milton, whose editorial interventions (“So spake th’ Apostate ... / Vaunting aloud, but rackt with deep despair” [I, 125–126], “fondly overcome with Female charm” [IX, 999]) have had the effect not of clarifying matters but of producing new interpretive disputes, disputes that began with the early commentary of Patrick Hume (1695) and continue in the writing of William Empson, A. J. A. Waldock, Catherine Belsey, and others. If the plot of the poem is one of testimony—of moments in which various speakers either prove or betray themselves in words—it is a plot Milton does not preside over, but inhabits as one (and not a privileged

one) of many styling voices. The burden of his song is interpretive freedom, the freedom of a will whose choices are unconstrained by a deity who will nevertheless pass judgment on them. Interpretive freedom is therefore at once a glory (because it accords the agent the dignity of self-determination) and a burden (because it subjects the agent to the dangers of self-determination). We must all raise ourselves by interpretive labor, at the risk of razing ourselves should those labors be performed in the wrong spirit and at the bidding of impulses rooted in self-love. Interpretive labor is what Milton narrates in the persons of his characters; interpretive labor is what he demands of his readers as they must make sense of the characters' making sense; and interpretive labor is what Milton performs with no more assurance than anyone else that he is on the side of the angels when he sets himself up as the architect of the conditions within which sense will be fatefully made.

The firmness of his architecture is such that it has earned him the hostility of readers like Leavis, whose judgment has been reaffirmed by Leo Damrosch: "Milton is the most imperial of writers, shaping every minute element of his mighty tale, guiding his readers at all points and perhaps even tyrannizing over them."<sup>24</sup> Although this is certainly accurate as a description of the verse's mechanics and perhaps of Milton's intentions, the effect thereby produced is almost the reverse. As many have observed, this is a poem one cannot read without being provoked to argue back. The first of God's speeches in book III is only the most egregious illustration of an experiential fact: the more totalizing the discourse—the more it attempts to fill every nook and cranny—the more energetically will those at whom it is directed struggle to escape it. Whether it is a part of Milton's design, or simply an effect of the interpretive freedom he celebrates, the structure that seems so monolithic and closed is at every point of its articulation productive of challenges in the name of everything it tries to exclude.

The tendency to exclusion accompanied by a claim to interpretive purity is especially pronounced in the early work. In the antiprelatical tracts and in the poetry of the 1645 volume, Milton delineates a universe in which an overriding truth embodied in a sacred text is embraced by one party and rejected by another in favor of its own carnal imaginations. In that universe, time is devalued as a medium of error and wandering; language is distrusted as an impious addition to the sufficiency of God's revealed word; and history—or, as Milton labels it, custom or tradition—is stigmatized as a collection of corrupted texts or as a veil that obscures a reality easily seen by those of a cleared and regenerate vision. As for those who don't see, they are such as cannot be taught and one simply leaves them to the judgment they will certainly face on the Day of Judgment.

This tidy, static, leakproof world is crafted and celebrated with a sometimes unholy zeal until 1643–1645, when, without explanation (at least

Milton doesn't give one), everything changes. Fallibility of vision is predicated of everyone, not simply of the unregenerate. Consequently there is no one for whom the meaning of Scripture is perspicuous, and interpretation, rather than being forbidden as an unnecessary supplement to a self-declaring word, is enjoined. This in turn means that time and history are redeemed, since a skillful and laborious gathering is now required before the body of truth can be reassembled (if it ever can be). Choice is no longer a single moment of commitment which is clung to with all one's might; rather, choice must be made again and again in circumstances that demand ever new calculations and recalculations and bring ever new opportunities to go wrong, "to wander ... forlorn" (*PL*, VII, 20). Contingency and difference, once denied and pushed away with a fear bordering on the pathological, are now acknowledged and embraced as the mediums of potential growth of "knowledge in the making." Women, previously stigmatized as the very incarnations of the secondary and idolatrous (or turned into men, as is the Lady in *Comus*), are now the bearers of regenerative and healing powers.

I do not mean to suggest that Milton simply woke up one morning to find his views wholly changed. Patriarchy and misogyny are hardly absent from *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*, and *Paradise Regained* is in many ways a return to the flinty exclusiveness of *Comus* and the antiprelatical tracts. But the general point, I think, holds: the freedom that Milton once thought unproblematically grounded in a text notable for its "clearness"<sup>25</sup> is reconceived as a trial, as an interpretive crucible, as a field of opportunity whose rewards are inseparable from its risks. Risk is not an important component in the early prose and poetry, populated as they are by persons who are already and irrevocably on one side or another of a great dividing line; but risk is coincident with action when that line must itself be drawn by those who would position themselves in relation to it—those who want to feel that they know the difference between devils and deities and that, when they raise a hand or a pen, they do it gently.

#### NOTES

1. F.R. Leavis, "Milton's Verse," in C.A. Patrides, ed., *Milton's Epic Poetry: Essays on "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained"* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 28.

2. J.B. Broadbent, "Milton's 'Mortal Voice' and His 'Omnific Word,'" in C. A. Patrides, ed., *Approaches to "Paradise Lost"* (London, 1968), p. 115.

3. *Paradise Lost*, book I, lines 527–530, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. M. Y. Hughes (New York, 1957).

4. Donald Davie, "Syntax and Music in *Paradise Lost*," in Frank Kermode, ed., *The Living Milton* (London, 1960), p. 83.

5. See on this point Regina Schwartz, "The Toad at Eve's Ear," in D. T. Benet

and M. Lieb, eds., *Literary Milton* (Pittsburgh, 1994), p. 20: "Making reading an activity in which the reader is engaged in choosing identifications, [Milton] exposes his work to the danger that the reader may identify with the wrong character at the wrong juncture in his or her moral life."

6. *The Reason of Church Government*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, ed. D.M. Wolfe (New Haven, 1953), p. 850.

7. *The Prose of John Milton*, ed. J. M. Patrick et al. (New York, 1967), p. 266.

8. *The Readie and Easie Way*, 2nd ed., in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 7, ed. R.W. Ayers (New Haven, 1980), p. 550.

9. *The Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings*, in *The Prose of John Milton*, p. 514.

10. *The Reason of Church Government*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, p. 803.

11. *Comus*, lines 244–248, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*.

12. *Christian Doctrine*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 6, ed. M. Kelley, trans. J. Carey (New Haven, 1973), p. 307.

13. Cf. William Kolbrenner, *Milton's Warring Angels: A Study of Critical Engagements* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 144: "Providential history resists the temporalizing effects of narrative."

14. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 145: "Representation in its very essence violates the promised unity—the monistic identity—of God with his creation."

15. As William Kolbrenner observes, "All discourse, irreducibly material, elicits the *temptation* of idolatry" (*Ibid.*, p. 155).

16. "At a Solemn Music," lines 25–26, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*.

17. Herman Rapaport, *Milton and the Postmodern* (Lincoln, Neb., 1983), p. 176.

18. *Areopagitica*, in *The Prose of John Milton*, p. 310.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 316–318.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 330.

21. *Christian Doctrine*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 6, p. 638.

22. J. Bennett, "Milton's Antinomianism," in W. Hunter Jr. et al. eds., *A Milton Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (Cranbury, N.J., 1983), p. 14.

23. Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden* (Toronto, 1965), p. 103.

24. Leo Damrosch, *God's Plot and Man's Stories* (Chicago, 1985), p. 120.

25. *The Reason of Church Government*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, p. 750.

BARBARA K. LEWALSKI

“*Something ...  
Written to Aftertimes*”

Milton has probably had a greater influence on major poets and writers over a longer period of time than any other English literary figure except Shakespeare. Later readers and writers looked to him for a powerful formulation of the great biblical myths of Western civilization: the garden state of innocence, Satan or the embodiment of evil, the Fall of humankind, and, assimilated to them, the classical myths of the Golden Age, Pandora, Flora, Prosperine, Scylla and Charybdis, Prometheus, and Creation out of Chaos. Indeed, many readers virtually conflated Milton’s portrayal of Eden and the Fall with the Genesis account. Also, Milton was seen to have established literary norms and styles: Harold Bloom claims that English poets from Dryden to T.S. Eliot looked upon Milton as a daunting father figure, who set them a standard of imaginative force and eloquent expression which they felt compelled to imitate or adapt or rebel against.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, subsequent writers sought in Milton their own theological, political and cultural ideals, prompting conflict from the outset between orthodox and reformist versions of Milton’s legacy.

His influence soon spread beyond anglophone countries through translations of *Paradise Lost* and some other poems and treatises into Dutch, French, Italian, German, Russian, and Polish, and more recently, Chinese and Japanese. Also, his poems influenced artists in other media. From 1688 onward *Paradise Lost* and sometimes other Milton poems provided a stimulus

---

From *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*. © 2000 by Blackwell Publishing.



for distinguished illustrations, of which Blake's are masterpieces. Handel composed an oratorio on texts from *Samson Agonistes*. He also composed a three-part secular oratorio with texts from *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* and a characteristically eighteenth-century conclusion, *Il Moderato*; in the late twentieth century Mark Morris added a ballet to that Handel work. Milton's epic also supplied inspiration, and the libretto, for an impressive opera entitled *Paradise Lost* by the twentieth-century Polish composer Penderecki.

Milton's younger contemporary, Dryden, acknowledged his impact by imitation, praise, appropriation, and ideological revision. Into *The State of Innocence*, his dramatic version of *Paradise Lost*, Dryden imported couplet rhyme and royalist politics, and his satiric brief epic, *Absolom and Achitopel* (1681), written during the exclusion crisis, models the Whig Shaftesbury on Milton's crafty Satan. The temptation scenes of Dryden's *Hind and the Panther* bear Milton's impress and verbal allusions abound in his translations of Virgil. In a laudatory epigram to the 1688 edition of *Paradise Lost*, Dryden proposed Milton as England's poet, surpassing Homer and Virgil—though by locating all of them in a distant epic past he sought to neutralize Milton's politics and literary influence:

Three poets, in three distant ages born,  
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.  
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed;  
The next in majesty; in both the last.  
The force of nature could no further go;  
To make a third, she joined the former two.

That handsome 1688 Folio with its commendations, striking illustrations by John Baptist Medina, and subscription by over 500 Englishmen was a major factor in returning Milton to the mainstream, repressing his radical politics and theology, and presenting his epic as the pride of the English nation. While several early readers—among them Defoe, John Toland, John Dennis, and Isaac Newton—recognized and sometimes complained of the Arianism and republicanism in *Paradise Lost*, Addison's influential series of essays for *The Spectator* (1728) sidestepped such issues, emphasizing the poem's classical dimension, evaluating its literary excellence by neoclassical standards, and proclaiming it as the national epic.

