



A NEW COMPANION TO

MILTON

EDITED BY
THOMAS N. CORNS

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A New Companion to Milton

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*M*ILTON

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This edition first published 2016
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John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data applied for

Hardback ISBN: 9781118827826

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Vatican Museums and Galleries, Vatican City / Alinari / Bridgeman Images

Set in 11/13pt Garamond by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

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Preface

The preparation of this *New Companion* has afforded me the opportunity to supplement substantially the work of the original *Companion* through the addition of new essays on Milton's poetic oeuvre, giving a platform to newer voices in the always controversial and expanding field of Milton scholarship.

I have added a substantial section both to recognize Milton's global impact outside Anglocentric and Eurocentric environments and to reflect the current and emerging critical engagement with that impact.

The first edition was published at a time when uncertainty and controversy surrounded the canonicity of *De Doctrina Christiana*. Those problems are largely resolved, and there has emerged a near unanimity about its place in the Milton canon.

I have retained all but one essay from the original *Companion*, and their authors have responded to the invitation to refresh and revise their work as seemed appropriate, and recommendations for further reading have been augmented to incorporate important material subsequently published. I am grateful to Carter Revard for permission to update, modestly, the recommended further reading of the essay by the late Stella Revard. In place of the chapter on Milton's life records, I have supplied a chronology to chart Milton's life and works in the context of his age.

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May 2015

Note on Editions Used

Unless otherwise stated, all biblical references are to the Authorized Version, also known as the King James Bible, first published in 1611. The selection of editions for works of the Milton oeuvre remains problematic and necessitates some compromise. Where volumes of *The Complete Works of John Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008–) are available, those provide the editions cited. This applies to *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*, the minor poetry, the vernacular prose of 1649 and 1660, and *De Doctrina Christiana* (*Christian Doctrine*). Other prose is cited from *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, edited by Don M. Wolfe et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82), and Latin prose is sometimes cited from *The Works of John Milton*, edited by Frank Allen Patterson et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–8). *Paradise Lost* is cited from the second edition of *Paradise Lost*, edited by Alastair Fowler (London and New York: Longman, 1998). Editorial material from other editions is drawn upon from time to time, most frequently from the second edition of *Complete Shorter Poems*, edited by John Carey (London and New York: Longman, 1997).

The principal texts considered within each chapter are listed under ‘Writings,’ followed by a list of suggested ‘References for Further Reading.’

List of Abbreviations

AV	Authorized Version of the Bible (the King James Bible)
CPW	<i>Complete Prose Works of John Milton</i>
CSP	<i>Complete Shorter Poems</i> , edited by John Carey
CWJM	<i>The Complete Works of John Milton</i>
MQ	<i>Milton Quarterly</i>
MS	<i>Milton Studies</i>
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PL	<i>Paradise Lost</i> , edited by Alastair Fowler
WJM	<i>The Works of John Milton</i>

Part I

The Cultural Context

1

Genre

Barbara K. Lewalski

Milton shows a constant concern with form, with genre, to a degree remarkable even in his genre-conscious era. Among the first questions to ask about any of his poems are what conventions he embraced and what freight of shared cultural significances he took on by casting a poem in a particular genre. In poem after poem he achieves high art from the tension between his immense imaginative energy and the discipline of form. Yet he is never a mere follower of convention and neoclassical rules: his poems gain much of their power from his daring mixtures of generic elements and from radical transformations that disrupt and challenge reader expectation.