A few eighteenth-century poets like Richard Blackmore tried to follow Milton in epic, but better poets recognized that he had exhausted that genre, at least for a time, and engaged with the Miltonic legacy in other ways. Pope's brilliant mock epic, *The Rape of the Lock*, parodies passages and supernatural machinery from *Paradise Lost* in recounting a rake's theft of a coquette's lock of hair; and in his satiric epic *The Dunciad* Pope rises to a Miltonic high style in evoking the image of Chaos and Night returned again to uncreate the

world. Also, Pope appropriated Miltonic language in his translations of Homer and recast Milton’s epic purpose, “To justify the ways of God to man,” in defining the intent of his *Essay on Man*: “To vindicate the ways of God to man.” Many lesser poets—among them Thomas Gray, James Thomson, Edward Young, William Collins, and William Cowper—attempted to imitate the blank verse and “sublimity” of *Paradise Lost*, or wrote in “Miltonicks,” the tetrameter couplets of the very popular companion poems, *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*; their poems were filled with Miltonic allusions, poetic diction, and syntax. Milton came to be regarded as the very type of the great poet, and a chorus of voices agreed with Edmund Burke and Samuel Johnson that his characteristic quality was sublimity. Dr Johnson underscored Milton’s greatness but, prompted by his antipathy for Milton’s politics and by the neoclassical standards of his age, he also found much to object to in Milton’s poetry: the use of pastoral and the mix of Christian and classical supernatural elements in *Lycidas*, the “faults” of language and versification and the want of human interest in *Paradise Lost*, and the lack of a “middle”/in *Samson Agonistes*.

Colonial and post-revolutionary Americans embraced Milton as a model of sublime thought and expression, a major source of imitation and quotation, and a valuable support for orthodoxy in several areas. Schoolmasters illustrated points of grammar and rhetoric out of his poems, moralists pointed to his Eve and his Garden of Eden for ideals of womanly virtue and wedded love, ministers cited him to support their own positions and appropriated his images to tell the Christian story. Milton’s companion poems prompted a rash of mostly pedestrian mood poems, and New England poets celebrated the Puritan errand into the Wilderness and the New World experience in an epic style derived from Milton and Pope. Philip Freneau’s *The Rising Glory of America* in blank verse (1772), Timothy Dwight’s *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785) and Joel Barlow’s *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) in heroic couplets reworked images, passages, and episodes from *Paradise Lost*—the Infernal Council, Michael’s prophecy, Adam and Eve in Eden and their Morning Hymn—often appropriating Milton’s words. Both Milton and Pope influenced the first African-American poet, the educated eighteenth-century slave woman Phillis Wheatley. She often imitated Milton’s syntax, cadences, themes, and verse forms. In Phillis’ *Reply* she terms Milton the “British Homer” and “Europa’s Bard,” affirming at once her debt to him, her own insufficiencies in high poetry, and the end of his epic tradition: “in him Britania’s prophet dies.”

But if Milton’s example was of little use to poets who made him into a literary icon, reformist and radical statesmen in America, England, and France found much to their various purposes in both his prose and his poetry. In the buildup to the Glorious Revolution (1688) English Whigs—John Locke, Algernon Sidney, John Toland, and Anthony Cooper, Third

Earl of Shaftesbury—drew often unacknowledged support from Milton's attacks on sacerdotal kingship and press censorship, and from his arguments for Protestant religious toleration and the contract theory of government in *Areopagitica*, *Tenure*, the *Defensio*, *Of Civil Power*, and *Hirelings*. In 1774 the English Republican historian Catherine Macauley reprised the arguments of *Areopagitica* in *A Modest Plea for the Property of Copy Right*; and her eight-volume *History of England* (1763–83) defended the English revolution, the regicide, and the Commonwealth by marshaling the contract theory arguments of Sidney, Locke, the Levellers, and Milton's *Tenure* and *Defensio*. Often reprinted in England, *Areopagitica* was the first Milton book published in America (1774), and its arguments have continued to echo down the centuries in defense of liberal ideas of toleration and intellectual freedom. Milton's other tracts also served revolutionaries in America, and his poetic imagery and rhetoric was even more important for them. His agonizing pleas to his countrymen in *The Readie and Easie Way* was used in 1770 to denounce American backsliders; Benjamin Franklin damned British taxation policy as reminiscent of Milton's description of Chaos; and John Adams described British colonial rule in the imagery of Satanic pomp and foolish resistance, citing Milton as one who helped convince him that a republic is the only good government. Jefferson excerpted some 48 passages from *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* in his Commonplace book (many of them dealing with Satan's revolt), and in 1776 he called on the antiprelatical tracts in an argument for disestablishing the Church of England in Virginia. In France, Mirabeau's *Sur La Liberté de la Presse*, which paraphrases or translates much of *Areopagitica*, was published four times between 1788 and 1792, and an anonymous treatise on which he collaborated, the *Théorie de la Royauté d'après la doctrine de Milton* (1789), undertook to justify the French Revolution and its aftermath with arguments and extracts from the *Defensio* and other Milton tracts. It was republished in 1792 with a preface calling for the trial and execution of Louis XVI.

The English Romantics celebrated Milton as a prophet and a revolutionary in his life and in his art; because they set themselves to take up his prophetic mantle, they were able to respond creatively to his example. Blake's engagement with Milton was both pervasive and profound: Blake and his wife sat nude in their garden reading aloud Book IV of *Paradise Lost*; Blake engaged in visionary conversations with Milton; and Blake's striking illustrations of *Comus*, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* provide brilliant commentaries on those poems. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* famously claims Milton for the Devil's party, understanding Milton's Satan as a figure of energy and rebellion; and Blake's several long, epic-like prophetic poems bear the impress of *Paradise Lost* and especially *Paradise Regained*. His poem *Milton* makes that poet an epic hero, one of the angels of the Apocalypse who fell into errors of selfhood by wronging his wives and daughters, his

“emanations,” and who returns to earth to redeem those errors; entering the foot of his successor poet-prophet Blake, Milton is joined with him in the work of building the new Jerusalem “in England’s green & pleasant Land.” For Wordsworth, Milton was also a powerful inspiration. In his efforts to revive the sonnet genre he looked to the lofty Miltonic model—“in his hand / The Thing became a trumpet.” He invoked Milton in his sonnet *London 1802* as an exemplar of steadfast freedom of mind, noble ideals, virtue, and duty: “Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour: / England hath need of thee.” Wordsworth commented astutely and admiringly on many Milton passages, read his poems aloud with his sister Dorothy, often invoked his example in discussing issues of poetics, and in *The Excursion* expressed his epic aspirations in Miltonic blank verse. In defining “the Mind of Man” as its theme Wordsworth’s blank verse epic, *The Prelude*, takes off from the promise of a “paradise within” at the end of *Paradise Lost*. It also finds precedent in Milton’s Proems to Books I, III, VII, and IX of *Paradise Lost*, which treat the Bard’s heroic trials in writing his epic, for a new heroic subject: Wordsworth’s development as man and poet. *The Prelude* is dense with verbal and structural echoes and transformations of *Paradise Lost*: Helvellyn recalls Eden, the ascent of Snowdon recalls Adam’s ascent of the highest hill of Paradise, the French Revolution reprises the Fall.

The second generation of Romantic poets were also aided in realizing their poetic visions through engagement with Milton. Byron’s notorious “Byronic” heroes—Manfred, Cain—are descendants of Milton’s Satan in their dark passions, enormous nameless guilt, total alienation, and titanic self-assertion. A defiant critic of all sorts of orthodoxy who died fighting to liberate Greece, Byron praised Milton’s intellectual courage in facing down tyrants, and in *Don Juan* wished him back “to freeze once more / The blood of monarchs with his prophecies” and to convict time-serving poets of the present. Strongly influenced by Byron, the revolutionary Russian poet Pushkin also looked to Milton as an embodiment of genius, integrity, and amazing courage. Shelley honored Milton as a republican and a bold inquirer into morals and religion who made his Satan far superior to his God in moral virtue, giving him the best arguments and a character of unsurpassed energy and magnificence. Milton’s impress on Shelley’s poetry is everywhere: in *Milton’s Spirit* he imagines that Milton might again sound his “Uranian lute” to make “sanguine thrones and impious altars” quake; his elegy for Keats, *Adonais*, invites comparison with *Lycidas*; and *Prometheus Unbound*, a poem in four books about the regaining of Paradise, owes large debts to *Paradise Regained* and Jesus’s evolving definition of the kingdom within. Keats also admired Milton’s zealous liberalism, waxed enthusiastic about several passages of sublimity, beauty, and pathos in *Paradise Lost*, and responded to seeing a lock of Milton’s hair with a poem promising to follow his example and rise to nobler philosophic harmonies. His epic fragment *Hyperion*

portrays the fall of Saturn and the Titans sympathetically, but treats the rise of the new gods and especially Apollo, god of the sun and of high poetry, as necessary for progress. Miltonic elements range from the sinuous blank verse to the debate of the baffled Titans, to many particulars of image and idiom, but Keats came to believe the Miltonic mode to be antithetical to his own genius, and began the poem over again in other terms. Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, written at a period when Shelley was reading *Paradise Lost* aloud in the evenings, is a strikingly original re-creation of Milton's central myth; its epigram from *Paradise Lost*—"Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man? Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me"—invites association of Dr Frankenstein with Milton's God, the creature with Adam, and both with aspects of Satan.

Romantic critics commented at length and often astutely about Milton's poetry, and, like the poets, found his Satan powerfully attractive. Coleridge honored Milton's republicanism and role in the English revolution, characterized him as a "sublimar poet than Homer or Virgil," and ranked him with Shakespeare. He admired the Miltonic Satan's "dark and savage grandeur," but also observed that he displayed the egotism characteristic of "liberticides" from Nimrod to Bonaparte.<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt described Milton's Satan as the most heroic epic subject ever chosen for a poem, and praised Milton for portraying his nature and his rhetoric without any recourse to cheap deformities, while also showing him to embody love of power, pride, self-will, and ambition. And when Walter Savage Landor and the poet laureate Robert Southey elaborated on and added to Dr Johnson's criticisms of Milton, Thomas De Quincey offered a spirited defense of his poems and prose works.

Victorian poets and critics were usually more restrained and more selective than the Romantics in their responses to Milton. Some honored him as a republican and a lover of liberty. Extracts from *Tenure, Eikonoklastes*, and *The Radies and Easie Way* appeared in several Chartist tracts, new editions of his prose praised his heroic patriotism, and David Masson's six-volume biography provided a richly detailed and sympathetic account of his life and times. In 1825 Thomas Macauley produced a long panegyric essay on Milton and his works, prompted by the shocked reactions of some Victorians to the Arianism and other heterodoxies in the newly discovered *De Doctrina Christiana*. Those, he declared, should not surprise any careful reader of *Paradise Lost*. Macauley terms Milton "the glory of English literature, the champion and the martyr of English liberty," praising him especially for recognizing, in *Areopagitica*, the horrors of intellectual slavery and the benefits of a free press in promoting "the unfettered exercise of private judgment."<sup>3</sup> He honored Milton's personal triumph over the greatest difficulties and saw the same qualities in his "wonderful" Satan, whom he thought superior even to Prometheus in energy and noble endurance.

Ranking Milton's two epics above all subsequent poems, he valued especially Milton's ability, despite age, anxiety, and disappointment, to adorn *Paradise Lost* with “all that is most lovely and delightful in the physical and in the moral world.” By contrast, Matthew Arnold deprecated Milton's character, most of his prose works, and the subject matter of his epic as products of the Hebraic spirit nurtured by Puritanism. But he thought that spirit often countered in Milton's poetry by the Hellenistic influence, making for a patchwork of dazzling lines, splendid passages, and an unfailingly sublime poetic style. He includes several short passages from *Paradise Lost* among his touchstones of highest poetic quality, by which he would have readers form their taste and critical judgment.

Among the Victorian poets, both Arnold and Tennyson at times imitated Milton's blank verse and his diction. In an elegantly crafted poem in alcaics entitled *Milton*, Tennyson paid tribute to Milton's sublime style—“O mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies, / ... God-gifted organ voice of England.” Gerard Manley Hopkins valued Milton's art, and especially the rhythm and metrics of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson*, above that of any other poetry in any language: terming Milton “the great standard in the use of counterpoint,” he pointed to the choruses of *Samson Agonistes* as a forerunner of his own sprung rhythm.<sup>4</sup> Among the Victorian novelists, George Eliot felt his impress strongly. She thought his tractate on education and his divorce tracts especially relevant for her own era, and her novels often refer to or allude to Milton in treating issues of experience and moral choice. In *Middlemarch* Dorothea Brooke compares herself to Milton's daughters when she decides to marry Casaubon so as to assist him with a great intellectual project, though unlike them she expects by doing so to gain wisdom herself, the novel explores the disastrous consequences of her inexperience and naiveté in mistaking the pedant Casaubon for a Milton surrogate. In *Great Expectations* Dickens presents Pip's fall as a bourgeois parody of Adam's, both of them “fondly overcome with Female charm”; the novel ends with Pip and Estella reprising Adam and Eve as they leave a wrecked garden with hands joined.

Nineteenth-century Americans related readily to Milton's theology and politics as well as his poetry, sensing, as R. W. Griswold declared in 1846, that “Milton is more emphatically *American* than any other author who has lived in the United States.”<sup>5</sup> New England Unitarians were pleased to find Arianism and Arminianism in Milton's newly recovered *De Doctrina Christiana*, William Ellery Charming proclaiming him a great saint and an inspired master spirit. New England Transcendentalists encountered him through Coleridge and other English Romantics, but also directly. Emerson cited and paraphrased Milton's comments on poetic inspiration in *The Reason of Church-government*, and proclaimed Milton “the sublimest bard of all,”<sup>6</sup> a judgment based on his belief that all of Milton's poetry is a version of his own

heroic life of bravery, purity, temperance, toil, self-reliance, and devotion. Honoring especially his defense of the individual conscience in *Areopagitica*, Emerson termed him an “apostle of freedom” in the house, in the state, in the church, and in the press, asserting categorically that “no man can be named whose mind still acts on the cultivated intellect of England and America with an energy comparable to that of Milton.”<sup>7</sup> Emerson identified with Milton the prophet, and took the title of his poem *Uriel* from Milton’s angel of the sun, conjoining in that figure Satan’s rebelliousness and Uriel’s devotion to truth. Margaret Fuller, who read Milton at fourteen and identified her own ambition with his, thought Milton’s prose works deserve to be studied beyond any other English prose for the exemplar figure they reveal: “If Milton be not absolutely the greatest of human beings, it is hard to name one who combines so many features of God’s own image, ideal goodness, a life of spotless nature, heroic endeavor and constancy, with such richness of gifts.” Like Griswold she thought him a peculiarly American spirit, who “understood the nature of liberty, of justice—what is required for the unimpeded action of conscience, what constitutes true marriage, and the scope of manly education.”<sup>8</sup> During the buildup to the American Civil War *Paradise Lost* supplied rhetorical force to denunciations of the Southern revolt, which Edward Everett in an oration at Gettysburg likened to “that first foul revolt of ‘the Infernal Serpent.’”<sup>9</sup> And Lincoln, reading the first books of *Paradise Lost*, was reportedly struck “by the coincidences between the utterances of Satan and those of Jefferson Davis.”<sup>10</sup>

In his short story *Rappacini’s Daughter* Hawthorne presents a dark version of Milton’s Eden, in which a father creates a beautiful garden whose fruit poisons his daughter and her poisoned body infects her lover. In his epic novel *Moby Dick* Melville invests in Captain Ahab the indomitable will and obsession with revenge of Milton’s Satan, and embodies in his white whale Satan’s (or God’s) titanic strength and seeming cosmic malevolence. Throughout the novel the issues foregrounded are those at the core of Milton’s epic, debated fruitlessly by his fallen angels, and embodying, Melville thinks, Milton’s own profound questioning of theodicy: “Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate, / Fixt Fate, Free Will, Foreknowledge absolute.”<sup>11</sup> And Walt Whitman took on the mantle of the poet-seer from Milton and Wordsworth as he sang a new, democratic epic celebrating himself as the embodiment of everything in the universe.

In the earlier twentieth century, and especially in England, Milton the poet was seen as an icon of the cultural and literary establishment, to be embraced as such or vigorously rejected, whereas Milton the man was repudiated as a dour Puritan, republican, and regicide. C. S. Lewis praised *Paradise Lost* as a brilliantly realized epic of orthodox Christianity, while William Empson carried on his battle against the God of that same orthodox Christianity who disfigured, as he thought, the text of Milton’s epic. T. S.

Eliot admitted his antipathy toward Milton the man, arising, as he shrewdly recognized, from the fact that the Civil War has never really ended in England. In several essays beginning in 1922 Eliot launched the modernist attack on Milton's poetry, warning his poet-contemporaries against imitating the poet who had helped produce a “dissociation of sensibility” in English poetry and whose convoluted poetic language violates English norms. He recanted some of this in 1947, acknowledging that Milton had invented a great though inimitable poetic language marked by musicality, long periods, and imagery evoking vast size and limitless space, and that modern poets might learn from him about freedom within form. While American New Critics were echoing Eliot's disparagement of Milton's poetry, American scholars were producing painstaking editions of his entire oeuvre; in the crisis years before and during World War II, that oeuvre was often held forth as an embodiment of Christian humanism and American liberal values of toleration, individualism, and personal freedom. Virginia Woolf's reference to “Milton's bogey”—his ideas of woman's inferiority as a major obstacle to women writers' creativity—in the final chapter of *A Room of One's Own* (1929) shaped the response to Milton of many twentieth-century feminist readers. A similar notion of Milton's repressive effect on women informs Robert Graves' novel imagining Milton's domestic life, *The Story of Mary Powell Wife to Mr Milton* (1943). Some contemporary feminists, however, have been led by Milton, as Catherine Macauley, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot had been, to write themselves into his programs of reform and intellectual liberty. In that appropriative spirit Malcolm X enlisted Milton for black liberation, identifying his Satan with the popes and kings and other evil forces of Europe, and so concluding that “Milton and Mr. Elijah Muhammad were actually saying the same thing.”<sup>12</sup>

Milton's impress on twentieth-century literary texts is often a matter of allusions that evoke his works to supply context or ironic contrast. A few examples must suffice. Eliot's *Four Quartets* contain allusions that incorporate Milton among the many voices commenting on memory and history; Eliot's verse dramas, especially *Murder in the Cathedral*, owe a good deal to *Samson Agonistes*; and Eliot played off Milton's title for his *Sweeney Agonistes*. James Joyce's epic novel *Ulysses* looks to Milton as well as Homer and Dante for some elements of theme and style. Aldous Huxley evoked the poignant description of Milton's Samson to set the tone for his novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*. Clifford Odets used the title *Paradise Lost* for a 1934 play in which a family is dispossessed from their little Eden—their home—by the forces of capitalism and the Depression; it contains a very minor character called Milton, who lisp and whose chief business is to define the nature of man as 80 per cent alkaline and 20 percent acid. In his poem *Skunk Hour* Robert Lowell imports Satan's line to characterize the mood of his speaker: “I myself am hell.” In his poem *Adam and Eve* Karl Shapiro alludes to Milton's scenes



of Adam's longing and Eve's creation to rewrite the story of their union. And in the mode of tribute, Jorge Luis Borges' poem entitled *A Rose and Milton* voices a poignant wish that some rose Milton once "held before his face, but could / Not see" might, for that association, be spared oblivion.

In the later twentieth century critics and theorists of every stripe—Marxists, feminists, deconstructionists, new historicists, psychological critics, and more—have made Milton grist for their several mills. And as the new millennium begins, he is still a battleground for our culture wars. On the one hand, so strong is the impulse to reclaim him for orthodoxy that some scholars are casting doubt on his authorship of much or all of his heterodox theological treatise, *De Doctrina Christiana*. On the other hand, critics writing from a Marxist, cultural materialist, or historicist perspective are interrogating all his poetry and prose to situate his complex texts more precisely in their political and cultural milieu, and to examine how they relate to some of the fraught issues of our time: gender roles, marriage and divorce, imperialism, individualism, the artist in society. Postmodernist critics value the dividedness and ambiguities of his texts, the fact that for him truth is not a monolithic closed system but the dismembered body so graphically described in *Areopagitica*. Ideological concerns and critical fashions have changed over three centuries, but what endures is the response of generation after generation of readers to Milton's superlative poetry and to his large vision of the human condition.