In 1642, in the preface to the Second Book of *The Reason of Church-Government*, Milton provided his most extended comment on poetry and poetics. Among other topics, he points to some of the literary genres he hopes to attempt, offering an important insight into his ideas about and ways with genre:

Time serves not now, and perhaps I might seem too profuse to give any certain account of what the mind at home in the spacious circuits of her musing hath liberty to propose to her self, though of highest hope, and hardest attempting, whether that Epick form whereof the two poems of Homer, and those other two of Virgil and Tasso are a diffuse, and the book of Job a brief model: or whether the rules of Aristotle herein are strictly to be kept, or nature to be follow'd ... Or whether those Dramatick constitutions, wherein Sophocles and Euripides raigne shall be found more docttrinal and exemplary to a Nation, the Scripture also affords us a divine pastoral Drama in the Song of Salomon consisting of two persons and a double Chorus, as Origen rightly judges. And the Apocalyps of Saint John is the majestick image of a high and stately Tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn Scenes and Acts with a sevenfold Chorus of halleluja's and harping symphonies: ... Or if occasion shall lead to imitat those magnifick Odes and Hymns wherein Pindarus and Callimachus are in most things worthy, some others in their frame

judicious, in their matter most an end faulty: But those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition may be easily made appear over all the kinds of Lyrick poesy, to be incomparable. (*CPW* I: 812–16)

Much as the Renaissance Italian critic Minturno did (Minturno 1559: 3), Milton thought in terms of three general categories or ‘parts’ of poetry – epic, dramatic, lyric – and within each of these categories he identified certain historical genres or ‘kinds’ (the Renaissance term). Here he mentions ‘diffuse’ and ‘brief’ epic, pastoral dramas and tragedies, odes, and hymns. Renaissance theorists and poets also recognized many other kinds, identified by a mix of formal and thematic elements, conventions and topics: metre, structure, size, scale, subject, values, occasion, style and more (Fowler 1982: 1–74). Milton’s reference to ‘pastoral’ drama in the passage quoted calls attention to the category of literary modes – what Sidney in *The Defence of Poesie* called ‘species’ and defined chiefly by tone, topics and affect: for example, pastoral, satiric, comedic, heroic, elegiac (Sidney 1595, sigs C2^r, E3^v–F1^r). These modes may govern works or parts of works in several kinds: we might have a pastoral comedy, or pastoral eclogue, or pastoral song; or a satiric verse epistle, or epigram, or novel. Also, Milton links biblical with classical models – Homer and Job for epic, Sophocles and the Apocalypse for tragedy, Pindar and the Psalms for the high lyric – indicating his sense of the Bible as a compendium of literary genres and poetic art. His final comment privileging biblical lyric over all other lyric poetry not only for truth, but also for art assumes a Platonic union of truth and beauty.

Renaissance poets and critics often repeated the Horatian formula for the purpose of poetry, to teach and delight, and Sidney added to these aims the function of rhetoric, to move. Milton was thinking in these terms as he debated with himself whether epic or tragedy might be more ‘doctrinal and exemplary’ to the nation. But Milton’s poetic teaching is not a matter of urging a message or doctrine: it involves representing human life and human values in all their complexity, in a richly imagined poetic universe. Genre is a major element in that representation, for genres afford, in Rosalie Colie’s terms, a series of frames or fixes upon the world (Colie 1973: vii), transmitting the culture’s shared imaginative experience. By his virtuoso use of the literary genre system, and especially by his characteristic mixture of generic elements in most of his poems, Milton can invite his readers to weigh and consider the values the several kinds have come to embody, and to make discriminating choices (Lewalski 1985: 17–24).

During Milton’s earlier career, genres associated with and promoted by the Caroline court took on special political and cultural import. Court masques and pastoral dramas mystified the virtue, power, and benevolence of Charles I and Henrietta Maria. Cavalier poets associated with the court wrote witty, sophisticated, playful love lyrics imbued with the fashionable neoplatonism and pastoralism or treated *carpe diem* themes with a light-hearted licentiousness. Other common royalist kinds were panegyrics on members of the royal family and their celebratory occasions, and religious poems treating the ‘high church’ rituals, feasts, ceremonies, and arts promoted by Archbishop

Laud. During the period of the Commonwealth and Protectorate (1649–60), royalists in retreat from London and without a court often wrote works in pastoral and romance modes, celebrating retirement and friendship, or courtly chivalry (Potter 1989; Smith 1994: 233–41). By contrast, some writers associated with the revolution reached toward the sublime or prophetic register to celebrate heroic action, as in Marvell's 'Horatian Ode' (Norbrook 1999: 251–71). Restoration court culture, with Dryden at its center, promoted heroic drama, satire, and Virgilian panegyric, written in smooth and graceful pentameter couplets.