#### NOTES

1. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York, 1973).
2. Letter 164, to John Thelwell, December 17, 1776; and *The Statesman's Manual*, 1816, cited in Joseph A. Wittreich, Jr., *The Romantics on Milton: Formal Essays and Critical Asides* (Cleveland, Ohio, and London, 2970), 157, 228–9.
3. "Milton," from the *Edinburgh Review*, August, 1825.
4. From a letter of Hopkins to Richard Walter Dixon, October 5, 1878, cited in James Thorpe, ed., *Milton Criticism: Selections from Four Centuries* (London, 1951), 372. In a letter to Robert Bridges, February 15, 1879, Hopkins states that he "hopes in time to have a more balanced and Miltonic style."
5. R. W. Griswold, *Papers on Literature and Art* (New York, 1846), I, 35.
6. *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William Gilman, et al., 16 vols (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), II, 106–7.
7. Milton," *North American Review*, July, 1838.
8. In her review of R. W. Griswold's edition of Milton's Prose, *New York Daily Tribune*, October 7, 1845; Fuller, *Paper on Literature and Art*, 2 vols (New York, 1846), I, 36, 38–9.

9. Cited in Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War* (New York, 1973), 343.

10. Noted in *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Allan Nevins and M. H. Thomas, 4 vols (New York, 1852), III, 368.

11. Robin Grey, *The Complicity of Imagination: The American Renaissance, contests of Authority, and Seventeenth-Century English Culture* (Cambridge, 1997), 213–27.

12. Malcolm X (with the assistance of Alex Haley), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, 1965), 186.



## *Chronology*

- 1608 John Milton is born December 9 in Cheapside, London.
- 1620 Enters St. Paul's School in London.
- 1625 Admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge. (Receives M.A., 1632.)
- 1634 First performance of *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* [*Comus*], September 29.
- 1635–38 Period of further study at Horton, Buckinghamshire.
- 1637 Writes *Lycidas*, (published in an elegy collection for Edward King, 1638).
- 1638 Begins Italian journey in May; travels abroad till July, 1639.
- 1639–40 Teaches in London.
- 1641 Publishes *Of Reformation in England, Of Prelatical Episcopacy, Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against SMECTYMNUUS*.
- 1642 *The Reason of Church-Government Urg'd Against Prelaty* published. Milton marries Mary Powell, but she soon returns to her royalist family in Buckinghamshire.
- 1643 *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* published.
- 1644 Publishes *Of Education* and *Areopagitica*.
- 1645 *Tetrachordon* published. Mary Powell Milton returns to her husband. *Poems of Mr. John Milton* appears.

- 1649 *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* published. Milton appointed as Secretary for Foreign Tongues. *Eikonoklastes* published.
- 1651 *Defensio pro populo Anglicano* published.
- 1652 Milton is almost completely blind. Death of his wife and son.
- 1654 *Defensio secunda pro populo Anglicano* published.
- 1656 Marries Katherine Woodcock. She dies in 1658.
- 1660 *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* published. Milton faces arrest in June but is released from custody in December.
- 1663 Marries Elizabeth Minshul.
- 1667 *Paradise Lost, A Poem in Ten Books* published.
- 1670 *The History of Britain* published.
- 1671 *Paradise Regain'd* published along with *Samson Agonistes*.
- 1673 *Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, and Toleration* published.
- 1674 *Paradise Lost, A Poem in Twelve Books* published. Death of Milton on November 8. Buried in St. Giles, Cripplegate.

## *Contributors*

HAROLD BLOOM is Sterling Professor of the Humanities at Yale University and Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Professor of English at the New York University Graduate School. He is the author of over 20 books, including *Shelley's Mythmaking* (1959), *The Visionary Company* (1961), *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963), *Yeats* (1970), *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), *Agon: Toward a Theory of Revisionism* (1982), *The American Religion* (1992), *The Western Canon* (1994), and *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection* (1996). *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) sets forth Professor Bloom's provocative theory of the literary relationships between the great writers and their predecessors. His most recent books include *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998), a 1998 National Book Award finalist, *How to Read and Why* (2000), *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (2002), and *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (2003). In 1999, Professor Bloom received the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters Gold Medal for Criticism, and in 2002 he received the Catalonia International Prize.

F.T. PRINCE was Professor of English at Southampton University. Poet, critic, and editor, he produced the Arden edition of Shakespeare's *Poems* as well as his own *Collected Poems, 1935–1992*.

WILLIAM EMPSON was one of the most eminent of modern poet-critics. He taught for many years in China and later at Sheffield University. His principal writings include his *Collected Poems*, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, and *The Structure of Complex Words*.

THOMAS GREENE was Professor Emeritus of comparative literature and English at Yale University. His books include a study of Rabelais, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, the essay collection *The Vulnerable Text*, and *Calling from Diffusion: Hermeneutics of the Promenade. Poetry, Signs, and Magic*, another collection of essays, is forthcoming.

ANGUS FLETCHER is Professor Emeritus of English at the Graduate School of the City University of New York. He is the author of *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, *The Prophetic Moment*, a study of Spenser, and *Colors of the Mind: Conjectures on Thinking in Literature*.

JOHN HOLLANDER, Sterling Professor Emeritus of English at Yale University, is the author and editor of many books. The latest of his nineteen volumes of poetry is *Picture Window*, while his critical works include *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form*, *Melodious Guile: Fictive Pattern in Poetic Language*, and more recently, *The Poetry of Everyday Life* and *The Work of Poetry*.

PETER M. SACKS is Professor of English at Harvard University. His book *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* won the Christian Gauss Award in 1985, and he has also written several volumes of poetry, including *Promised Lands*, *Natal Command*, and *Necessity*.

WILLIAM FLESCHE, Associate Professor of English at Brandeis University, has published articles in *Critical Inquiry*, *Studies in Romanticism*, and *Southwest Review*. He is the author of *Generosity and the Limits of Authority: Shakespeare, Herbert, Milton*.

MARY NYQUIST, Associate Professor of English at the University of Toronto, is co-editor (along with Margaret Ferguson) of *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*. She has also published articles on "Phallogocentric discourses in *Paradise Lost*" and "*The House of Mirth* and the Anglo-American realist tradition."

JOHN GUILLORY is Professor of English at New York University. He is the author of *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* and *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. His articles on reading, ethics, and philosophy have appeared in *The Turn to Ethics*, *Rethinking Class*, and other volumes.

C.A. PATRIDES was the G.B. Harrison Professor of English at the University of Michigan and the author of *Milton and the Christian Tradition*, *Premises and Motifs in Renaissance Thought and Literature*; and many other

books. He also edited several essay collections, as well as editions of the poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Milton.

PRICE McMURRAY, Assistant Professor of American Literature at Texas Wesleyan University, has published articles in *Milton Studies* and *Studies in American Fiction*.

J. MARTIN EVANS is William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of English at Stanford University. He has published a number of books on Milton, including *Road from Horton: Looking Backwards in "Lycidas," Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, and *Miltonic Moment*. Most recently he has edited the essay collection *John Milton: Twentieth Century Perspectives*.

STANLEY FISH is the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His most influential works are *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* and *Is There a Text In This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Other books include *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature*, *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change*, as well as studies of Skelton, Herbert, and legal theory.

BARBARA K. LEWALSKI is William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of History and Literature and of English Literature at Harvard University. Her books include *Milton's Brief Epic: the Genre, Meaning, and Art of Paradise Regained; Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*; and more recently, *Writing Women in Jacobean England*. She has also edited *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation* and *Polemics and Poems of Rachel Speght*.





## *Bibliography*

- Achinstein, Sharon. *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- . “*Samson Agonistes* and the Drama of Dissent.” *Milton Studies* XXXIII (1996): 133–58.
- Adams, Robert M. *Milton and the Modern Critics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955.
- Armitage, David et al, eds. *Milton and Republicanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Arthos, John. *Milton and the Italian Cities*. London: Bowes and Bowes, 1968.
- Barker, Arthur E. *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma 1641–1660*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942.
- , ed. *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Benet, Diana Treviño and Michael Lieb, eds. *Literary Milton: Text, Pretext, Context*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994.
- Bloom, Harold. *A Map of Misreading*. 1975. 2d ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Bradford, Richard. *Complete Critical Guide to John Milton*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Brisman, Leslie. *Milton’s Poetry of Choice and Its Romantic Heirs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973.
- Brown, Cedric C. *John Milton: A Literary Life*. London: Macmillan, 1995.

- Budick, Sanford. *The Dividing Muse: Images of Sacred Disjunction in Milton's Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Campbell, Gordon. *A Milton Chronology*. London: Macmillan, 1995.
- Carrithers, Jr., Gale H. and James D. Hardy, Jr. *Milton and the Hermeneutic Journey*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994.
- Clark, Donald Lemen. *John Milton at St. Paul's School*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1948.
- Corns, Thomas N. *The Development of Milton's Prose Style*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.
- . *John Milton: The Prose Works*. New York: Twayne, 1998.
- . *Regaining Paradise Lost*. New York: Longman, 1994.
- Danielson, Dennis, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Darbishire, Helen, ed. *The Early Lives of Milton*. London: Constable, 1932.
- Davies, Stevie. *Images of Kingship in Paradise Lost*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983.
- Di Cesare, Mario, ed. *Milton in Italy: Contexts, Images, Contradictions*. Binghamton: MRTS, 1991.
- Diekhoff, John S., ed. *A Maske at Ludlow: Essays on Milton's Comus*. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1968.
- Dobranski, Stephen B. *Milton, Authorship, and the Book Trade*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- DuRocher, Richard J. *Milton Among the Romans: The Pedagogy and Influence of Milton's Latin Curriculum*. Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press, 2002.
- Eliot, T.S. "Milton," and "A Note on the Verse of John Milton." *On Poetry and Poets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957.
- Empson, William. *Milton's God*. 1961. Rev. ed. London: Chatto & Windus, 1965.
- Evans, J. Martin. "The Birth of the Author: Milton's Poetic Self-Construction." *Milton Studies* XXXVIII (2000): 47–65.
- , ed. *John Milton: Twentieth Century Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- . *Milton's Imperial Epic: Paradise Lost and the Discourse of Colonialism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Fallon, Robert T. *Milton in Government*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.

- Ferry, Anne D. *Milton's Epic Voice: The Narrator in Paradise Lost*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Fish, Stanley. *How Milton Works*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2001.
- . *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*. 1967. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Fletcher, Angus. *The Transcendental Masque: An Essay on Milton's Comus*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971.
- Forsyth, Neil. *Satanic Epic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- French, J. Milton, ed. *The Life Records of John Milton*. 5 vols. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1949–58.
- Froula, Christine. "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy." *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983): 321–47.
- Frye, Northrop. *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*. New York: Harbinger, 1963.
- . *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.
- Greene, Thomas. *The Descent from Heaven: Studies in Epic Continuity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.
- . "Magic and Counter-Magic in Milton's *Comus*." *Opening the Borders: Inclusivity in Early Modern Studies*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999.
- . "The Meeting Soul in Milton's Companion Poems." *English Literary History* 51 (1984): 159–74.
- Guillory, John. *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton and Literary History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. "Milton's Counterplot" and "Adam on the Grass with Balsamum." *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958–1970*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.
- Hill, Christopher. *Milton and the English Revolution*. London: Faber and Faber, 1977.
- Hollander, John. *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
- . *The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry 1500–1700*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.
- Huckabay, Calvin, ed. *John Milton: An Annotated Bibliography 1929–1968*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

- Hunter, William B., et al., eds. *A Milton Encyclopedia*. 9 vols. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1978–83.
- Jordan, Matthew. *Milton and Modernity: Politics, Masculinity, and Paradise Lost*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Kermode, Frank. "Adam Unparadised." *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.
- , ed. *The Living Milton*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960.
- . "Milton in Old Age." *An Appetite for Poetry*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Kerrigan, William. *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of Paradise Lost*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- King, John N. *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in Paradise Lost*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Lares, Jameela. "Paradise Lost, Books XI and XII, and the Homiletic Tradition." *Milton Studies* XXXIV (1996): 99–116.
- Le Comte, Edward S. *A Milton Dictionary*. New York: Wisdom Library, 1961.
- Leonard, John K. "Did Milton Go to the Devil's Party?" *New York Review of Books* 49.12 (2002 July 18): 28–31.
- Lewalski, Barbara. *Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.
- . *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of Paradise Regained*. Providence: Brown University Press, 1966.
- . "Paradise Lost and Milton's Politics." *Milton Studies* XXXVIII (2000): 141–68.
- Lewis, C.S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942.
- Loewenstein, David. *Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- and James Grantham Turner, eds. *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- . *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries: Religions, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Logan, William. "Milton in the Modern: The Invention of Personality." *Green Thoughts, Green Shades: Essays by Contemporary Poets on the Early*

- Modern Lyric*. Ed. Jonathan F.S. Post. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Marcus, Leah. *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Martz, Louis, ed. *Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- . *Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Masson, David. *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his Time*. 7 vols. 1881–84. New York: Peter Smith, 1946.
- McColley, Diane. *A Gust for Paradise: Milton's Eden and the Visual Arts*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- McMurray, Price. "Aristotle on the Pinnacle: *Paradise Regained* and the Limits of Theory." *Milton Quarterly* 32.1 (1998): 7–14.
- Nohnberg, James. "Paradise Regained by One Greater Man: Milton's Wisdom Epic as a 'Fable of Identity.'" *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*. Ed. Eleanor Cook, et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.
- Norbrook, David. *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627–1660*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Nyquist, Mary, and Margaret W. Ferguson, eds. *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the texts and traditions*. London: Methuen, 1988.
- Parker, William Riley. *Milton: A Biography*. 1968. 2 vols. Rev. Gordon Campbell. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Patrides, C.A. *Annotated Critical Bibliography of John Milton*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.
- . *Figures in a Renaissance Context*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989.
- , ed. *Milton's Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961.
- Patterson, Annabel, ed. *John Milton*. Longman Critical Reader. Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1992.
- Pope, Elizabeth M. *Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1947.
- Prince, F.T. *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1954.

- Quint, David. *Epic and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- . “Expectation and Prematurity in Milton’s *Nativity Ode*.” *Modern Philology* 97.2 (1999): 195–219.
- Radzinowicz, Mary Ann. *Toward Samson Agonistes: The Growth of Milton’s Mind*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Rajan, Balachandra and Elizabeth Sauer, eds. *Milton and the Imperial Vision*. Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press, 1999.
- Revard, Stella P. *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera’s Hair: The Making of the 1645 Poems*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997.
- Ricks, Christopher. *Milton’s Grand Style*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Rogers, John. *The Matter of Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Sacks, Peter M. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.
- Schaeffer, John D. “Metonymies We Read By: Rhetoric, Truth and the Eucharist in Milton’s *Areopagitica*.” *Milton Quarterly* 34.3 (2000): 84–92.
- Shawcross, John T. *Milton: A Bibliography for the Years 1624–1700*. Binghamton: MRTS, 1984.
- . “Milton and *Of Christian Doctrine*: Doubts, Definitions, Connotations.” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 27.2 (2001): 161–78.
- Simpson, Ken. “The Rituals of Presence in *Paradise Regained*.” *Wrestling with God: Literature and Theology in the English Renaissance*. Ed. Mary Ellen Henley and W. Speed Hill. Vancouver: M.E. Henley, 2001.
- Smith, Samuel. “‘Christ’s Victorie Over the Dragon’: The Apocalypse in *Paradise Regained*.” *Milton Studies* XXIX (1993): 59–82.
- Stanwood, Paul G., ed. *Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and his World*. Binghamton: MRTS, 1995.
- Strier, Richard. “Milton against humility.” *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*. Ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Summers, Joseph H. *The Muse’s Method: An Introduction to Paradise Lost*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Vendler, Helen. “John Milton: The Elements of Happiness.” *Coming of Age as a Poet*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Walker, M. *Milton and the Idea of Woman*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

- Welch, Anthony. "Reconsidering Chronology in *Paradise Lost*." *Milton Studies* XL (2002): 1–17.
- Widmer, Kingsley. "The Iconography of Renunciation: The Miltonic Simile." *Milton's Epic Poetry: Essays on Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*. Ed. C.A. Patrides. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967.
- Wilbur, Richard. "Milton's 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso.'" *The Catbird's Song: Prose Pieces 1963–1995*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997.



## EDITIONS OF MILTON'S WORKS

- Milton, John. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1957.
- . *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire. London: Oxford University Press, 1958 [old-spelling edition].
- . *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. Ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82.
- . *Complete Shorter Poems*. Ed. John Carey. Rev. ed. London: Longman, 1997.
- . *John Milton: A Maske. The Earlier Versions*. Ed. S.E. Sprott. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.
- . *John Milton's Complete Poetical Works*, reproduced in Photographic Facsimile. Ed. Harris Francis Fletcher. 4 vols. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1943–48.
- . *The Latin Poems of John Milton*. McKellar, Walter, ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930.
- . *Latin Writings: A Selection*. Ed. and trans. John K. Hale. Tempe: MRTS, 1998.
- . *Milton's Sonnets*. Ed. E.A.J. Honigman, E.A.J. London: Macmillan, 1966.
- . *Paradise Lost*. Alistair Fowler, ed. Rev. ed. London: Longman, 1998.
- . *Selected Prose*. Ed. C.A. Patrides. Rev. ed. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985.
- A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*. Vol. 1, eds. Douglas Bush, J.E. Shaw, and Bartlett Giamatti; vol. 2, eds. A.S.P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush; vol. 4, ed. Walter MacKellar. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970–5.
- . *The Works of John Milton*. Ed. F.A. Patterson. 18 vols. in 21. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–8.

## *Acknowledgments*

“Milton and His Precursors” by Harold Bloom. From *A Map of Misreading*: 125–143. © 1975 by Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission of the author.

“Milton’s Minor Poems” by F. T. Prince. From *The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse*: 58–70. © 1954 by Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission.

From “Heaven” by William Empson. From *Milton’s God*: 114–146. © 1965 by Chatto & Windus, Ltd. Reprinted by permission.

From “Milton” by Thomas Greene. From *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity*: 363–411. © 1963 by Yale University. Reprinted by permission.

“The Transcendental Masque” by Angus Fletcher. From *The Transcendental Masque: An Essay on Milton’s Comus*: 147–194. © 1971 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University.

From “Echo Schematic” by John Hollander. From *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*: 36–51. © 1981 by the Regents of the University of California. Reprinted by permission.

“Milton: ‘Lycidas’” by Peter M. Sacks. From *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*: 90–117. © 1985 by The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted by permission.

From “The Majesty of Darkness” by William Flesch. From *Modern Critical Views: John Milton*: 293–309. © 1986 by Chelsea House Publishers and William Flesch. Reprinted by permission.

“The genesis of gendered subjectivity in the divorce tracts and in *Paradise Lost*” by Mary Nyquist. From *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the texts and traditions*: edited by Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson: 99–127. © 1988 by Mary Nyquist. Reprinted by permission.

“The father’s house: *Samson Agonistes* in its historical moment” by John Guillory. From *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the texts and traditions*: edited by Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson: 148–176. © 1988 by John Guillory. Reprinted by permission.

“Milton’s Prose: The Adjustment of Idealism” by C. A. Patrides. From *Figures in a Renaissance Context*, edited by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth: 249–271. © 1989 by The University of Michigan. Reprinted by permission.

McMurray, Price. “Aristotle on the Pinnacle: *Paradise Regained* and the Limits of Theory.” From *Milton Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1998): 7–14. © 1998 by Roy C. Flannagan and The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted by permission.

“The Birth of the Author: Milton’s Poetic Self-Construction” by J. Martin Evans. From *Milton Studies* XXXVIII (2000): 47–65. © 2000 by University of Pittsburgh Press. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Reprinted by permission of the publisher from “Gently Raised” in *How Milton Works* by Stanley Fish, pp. 477–510, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 2001 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

“Something ... Written to Aftertimes” by Barbara K. Lewalski. From *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*: 539–547. © 2000 by Blackwell Publishing. Reprinted by permission.