Milton wrote many kinds of poem: sonnets in Italian and English, elegies and verse epistles in Latin elegiac verse, funeral elegies in English and Latin, songs, literary hymns, odes, epitaphs, encomiums, a masque, an entertainment, a tragedy, an epic, and a brief epic. He also wrote several kinds of prose treatises and polemics, both in English and in Latin – college orations, controversial tracts promoting particular causes or answering attacks, defenses of the regicide and the Commonwealth, histories, and theological exposition. As poet, he identified his career path with that defined by Virgil and imitated by Spenser: beginning with the lesser kinds, pastoral and lyric, and proceeding to the highest – assumed by Renaissance theorists to be epic, though Aristotle gave pride of place to tragedy. Milton wrote both.

Milton composed his neo-Latin poems with attention to generic categories based on classical metrical patterns. In his book of *Poems ... Both Latin and English* (1645), he collected several early Latin poems (titled elegies because written in elegiac metre, a hexameter line followed by a pentameter) in a section called 'Elegiarum Liber.' Three of these are verse epistles, two others are funeral poems, and two celebrate spring and love. The second group of Latin poems in that volume is termed 'Sylvarum liber,' indicating a collection of poems in various metres (like the several kinds of trees in a forest, the meaning of *Sylva*). Some poems in that section are encomia, praises (*Mansus, Ad Patrem*). The final poem, *Epitaphium Damonis*, is a pastoral funeral lament for the death of his dear friend, Charles Diodati; it is termed an epitaph, not an elegy, because it is not in elegiacs. Milton identified as an ode the poem that he sent with a copy of the 1645 volume to the librarian of Oxford University, 'Ad Joannem Rousium Oxoniensis': in an appended note he explains his nontraditional use of classical ode structure (Strophe, Antistrophe, and Epode) and cites some precedents for his metrical irregularities.

In several early Latin and English poems Milton invokes the genre system to weigh alternative lifestyles, in both personal and cultural terms. 'Elegy VI', a Latin verse epistle addressed to his close friend Charles Diodati, is a counterstatement to his own 'Elegy V', an ecstatic celebration of love and springtime in Ovidian terms, written a few months earlier. 'Elegy VI' contrasts two kinds of poetry and the lifestyles appropriate to each. He identifies Diodati with the 'gay elegy', which is consonant with a festive life of 'grand banquets' and 'frequent potions of old wine', and locates himself with epic and hymnic poets – Homer, Tiresias, Linus and Orpheus – whose high subjects require an ascetic and chaste life: 'For the poet is sacred to the gods: he is their priest' (line 77). Claiming that role definitively, he included with this elegy his first

major poem, 'On the morning of Christs Nativity' (1629), which he describes in the Proem as a 'humble ode' because of its pastoral elements, but which becomes a lofty 'Hymn' imagined as joining with the hymns of the angelic choir at that event. Also, the graceful, urbane companion poems, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles – 'heart-easing Mirth' (line 13), 'divinest Melancholy' (line 12) – that a poet might choose, or might choose at different times, or in sequence. As celebrations of their respective deities, the Grace Euphrosone (Youthful Mirth) and the allegorical figure imagined as a deity, Melancholy, both poems are modeled on the classical hymn. But they also incorporate elements of several other kinds, among them the academic debate, the Theocritan pastoral idyll of the ideal day and its festivals, the Theophrastian prose 'character' with such titles as 'The Happy Man' or 'The Melancholy Man', the encomium, and the demonstrative or eulogistic oration with its traditional categories of praise: the goods of nature (ancestry and birth), the goods of fortune (friends and circumstances of life), and the goods of character (actions and virtues). The final couplet of each poem echoes and answers the question posed in Marlowe's 'Come live with me and be my love' and its Elizabethan analogues. But despite the familiarity of these elements, Milton's paired poems have no close antecedents.

The title personages of both poems are drawn with some playfulness, as ideal but exaggerated types, their pleasures and values adumbrated through literary kinds. The essence of 'L'Allegro', youthful mirth, is displayed in the activities and values of the pastoral mode and the literary genres harmonious with it: rural folk and fairy tales of Queen Mab and Goblin; court masques and pageants; Jonson's 'learned' comedy; romantic comedies in which 'sweetest *Shakespear* fancies childe / Warble[s] his native Wood-notes wilde' (lines 133–4); and love songs in the Greek Lydian mode. In 'Il Penseroso' the romance mode presents the activities, pleasures and values of a solitary scholar-errant. He wanders through a mysterious gothic landscape with a melancholy nightingale, a 'high lonely Towr' (line 86), a drowsy bellman, a cathedral cloister with 'high embowed Roof' (line 157), stained glass windows, 'dimm religious light' (line 160), a 'pealing Organ' and a 'full voic'd Quire' engaged in 'Service high' (lines 161–3), and a hermitage with mossy cells. These images are appropriate to the medievalism and romance decorum of the poem. Melancholy's devoté enjoys the esoteric philosophy of Plato and Hermes Trismegistus, romances like Chaucer's unfinished Squire's Tale for their marvels and their allegory, Greek tragedies about Thebes and Troy by Aeschylus and Euripides, and bardic hymns like those of Orpheus. Finally, *Il Penseroso* turns to Christian hymns that produce ecstasy and vision.

L'Allegro might seem to show some affinity with the Cavalier poets in his pastoralism, his apparent elitist denial of rural labor, and his attendance at masques and stage plays. And *Il Penseroso*'s fondness for the architecture, art, and organ music of cathedrals, and his final retreat to a monastic hermitage, seem to register a surprising affinity with Roman Catholic or Laudian ritual (Patterson 1988: 9–22). But Milton uses these images to another purpose: to define and evaluate lifestyles in terms of literary modes, and to reclaim debased genres and art forms to good uses. Milton does

not, here or elsewhere, repudiate pastoral, stage plays or masques because he thinks Cavaliers have debased them, or church music and art because he thinks Laudians use them in the service of idolatry. Rather, these poems reclaim such art for innocent delight by excising any hint of licentiousness, or courtly neoplatonism, or idolatry. Through them, Milton contrasts kinds of art and life and sets them in some hierarchical relation. A progression is implied from the genres *L'Allegro* enjoys to the higher kinds *Il Penseroso* delights in: from folk tales to allegorical romance, from comedy to tragedy, from Lydian airs to bardic and Christian hymns. More important, the eight-line coda of '*Il Penseroso*' disrupts the poems' parallelism by opening to the future:

And may at last my weary age
Find out the peacefull hermitage,
The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell,
Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew,
And every Herb that sips the dew;
Till old experience do attain
To somehing like Prophetic strain.
(lines 167–74)

The coda makes Milton's poetic strategy clear. He does not, obviously, plan a monastic retreat for himself or hold it forth as an ideal; but he makes those images, which are appropriate to the medievalizing, romance mode of the poem, figure his aspiration to prophetic poetry. In '*Il Penseroso*', age has its place, bringing true knowledge of nature and the ripening of 'old experience' into 'something like prophetic strain'. A natural progression from '*L'Allegro*' to the higher life and art of '*Il Penseroso*' offers to lead, at last, beyond ecstatic vision to prophetic poetry that can convey that vision to others.