## Index

- Abdiel, angel in *Paradise Lost*, 5, 9, 48, 58–59  
    challenging Satan, 308–309  
    defiance of Satan, 90  
    on devils and deities, 301  
*Absolom and Achitopel*, (Dryden), 320  
Adam, character in *Paradise Lost*  
    courage of, 86  
    creation of, 174, 189  
    on evil, 90  
    Felix culpa speech, 91  
    and inability to see God, 163–164  
    on meaning of knowledge, 167  
    the mourning hymn, 85  
    his Satanic echoing, 117  
    his speech, 185  
    on weakness of the fall, 161  
“Adam and Eve,” (Shapiro), 327  
Adams, John, 322  
*Adam Unparadis’d*  
    on the fall of man, 240  
*Adamus Exul*, play, (Grotius), 238–239  
Adelman, Janet, 276–277  
    on *Paradise Lost*, 288  
“Adone,” (Marino), 56  
Adorno, Theodor, 204  
*Ad Patrem*, 103  
*Advancement of Learning, The*, (Bacon), 7  
*Aeneid*, 14–16, 20, 62  
“Alaric,” (Scudery), 56, 61  
*Alchemist*, (Jonson), 51  
*Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, (Fletcher), 10  
Allusion, 7–8  
    the Golden Age, 13  
Alpheus, character in “Lycidas”  
    the stream as a figure, 40  
*Aminta*, (Tasso), 29  
*Anaphora*, 110  
Androgyny, 174  
*Animadversions*, 241  
*Annotations Upon All The Books of The Old and New Testaments*, (Westminster Assembly)  
    compared to *Tetrachordon*, 182  
    on Milton’s exegesis, 181  
*Answer to Davenant’s Preface*, (Hobbes), 20  
*Antanacsis*, 115  
Anti-Platonic, 162  
Anti-plot thinking, 299  
*Apology for Poetry*, (Sidney), 253  
    and style in, 247  
*Apology for Smectymnuus, An*, 98  
    and chastity, 99  
    having hero, 99  
    Milton’s aspirations to God and Country, 238  
Arabia Felix Simile, 83–84  
*Araignment, The*, (Swetnam), 179–180  
Arbeitszwang  
    sublimation of aggression, 218–219

- Arcades*  
 Jonson's influence in, 29  
 the lyrics of, 30
- Arcadia*, (Sidney), 38
- Arcadian Rhetorike, The*, (Fraunce), 15
- Areopagitica*, 8, 13, 166, 235, 253, 326, 238  
 advances in series of waves, 245  
 epistemological condition in, 311  
 as testimony, 301
- Arethusa-Alpheus legend, 127
- Ariosto, 55
- Aristotle, 262  
 on recognition, 263–264
- Armenian revision of Calvinist Doctrine, 205, 211
- Arnold, Matthew, 325
- Art of Logic*, 68
- Arthos, John, 101
- “Artistic labor,” 227
- Asprezza, 69
- Astell, Mary, 196–197
- Attendant Spirit, 103
- Aubrey, John, 248
- Aufhebung*, 113
- Bah, Mieke, 173
- Barber  
 on *Comus*, 102–103
- Barberini, Cardinal, 238–239
- Barlow, Joel, 321
- Barons' Wars*, (Drayton), 59
- Barthes, Roland, 275–276, 279
- Bastwick, 123–124
- Beaux Stratagem, The*, (Farquhar), 245
- Bellerus  
 the fabled giant, 141–142
- Belsey, Catherine, 315
- Berufsarbeit  
 and sublimation of aggression, 219, 221
- Beyond the Pleasure of Principle*, (Freud), 216
- Biblical Criticism and Heresy in Milton*, (Cronklin), 50
- Blackmore, Richard, 320
- Blake, 247, 320  
 on Satan, 4
- Bloom, Harold, 158, 168  
 an introduction, 1–21  
 on Milton as father figure, 319  
 on Milton's response to his ambivalence, 167  
 on Satan in *Paradise Lost*, 154
- Boiardo, 55
- Book of Common Prayer*, 123
- Borromini, 239
- Bourgeois Vocation, 219–220  
 and accumulation of material capital, 227
- Bourdieu, Pierre  
 and capitalism, 224–225  
 ‘symbolic capital,’ 224
- Borges, Jorge Luis, 238
- Brand, Dana  
 consciousness in “Il Penseroso,” 283  
 on “L'Allegro,” 282
- Breviate of the Prelates Intollerable Usurpations, both upon the Kings Prerogative Royall, and the Subjects Liberties, A*, (Bastwick/Burton/Phynne), 123
- Broadbent, J. B.  
 on Milton's vocabulary, 296–297
- Brooke, Dorothea, 325
- Browning, 9
- Burke, Edmund, 321
- Burton, 123
- Byron, 323
- “Byronic” heroes, 323
- Calamy, Edmund, 240
- Calvin  
 on Adam, 186  
 difference between general and special calling, 210–211

- the elect, 210  
 the generic man, 178  
 on God, 205  
 and vocation, 211  
 Calvinism, 152  
   ideologies of labor, 216  
   psychic accounting, 227  
 Camoens, 55  
 Champion, 101  
 Canzone, 25, 27  
 Charles I, 240, 247  
 Charles IX, 55  
 Charming, William Ellery, 325  
 Chastity  
   envisioned in sacred language, 99  
   Milton's concern with, 98  
*Christian Doctrine*, 152, 159, 169  
   "of the creation," 303  
   on image of God, 168  
   all things come from God, 303  
   true worship of God, 312  
 Christian Theology, 97  
 "Christ's Victorie and Triumph,"  
   (Fletcher), 57  
 "Christus Patiens," 227  
 Cicero, 254  
*Civil Wars*, (Daniel), 59  
*Civilization and its Discontents*, (Freud),  
   217  
   and compulsion to work, 218  
   'economics of the libido,' 218  
 Claudian, 82  
 "Clovis," (Saint-Sorlin), 56  
*Colasterion*, 183–184  
 Collins, William, 321  
 Comic echo, 114  
*Comus*, 10, 29–31, 63, 105  
   ambiguity of themes, 97  
   blank verse in, 29–30  
   Jonson's influence in, 29  
   on looking back, 101  
   lyrics of, 30  
   Milton's relation to Elizabethans, 30  
   as radical experimentation, 100  
   tone of Shakespeare, 30  
 Congreve, 235  
 Conklin, G. N., 50  
*Conquest of Canaan, The*, (Dwight), 321  
 Conventions  
   Milton's use of, 132  
 Cooper, Anthony, 321–322  
 Court poets, 55  
 Cowley, 21, 56  
   failures of his youth, 58–59  
   his un-heroic couplets, 58  
 Cowper, William, 321  
 Cromwell, 52, 248  
  
 D'Aubigne, 55  
   Christian epics, 56  
 Damon's Epitaph, 79  
 Damrosch, Leo  
   on Milton, 316  
 Dante, 7  
   on the far-fetching, 11–12  
 Davenant, 21, 56, 61  
*David and Golia*, (Drayton), 57  
*Davideis*, (Cowley), 56–57, 62  
   invocation to, 59  
   shortcomings of, 59  
 Davie, Donald, 306  
   on Milton's syntax, 298  
 Davis, Jefferson, 326  
 "Death of the Author, The," (Barthes),  
   275  
*Death of Bishop of Winchester; On the*, 79  
*Death of a Fair Infant, On the*, 24  
 "De Ave Phoenix," (Lactantius), 67, 83  
*De Comus a Satan*, 37–38  
*De Doctrina*, 33, 37, 44, 50  
   the ignorance of the son, 41  
   on removing election, 211  
   special vocation, 211  
*Defenses*, 248–249  
*Defense of Himself*, 250  
*Defense of Poetry, A*, (Shelley), 4, 153  
*Defensio regia*, (Salmasius), 248, 250

- Defensio Secunda*  
 and Milton and Republican cause, 230
- Defoe, 320
- De jure belli ac pacis, 238
- Deleuze  
 idolatry in Plato, 162
- Dennis, John, 320
- De-sublimation, 225–226
- De Quincey, Thomas. 324
- Dickens, 325
- Dickinson, 151
- Diodati  
 Milton's letter to, 122, 124
- Discourse of Marriage and Wriving, A*,  
 (Nicchole)  
 and marital friendship, 180–181
- Divorce tracts, 174  
 on gender, 184  
 on marriage, 175  
 and privileged male voice, 190  
 the Reformers view, 175  
 on re-marriage after divorce, 176
- Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*  
 and charity, 245  
 on divorce and civil power, 177–178  
 and logic, 253  
 and Milton pleading for a divorce,  
 243  
 narrowness of, 235
- Don Juan*, (Byron), 323
- Drayton, 57, 59
- Drummond, 27
- Dryden, 8, 319–320
- Du Bartas, 59
- Du Bellay, 56
- Dunciad, The*, 320
- Dwight, Timothy, 321
- “Eclogue,” (Virgil), 125
- “Eclogue IV,” (Virgil), 128
- “Eclogue VI,” (Virgil), 134
- “Eclogue X,” (Virgil), 127, 132
- Education, Of*, 31, 253, 266  
 authoritative, 245  
 and categorical, 245  
 result of Milton's experience, 245
- Effects of his Political Life on John Milton*,  
*The*, (Morand), 37
- Eikon Basilike*, 38
- Eikonoclastes*, 38
- “*Elegia Quinta*,” 84
- Eliot, George, 325, 327
- Eliot, T. S., 36, 319, 326–327
- Elizabethans, 28–30
- Emerson, 325–326  
 on the word death, 114
- Empson, William, 261, 315, 326  
 the general calling, 210  
 on Heaven, 33–54  
 on Milton and ambivalence, 167  
 on Raphael like Satan, 160  
 and Satan in *Paradise Lost*, 154
- English Epic, 56
- Epic Poem, 31
- Epistemology, 311
- Epistrophe*, 110
- Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*,  
 21, 79, 280, 289, 291  
 on the dead woman, 281
- Epithaphium Damonis*  
 the phoenix reference, 82
- “Equal Rights,” 171
- Essays*, (Montaigne), 287
- Essay on Man*, (Pope), 320
- European Renaissance, 49
- Evans, J. Martin  
 on the Birth of the Author: Milton's  
 Poetic Self-Construction, 275–294  
 on Milton slowly evolving, 291  
 on *Paradise Lost*, 287–290  
 on *Paradise Regained*, 290–291  
 the 1645 Poems, 277–287
- Eve, character in  
 courage of, 86  
 creation of, 174, 189  
 her disobedience, 164  
 the mourning hymn, 85