When Milton was invited to contribute a poetic entertainment as part of the festivities in honor of Alice Spencer, Dowager Countess of Derby, he had to decide how to situate himself vis-à-vis genres traditionally associated with the court. The court masques of the 1630s promoted a fashionable cult of Platonic Love as a benign representation and vindication of royal absolutism and the personal rule of 1629–40, when Charles ruled without Parliament (Parry 1981). The royal pair displayed themselves under various mythological and pastoral guises as enacting the union of Heroic Virtue (Charles) and Divine Beauty or Love (Henrietta Maria). Caroline masques were exotic and prodigiously expensive. Sets and machinery were elaborate, and the ideality of Charles' reign was often imaged in pastoral terms: the Queen is Chloris/Flora in *Chloridia* (1631); the court is imaged as the Valley of Tempe in *Tempe Restored* (1632); and in *Coelum Britannicum* (1634) the reformed heaven (modeled on the court of Charles) is represented as a garden with parterres, fountains, and grottoes (Lewalski 1998: 298–301). The King and Queen danced in many masques, symbolizing their personal and active control of all the discordant elements represented in the anti-masques – unruly passions, discontented and mutinous elements in the populace, and

threats from abroad. At the end, the royal and noble masquers unmasked and participated with other members of the court in elaborate dances (the Revels), figuring the continual intermixing of the ideal world and the Stuart court.

Milton's *Arcades* was performed in the great hall of the Countess of Derby's Harefield estate by some of the Countess' resident and visiting grandchildren and some others. It proposed to reclaim pastoral from the court, intimating the superiority of these festivities and the virtues of this noble Protestant lady and her household over the Queen and her suspect pastoral entertainments. Milton's designation, 'Part of an Entertainment', relates *Arcades* to the genre usually employed to welcome visiting royalty or their surrogates to a noble house; most often its topics praise the visitor, who brings the benefits and virtues of the court to the hosts. But in Milton's reformed entertainment, it is the visitors, coming in pastoral guise from the 'Arcadian' court, who pay homage to a far superior rural queen of a better Arcadia, directed by Genius, its guardian spirit. The Countess replaces the King in the chair of State, and displays royal and divine accoutrements. A 'sudden blaze of majesty' (line 2) flames from her 'radiant state' and 'shining throne' (lines 14–15), which is also a 'princely shrine' (line 36) for an 'unparel'd' maternal deity (line 25): 'Such a rural Queen / All *Arcadia* hath not seen' (lines 94–5). The critique of the court is sharpened in a pair of lines in the last song of Genius: 'Though *Syrinx* your *Pans* Mistres were, / Yet *Syrinx* well might wait on her' (lines 106–7). The Arcadia/Pan myth had been taken over by the Stuarts, so these lines exalt the Countess above Henrietta Maria and the Caroline court. Milton begins to explore here what his Masque develops fully – a stance toward art and recreation that repudiates both the court aesthetics and wholesale Puritan prohibitions. The virtues of Harefield are said to be nurtured by good art as well as by the ruling Lady. Genius, the gardener/guardian of the place, embodies and displays the curative and harmony-producing powers of music and poetry, associating his better aesthetics with the virtues of a sound Protestant aristocracy.

Milton's *Mask*, commonly known as *Comus*, challenges the cultural politics of that court genre. In form, theme, and spirit this is a reformed masque, projecting reformist religious and political values. Performed in 1634 on Michaelmas night (29 September) in the great hall at Ludlow Castle to honor the Earl of Bridgewater, the newly appointed Lord Lieutenant of Wales and the border counties, Milton's masque builds brilliantly upon the specific occasion, presenting the Earl's three unmarried children on a journey to their Father's house for a celebration, aided by a Guardian Spirit who is their own music master, Henry Lawes. But their journey takes on overtones of the journey of life and of contemporary life, with the children lost in the dark woods and Lady Alice confronting the temptations of Comus, who in Milton's version is not the traditional belly god of drunkenness and gluttony, but has the power and attractiveness of a natural force and a contemporary cultural ideal. As Cedric Brown argues, he is the right tempter for the occasion, presenting these young aristocrats with the refined, dissolute, licentious Cavalier lifestyle that they must learn to resist (Brown 1985: 57–77). He embodies as well the seductive power of false rhetoric and the threat of rape. With his bestial rout Comus is made to figure not only Cavalier licentiousness,

but also Laudian ritual, the depravities of court masques and feasts, and the unruly holiday pastimes – maypoles, Morris dances, Whitsunales – promoted by the court and decried by Puritans. Milton's masque requires no expensive and elaborate machinery: no cloud machines for the Attendant Spirit, no elaborate sets. The ideal masque world is Ludlow Castle, not the Stuart court, and it does not, as is usual in masques, simply appear and dispel all dangers: it is attained through pilgrimage. Nor are the monarchs the agents of cure and renewal: that role belongs to Sabrina as an instrument of divine grace from the region, the Welsh countryside, and as an embodiment of the transformative power of song and poetry. Also, the Platonism in this masque is a far cry from that of the Caroline court: external form does not reflect internal worth, and evil is conceived in Protestant, not Platonic terms. At the end of this masque evil remains: the dark wood is still dangerous to pass through and Comus is neither conquered, nor transformed, nor reconciled.

Comus himself is a species of court masquer, enacting 'dazling Spells' and marvelous spectacles, but they only 'cheat the eye with blear illusion' (lines 154–5; McGuire 1983: 39–40). He deceptively claims the world of pastoral by his shepherd disguise and his offer to guide the Lady to a 'low / But loyal cottage' (lines 318–19), alluding to the pastoralism so prevalent in court masques. But instead he leads her to a decadent court with an elaborate banquet and a beast-headed entourage – a none-too-subtle allusion to the licentious Cavaliers. In formal terms, this is a surprise: a masque audience would expect the court scene to be the main masque after the antimasque in the dark wood with the antic dances of Comus' rout. Instead, the court is another antimasque – not the locus of virtue and grace but Comus' own residence. Poised against the Comus-ideal is the Lady's chastity as the principle that orders sensuality, pleasure, and love, holding nature, human nature and art to their right uses. And poised against the 'dazling fence' of Comus' 'deer Wit, and gay Rhetorick' (lines 789–90) is the better art embodied in the songs of the Lady, the Attendant Spirit, and Sabrina, and especially the masque dances at Ludlow Castle that figure and display the children's '*triumph in victorious dance / O'er sensual Folly, and Intemperance*' (lines 973–4). The scene images the virtuous pleasure, beauty and art that accord with the life of chastity, intimating that they can be best nurtured in the households of the country aristocracy. If we compare *Coelum Britannicum*, Thomas Carew's sumptuous court masque of 1634 in which the Caroline court is a model for the reformation of Olympus itself, it will be evident how completely Milton has reversed the usual politics of masquing.

Milton's pastoral funeral elegy, 'Lycidas', is the *chef d'œuvre* of his early poetry and one of the greatest lyrics in the language. In it he confronts and works through his most profound personal concerns: about vocation, early death, belatedness and unfulfilment, fame, and the value of poetry. He also sounds some leitmotifs of reformist politics: the dangers posed by a corrupt clergy and church, the menace of Rome, adumbrations of apocalypse, and the call to prophecy. The opening phrase, 'Yet once more', places this poem in the long series of pastoral funeral elegies stretching back to Theocritus, and in a series of biblical warnings and apocalyptic prophecies beginning with those words, especially Hebrews 12: 26–8 (Wittreich 1979: 137–53). The headnote identifies this