- her speech, 192
- Everett, Edward, 326
- Excursion*, (Wordsworth), 323
- Eyeless in Gaza*, (Huxley), 327
- Faerie Queene, The*, (Spencer), 7, 9, 14  
the shield of Radigund, 12
- Faithful Shepherdess*, (Fletcher), 29
- Farquhar, 245
- Feast of Dagon, 6
- Finney, Gretchen, 101
- “First Idyl,” (Virgil), 132
- “First Institution and Author of  
Marriage, Of the,” (Nicchole), 180
- Fish, Stanley, 285  
Difference and Writing, 305–308  
Freedom and Risk, 314–317  
Gently Raised, 295–318  
on Milton’s egoism, 291  
The Politics of Testimony, 308–314  
Semblance not Substance, 295–300  
Telling the Difference, 300–305
- Flandrin, Jean-Louis, 215
- Flesh, William  
on *The Majesty of Darkness*, 151–169
- Fletcher, Angus, 9, 29  
his study of Spencer, 10  
on *Thyrsis: The Orphic Persona*,  
101–107  
on *The Transcendental Masque*,  
97–100
- Fletcher, Giles, 57
- Foucault  
and ‘genealogy,’ 205  
Milton’s “author” function, 276  
the Protestant Vocation, 207  
subjectivity and subjection, 156
- Four Quartets*, (Eliot), 327
- Fowler, 19
- Frankenstein*, (Shelley), 324
- Franklin, Benjamin, 206, 322
- Fraunce, Abraham, 115
- Freneau, Philip, 321
- Frescobaldi, Pietro, 238–239
- Freud, 219, 225  
in Samson’s freedom, 220  
on Schicksalszwang, 216–217
- Frost,  
on the word death, 114
- Froula, Christine  
on Eve’s speech, 192
- Fry, Paul  
on Aristotle, 267
- Frye, Northrop  
on Milton, 99–100, 313
- Fuller, Margaret, 326–327
- Future of an Illusion, The*, (Freud), 217  
and arbeitszwang, 217–218  
and triebverzicht, 217
- Genesis  
creation of Adam, 174  
creation of Eve, 174  
on the end of marriage, 177  
relationship to *Paradise Lost*, 173
- Genette, Gerard, 174
- Geneva Bible, 208
- Georgics*, (Virgil), 5
- Gnostic Aeon, 163  
on Milton’s true God, 163
- God  
his invisibility, 161–162
- Gondibert*, (Davenant), 56, 61
- Graves, Robert, 327
- Gray, Thomas, 7, 321
- Great Expectations*, (Dickens), 325
- Greco-Christian, 174
- Greene, Thomas  
on Milton, 55–96
- Griswold, R. W., 325–326
- Grotius, Hugo, 238–239
- Guarini, 29
- Guillory, John  
on the Fathers’ House: *Samson  
Agonistes* in its Historical Moment,  
203–233



- Hale, John K., 278  
 Hall, Bishop Joseph, 241  
     and Milton's antagonist, 246  
 Halpern, Richard, 279  
*Hamlet*, (Shakespeare), 180  
 Handel, 320  
 Hanford, James Holly  
     on Milton in "L'Allegro" and "Il  
     Penseroso," 283  
 Hardy, 245  
 Hartlib, Samuel, 245  
 Hawthorne, 326  
 Hazlitt  
     on Milton's learning, 10  
 Hegel, 113  
 Henri III, 55  
 Henri IV, 55  
 "Hero and Leander," 105  
 Heroic Martyrdom, 1  
 Heywood, Thomas, 61, 251  
 Hill, Christopher, 152  
 Hill, Geoffrey, 7  
*Hind and the Panther*, (Dryden), 320  
*Historie of Samson*, (Quarles), 56  
*History of Britain*, 250  
     parallelism in, 251  
     and progressive, 253  
*History of England*, (Macauley), 322  
 Hobbes, 20, 61  
     as materialist, 248  
 Hollander, John, 18  
     on Echo Schematic, 109–120  
 Holstein, Lucas, 238  
     and Secretary to Cardinal Barberini,  
     238  
 Homer, 7, 9, 17–18, 327  
     on the far-fetching, 11–12  
 Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 325  
 Horton Period, 28, 31  
 Hughes, Merritt Y., 278  
 Humanist Poet, 55  
 Huxley, Aldous, 327  
*Hyperion*, 323–324  
 Iconoclasm, 152  
 Idolatrous narcissism, 158  
 Idolatry, 305  
     vehicles of, 314  
*Iliad*, (Homer), 12, 15, 19  
     similes in, 80  
*Il Moderato*, (Handel), 320  
*Il Pastor Fido*, (Guarini), 29  
 "Il Penseroso," 9, 166, 277, 280  
     and 'artist humor,' 23  
     consciousness presented in, 283  
     and passiveness, 284  
     on poet re-entering text, 282  
 Interpretive Labor, 316  
 Invention Spiritual, 145  
  
 Jacobean, 28–30  
*Job*, 5  
*John Milton: Complete Poems and Major  
 Prose*, (Hughes), 278  
 Johnson, Dr., 10, 122, 235, 324  
     on *Comus*, 30, 98  
     on "Davideis," 57  
     and Milton's political convictions,  
     235–236  
 Johnsonian Epithet, 98  
 Joyce, James, 327  
*Jude the Obscure*, (Hardy), 245  
 Judeo-Christian, 172  
 Judgment Day, 41  
*Judit*, (Du Bartas), 59  
  
 Kafka, 118  
 Keats, 9, 23, 235  
     his admiration for Milton, 323  
 Kerman, 101  
     the mythic failure of Orpheus, 102  
 Kermode, Frank  
     on *Paradise Lost*, 12  
*King Lear*, (Shakespeare), 114  
 King of Zion, 37

- Knell, Paul  
 his sermon, 240  
 Knight, Wilson, 39
- Lactantius, 82–83  
 “L’Allegro,” 23, 166, 277, 280  
 on poet re-entering the text, 282  
 and self-assertions transformed, 284
- Landor, Walter Savage, 324  
*La Tina*, (Malatesti)  
 dedicated to Milton, 239
- Laud, Archbishop, 123
- Lawes, Henry, 97
- Leavis, F. R., 299, 316  
 on Milton’s single-mindedness, 296, 307  
 on Milton’s style, 296
- Lewalski, Barbara K.,  
 on “Something...Written to  
 Aftertimes,” 319–329
- Lewis, C. S.,  
 his idea of social order, 53  
 on Satan, 36, 43  
*Life and Death of Mary Magdalene*,  
 (Robinson), 57  
*Life of Milton*, (Johnson), 10
- Lincoln, 326
- Lincolnshire, Rev. Carlton, 262
- Locke, John, 321
- Locus Amoenus*, 112
- Lords Maske, The*, (Campion), 101
- Lorenzo de Medici, 55
- Lowell, Robert, 327
- Lucifer and Prometheus*, (Werblowsky), 44
- Lucretius, 7
- Lurianic Kabbalists, 8  
 on gilgul, 8
- “Lycidas,” 23, 31, 101  
 the authors voice, 284–285  
 authority of the father, 135  
 classical myth, 136  
 conventional symbols in, 125  
 the corrupt clergy, 241  
 on Italian diction, 24  
 on Milton’s optimism, 79  
 resurrection, 145  
 and self-mourning in, 129  
 and speech of St. Peter, 122–123  
 the sun, 143–144  
 vocative mood in, 126
- Macauley, Catherine, 322, 327
- Mac Callum, Hugh, 168, 261–262
- Madan, F. F., 38
- Malatesti, Antonio, 238
- Malcolm X, 327
- Man-Mouse Taken in a Trap, The*,  
 (Vaughan), 241
- Manso, 79
- “Mantle Blue,” 144
- Marcus, Leah, 277  
 on “Lycidas,” 287  
 and Milton’s 1645 Poems, 277  
 the new “historical subject,” 278
- Marino, 56
- Marriage of Heaven and Hell, The*,  
 (Blake), 4, 322
- Marshall, Stephen, 240
- Martz, Louis, L., 282  
 on “Lycidas,” 287  
 on *Paradise Regained*, 5
- Marvell, Andrew, 223
- Marx, 227
- Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle, A*, 275
- McFarland, Thomas, 7
- McMahon, Robert  
 on the speaker in *Paradise Lost*, 276
- McMurray, Price  
 on Aristotle on the Pinnacle: *Paradise  
 Regained* and the Limits of Theory,  
 261–273
- Mediation, 204
- Medina, John Baptist, 320
- Melville, 326
- Memoriam, In*, (Tennyson), 43
- Metamorphoses*, (Ovid), 18

- Metropolitan Visitation, 123  
 Michelangelo, 239  
*Middlemarch*, (Eliot), 325  
*Midsummer Night's Dream*,  
 (Shakespeare), 20  
 Millennium, 44–45  
*Milton*, (Warton), 98  
 Milton, John  
   his blindness, 1  
   and combative spirit, 121  
   conflict between Republican politics  
     and his theology, 310, 312  
   Cowley his favorite poet, 62  
   on divorce, 175–176  
   and fascination with loss, 121  
   on freedom, 221  
   his God, 33–34, 37, 47  
   his humanity, 92  
   as idealist, 248  
   idolatry, 152  
   and influence on Romantics, 8  
   his language, 296  
   his minor poems, 23  
   his prose, 253  
   and Puritanism, 87  
   reverence for the Bible, 91–92  
   his Satan, 4  
   his similes, 79–80  
   and the sonnet, 26, 28  
   his style, 7  
   and syntax, 28  
 ‘Miltonic inversion,’ 30  
*Milton's Self-Presentation in Poems...1645*,  
 (Hale),  
*Milton's Spirit*, (Shelley), 323  
 Mirabeau, 322  
 Mirandola, Picodella, 99  
*Moby Dick*, (Melville), 326  
*Modest Plea for the Property of Copy Right*,  
*A*, (Macauley), 322  
 Monism, 303, 306, 311  
*Monomachie de David et de Goliath*,  
 (DuBellay), 56  
 Montaigne, 287  
 Morand, M., 37–38, 42  
   on God, 39, 46  
   on political corruption of Milton's  
     mind, 45  
   and the son and the father, 40  
 More, Henry, 241–242, 250  
*Morning of Christ's Nativity, On the*,  
 23–24, 166, 278  
 Morris, Mark, 320  
 Mosaic Law, 44  
 Mount Niphates, 4  
*Mouzell for Melastomus, A*, (Speght), 186  
*Murder in the Cathedral*, (Eliot), 327  
  
 Nachklang, 110, 112  
 Narcissus Myth, 193  
 “Nativity Ode,” 63, 279–280, 288  
 Natural Theology, 43–44  
 Neo-Christians, 44  
 Neoplatonic Theology, 97  
*New Bibliography of the Eikon*, (Madan),  
 38  
 Newcomen, Matthew, 240  
 “New Presbyter is but Old Priest Writ  
 Large,” 247  
 Newton, Isaac, 320  
 Nichole, Alexander, 180–181  
 Nietzsche, 110  
*Noah's Flood*, (Drayton), 57  
 Nyquist, Mary  
   on the Genesis of Gendered  
     Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts  
     and in *Paradise Lost*, 171–201  
  
 “Ode to a Nightingale,” (Keats), 109  
 Odets, Clifford, 327  
*Odyssey*, (Homer), 56, 85  
 Old Testament, 33, 37–39  
   and Cowley, 59  
 Omnific Word, 300, 307  
 Orphic persona, 101  
*Os Lusitadas*, (Camoens), 55