poem as a monody, a funeral song by a single singer (Puttenham 1589: 39), though in fact other speakers are quoted in the poem and the coda introduces another poetic voice. The generic topics of funeral elegy – praise, lament, consolation – are present, though not as distinct parts of the poem. Virtually every line echoes other pastoral elegies by classical, neo-Latin and vernacular Renaissance poets: Theocritus, Moschus, Bion, Virgil, Petrarch, Castiglione, Mantuan, Joannes Secundus, Sannazaro, Spenser, and many more (Woodhouse and Bush 1972b: 544–65). Yet no previous, or I think subsequent, funeral poem has the scope, dimension, poignancy, and power of ‘Lycidas’; it is, paradoxically, at once the most derivative and the most original of elegies. Milton’s choice of the pastoral mode was by then out of fashion for funeral elegies, but that choice enabled him to call upon the rich symbolic resonances Renaissance pastoral had come to embody. Imaging the harmony of nature and humankind in the Golden Age, pastoral traditionally portrays the rhythms of human life and death in harmony with the rhythms of the seasons. In classical tradition, the shepherd is the poet, and pastoral is a way of exploring the relation of art and nature. In biblical tradition, the shepherd is pastor of his flock, like Christ the Good Shepherd. He may also be a prophet like Moses, Isaiah, or David, all of whom were called to that role from tending sheep. Pastoral also allows for political comment, as in Spenser’s *Shepheards Calender* and several other poems (Revard 1997a: 190–3).

As Milton develops the usual topics of pastoral elegy, he evokes the pastoral vision again and again, then dramatizes its collapse. The dead poet and the living mourner are presented as companion shepherds singing and tending sheep in a *locus amoenus* – an idealized Cambridge University characterized by pastoral *otium*. The first collapse of pastoral obliterates this poignantly nostalgic pastoral scene in which nature, humankind, and poetic ambitions seem to be in harmony, unthreatened by the fact or even the thought of mortality. Lycidas’ death shatters this idyll, revealing in nature not the ordered seasonal processes of mellowing and fruition that pastoral assumes, but rather the wanton destruction of youth and beauty: the blighted rosebud, the taintworm destroying the weanling sheep, and the frostbitten flowers in early spring. The swain then questions the nymphs, the muses, and the classical gods as to why they did not prevent the death of a poet, and they cannot answer. Twice Milton signals the collapse of pastoral by genre shifts, as the pastoral oaten flute is interrupted by notes in a ‘higher mood’ (line 87): the epic speech of divine Apollo assuring the living swain and the dead Lycidas of enduring fame in heaven, and the ‘dread voice’ of St Peter promising that some formidable if ambiguous ‘two-handed engine’ stands ready ‘at the door’ to smite the guilty and cleanse the church (lines 130–2). These consolations, however incomplete, allow the swain to recall pastoral, first with a procession of mourners and later with an imagined funereal tribute of pastoral flowers. But it collapses again, based as it is on a ‘false surmise’ (line 153) of nature’s empathy with and care for humans: Lycidas’ body is not here to be honored by the floral tribute of nature’s beauty, but is subject to all the horrors of the monstrous deep. At length, various adumbrations of resurrection throughout the poem are caught up in the swain’s ecstatic vision of a heavenly pastoral scene in which Lycidas enjoys true *otium* beside heavenly streams,

with his twin roles of poet and pastor preserved. Painfully inadequate to the fallen human condition, pastoral is seen to have its true locus in heaven. That vision enables the swain, in the coda, to take up his several pastoral roles in the world: to warble his 'Dorick lay' (pastoral poetry) and, twitching his symbolic blue mantle, to assume poetry's prophetic/teaching role (Wittreich 1979: 142–3). He can now move on to the next stage of life and poetry and national reformation: 'fresh Woods, and Pastures new' (lines 189, 193).