- Othello*, (Shakespeare), 114  
 Ovid, 7, 82  
   the far-fetching, 11–12  
   the Golden Age, 13  
 Owen, Wilfred, 36
- Palaemon, 145  
   the drowned youth in “Lycidas,” 141  
 Pandaemonium, 18–20  
*Parables, On*, (Kafka), 118  
*Paradise Lost*, 1–2, 20, 40, 109, 242–243, 252, 322  
   Christian heroism, 261  
   on conclusion, 79  
   cosmic politics in, 88  
   epic heroism, 261  
   escape in, 306  
   Milton taking charge of, 290  
   paradox in, 87  
   pastoral echo, 112–113  
   phoenix reference, 82  
   power of omnipotence, 305  
   relationship to Genesis, 173  
   on Satan, 4, 255  
   scheme of refrain, 109–110  
   style of, 67, 69  
   wordplay in 114–115  
*Paradise Regained*, 39, 256, 322  
   and Christ, 261  
   on climax, 266–267  
   the final temptation, 263  
   formalism of, 264  
   the “I,” in, 290–291  
   a subdued work, 5  
*Paranomasia*, 115  
 Parker, W. R., 280  
 Pascal  
   and mockery, 242, 250  
*Passion, The*, 24, 166  
   Milton’s presence, 279, 283  
 Pastoral echo, 112–114  
 Pastoral fiction, 130  
 Patrides, C. A.  
   on Milton’s Prose: The Adjustment of  
   Idealism, 235–259  
 Penderecki, 320  
   opera on *Paradise Lost*, 320  
 Perkins, William, 227  
   as calling, 208  
   condemning monks and beggars, 209,  
   214  
*Pervigilium Veneris*, 111  
 Petrarch, 25  
   his canzone, 26  
 Phelan, Herbert, 277  
 Phillips, Edward, 251–252  
 Phoenix simile, 81, 84  
   symbol for New Age, 82  
 Plagiarism, 7–8  
 Platonic doctrine, 162  
 Plot-thinking, 299, 301  
 Plutarch, 251  
*Poems of Mr. John Milton, The*, 287  
 Political context, 204  
   in *Samson Agonistes*, 204  
 Pope, 320–321  
 ‘Post-feminist feminism,’ 171  
 Powell, Mary  
   Milton’s wife, 243  
 Predestination, 205  
*Prelatical Episcopacy*, Of, 241  
*Prelude, The*, (Wordsworth), 323  
 “Presence Divine,” 190  
 Primary epic, 7  
 Primitive economic exchange, 225–226  
 Prince, F. T.  
   on Milton’s Minor Poems, 23–31  
*Prometheus Unbound*, (Shelley), 4, 154  
*Prophetic Moment, The*, (Fletcher), 10  
*Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of  
 Capitalism, The*, (Weber), 209  
   and mediation, 204  
 Protestant Vocation, 224  
 Prothalamion, 25  
 Prynne, 1123–124  
 Psalm 19, 110  
 Psalm 148, 110

- Pulci, 55
- Puritanism  
repression of, 123
- “Qintum Novembris,” 63
- Quarles, 62  
on scriptural stories, 61
- “Querelle des Femmes,” 179–180
- Raleigh, Sir Walter, 33  
on *Paradise Lost*, 91  
on sin and death, 35
- Rape of the Lock, The*, (Pope), 320
- Raphael, character in *Paradise Lost*  
on being almighty, 160  
platonic doctrine, 162  
on presenting God, 161
- Rappacini’s Daughter*, (Hawthorne), 326
- Rapport, Herman, 310–311
- Ready and Easy Way, The*, 1, 247, 322  
and pessimism in, 79
- Reason of Church Government, The*, 69,  
241, 253, 266, 302  
discipline in, 237  
Milton’s aspirations to God and  
Country, 238
- Reflections Upon Marriage*, (Astell), 196
- Reformation in England, Of*, 79
- Reformation Touching Church Discipline*,  
241
- Regii sanguinis clamor*, (More), 250
- Remedia Amoris*, 105
- Reply*, (Wheatley), 321
- Revolutionary Artist, 99–100
- Revolutionary Epoch, 123
- Rising Glory of America, The*, (Freneau),  
321
- Riviere, Joan, 218
- Robinson, Thomas, 57
- Romantics, 166
- Ronsard, 55
- Room of One’s Own*, (Wolfe), 327
- Rose and Milton, A*, (Borges), 328
- Ross, Alexander, 242
- Rouse, John, 287
- Ruskin, 145
- Sacks, Peter M.,  
on Milton: “Lycidas,” 121–149
- Saint Michael  
patron of mariners, 142
- Saint Peter  
his anger, 139  
hair as symbol, 138  
his speech, 138
- Salamasius, 250
- “Samson Agonistes,” 6, 101, 295, 322  
aggression in, 221  
blank verse in, 30  
the bourgeois Protestant, 207  
code-like narrative, 203  
and coral inventions, 104  
death in, 207  
faith in, 206  
preface to, 253, 268  
regeneration, 212  
suicide in, 208, 227  
the two fathers in, 207, 215
- Samuel, Irene  
on *Paradise Regained*, 262
- Sannazaro, 55, 122, 125
- Satan, character in *Paradise Lost*, 4  
brutality of, 14  
and complexity of, 155  
and defeat, 266  
on devils and deities, 301  
his disguise, 64  
his echo, 115  
his fall, 264, 269  
his mistakes about paradise, 116  
and rationalization, 265  
and sin, 158  
his spear, 13  
and tragedy and rhetoric, 268
- Saurant, M. 49–51

- Schopenhauer, 110
- Scudery, 56
- Second Defense of the People of England, The*, 104
- Second Lash*, (More), 241
- Second Wash*, (Vaughn), 241
- Secondary epic, 7
- Shakespeare, 20
- the compact pun, 115
  - the “prophetic strain,” 10
- Shakespeare, On*, 24, 30, 275, 281, 289
- Shapiro, Karl, 327
- Sharpe, Joan, 179
- Shelley, Mary, 167
- Shelley, P. B., 151
- on Milton, 236
  - on Satan, 152
- Sidney, Algernon, 321
- Sidney, Sir Philip, 246, 253
- Sistine Chapel, 239
- 1645 Poems, 277–287, 316
- authorial persona in, 289
- Skunk Hour*; (Lowell), 327
- Solemn Music, At a*, 27, 280, 291, 308
- and choric voice, 286
  - on couplets, 28
- Song on May Morning*, 281
- Southey, Robert, 324
- Spacks, Patricia M., 276
- ‘Special Vocation,’ 213
- Species of Liberty
- civil, 240
  - domestic, 240
  - ecclesiastical, 240
- Spectator; The*, (Addison), 320
- Speght, Rachel, 181
- and dignity of marriage, 179
  - on Genesis, 180
  - as liberal feminist, 180
  - and wordplay, 180
- Spenser, 1, 55
- his Christian epics, 56
  - and conservative temperament, 99
  - his influence on *Paradise Lost*, 7
- Spurstow, William, 240
- State of Innocence*, (Dryden), 320
- Stein, Arnold
- on *Paradise Regained*, 5
- Stevens, 114
- Story of Mary Powell Wife to Mr. Milton, The*, (Graves), 327
- Stuart, M.
- on Milton’s God, 35
- Sublimation, 225
- Sur La Liberté de la Presse*, (Mirabeau), 322
- Sweeney Agonistes*, (Eliot), 327
- Swetnam, Joseph, 179–180
- Sylvester, Joshua, 58
- ‘Symbolic Capital,’ 224
- Tasso, 7, 55
- his Christian epics, 56
- Tempest, The*, (Shakespeare), 165
- Temple, The*, (Herbert), 112
- Ten Commandments, 313
- Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, The*, 250, 253
- on free man, 247
  - defensiveness of, 235
  - and sovereignty, 237
- Tennyson, 9, 43–44
- on imitating Milton’s verse and diction, 325
- Tertiary epic, 7
- Tetrachordon*, 105, 184
- on charity, 244
  - compared to Annotations, 182
  - and marriage, 176
  - on sexual union, 176
  - on unity, 176
- Theobald, 283
- Theocritus, 122, 125
- Theorie de la Royaute d’aupres la doctrine de Milton*, (Mirabeau), 322
- ‘Third Wave Feminism,’ 171
- Thomson, James, 321

- Tillyard, E. M. W.  
 on *Paradise Regained*, 5  
*Time, On*, 280  
 rhythmic weight, 27  
*Titbonus*, (Tennyson), 43  
 Toland, John, 320–321  
*Tornata*, 112  
 Totalitarian State, 53  
*Transcendental Masque, The*, (Fletcher),  
 10  
*Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical  
 Causes, A*, 246, 253  
*Treatise of the Vocations, A, or Calling of  
 Men*, (Perkins), 208  
 Tribble, Phyllis, 173  
 Trinity Manuscript, 126  
*Troilus and Criseyde*, 276
- Ulysses*, (Joyce), 327  
*University Carrier, On The*, 24  
*Upon the Circumcision*, 280  
 Urban VIII, Pope, 239  
*Uriel*, (Emerson), 326  
 Ussher, Archbishop James, 240–241
- Vacation Exercise, At a*, 24  
 and music and verse, 103  
 Vaughan, Thomas, 241  
 Vertical imagery, 87  
 Vido, 55  
 Virgil, 5, 7, 61, 117–118  
 the far-fetching, 11–12  
 and *Paradise Lost*, 30  
*Vision of Columbus, The*, (Barlow), 321
- Vives, Juan Luis, 244  
 Vocation, 204  
 historical problem of, 206–207  
*Vorklang*, 112, 118
- Waldock, A. J. A. 315  
 on God's innocence, 34  
 Warton, Thomas  
 on *Comus*, 98  
 Weber, Max, 205, 207  
 his ethic, 223  
 on religion and economy, 204  
 vocation, 204, 209–210, 212  
 Werblowsky, R. J. Z., 44  
 Westminster Assembly, 181  
 Wheatley, Phillis, 321  
*When Eve Reads Milton*, (Froula), 192  
 Whitman, Walt, 114, 326  
 William the Conqueror, 251  
 Winters, Yvor, 35, 52  
 Woodhouse  
 on *Comus*, 98  
 Woolfe, Virginia, 327  
 Wordsworth  
 on Milton, 236, 323  
 Wordsworth Solitary, 9
- Yeats, 9  
 Young, Edward, 321  
 Young, Thomas, 240  
 as Milton's tutor, 68
- Zohar, 49–50