Milton's sonnets, written over a period of some twenty-five years, offer a prime example of his experiments with, and transformations of, genre. He wrote twenty-three sonnets, almost all in Petrarchan form, and he did so after the great age of sonnet writing in England (the 1590s) had passed. All over Europe for more than two centuries the sonnet had been used by Petrarch and his many followers as the major vernacular lyric genre to treat of love and lovers' emotional states, and sometimes also to represent the power relations of patrons and clients. Milton vastly expanded the sonnet's range, using it for all sorts of subjects and incorporating other generic elements as well as a new complexity of rhetoric and tone. In several sonnets, especially those on his blindness and on the massacre of the Waldensians, syntax and rhetoric play off against the formal metrical pattern of octave and sestet, intensifying tensions and providing a formal mimesis of theme.

He began with traditional love sonnets. His first sonnet has in its generic background medieval lovers' complaints which set the nightingale, the bird of true love, against the cuckoo, the bird of hate whose song doomed the lover to disappointment. His Petrarchan mini-sequence of five sonnets and a canzone in Italian displays debts to Petrarch, Tasso, Bembo, and especially Giovanni della Casa (Prince 1954): having mastered the Ovidian love elegy in Latin, Milton evidently decided to try out the other major mode of love poetry in the European tradition in its original language. Milton's sequence employs familiar Petrarchan topics: his lady's beauty and virtue are 'shot from Love's bow' (Sonnet II, line 7); potent fire flashes from her eyes, which are like suns; and the humble, devoted lover sighs painful sighs and suffers from love's incurable dart. But this speaker resists and redefines conventional Petrarchan roles. His sonnet lady is not coy, or reserved, or forbidding, but gentle and gracious; she is no silent object of adoration, but charms her lover with bilingual speech and enthralling songs. Also, this lover-poet carefully avoids Petrarchan subjection to the bonds of Cupid and the lady's power, retaining his autonomy and insisting on his own virtue and worth. The sonnet lady is not his Muse, like Petrarch's Laura: indeed, the Italian love poetry she inspires diverts him from greater poetic achievements in English which promise, his friends remind him, an 'immortal reward' of fame ('Canzone', line 11). And the last sonnet in the sequence is a curious self-blazon, praising the speaker's own moral virtues and poetic aspirations rather than the physical beauties of the lady.

Several of Milton's political sonnets take on some characteristics of the comic or satiric epigram – those short, witty, acerbic poems that look back to Martial and often end with a surprising turn at the end, called a 'sting in the tail'. Some engage with contemporary history: a threatened assault on the city; attacks on Milton's Divorce

Tracts, and immediate threats to religious toleration. They transport into the lyric mode the satiric persona Milton developed in his prose tracts of the early 1640s. Other sonnets to male and female friends – Henry Lawes and Margaret Ley, and the epitaph-sonnet on Catherine Thomason – find some generic antecedents in epigrams of praise as practiced by Ben Jonson, with Milton's speaker adopting the Jonsonian stance of an honest man giving well-considered and well-deserved praise. Two other epigram-like sonnets invite young friends to enjoy the pleasant recreation of good conversation and a light repast: they adopt a Horatian tone and recall Jonson's Epigram 101, 'On Inviting a Friend to Dinner'. Three 'heroic' sonnets – to Sir Thomas Fairfax, Oliver Cromwell, and Sir Henry Vane – import into the small form of the sonnet the elevated diction, lofty epithets, and style of address appropriate to odes for great heroes and statesmen. But Milton mixes his high praises with admonitions to these statesmen to meet the still greater challenges that remain in settling civil government and religious toleration.

Several of Milton's finest sonnets dramatize moments of personal moral crisis, and in this owe something to the traditions of Protestant occasional meditation on the self and on personal experience. Topics include an anxious analysis of belatedness in the choice of vocation and the catastrophe of blindness striking in mid-career. 'When I consider how my light is spent' (Sonnet XVI, line 1) voices a bitter complaint against a taskmaster God who seems to demand service even from a blind poet, then moves toward resolving that problem by projecting a regal God who needs no service, but whose kingdom has place for all. A later sonnet on blindness insists, perhaps too urgently, on Milton's calm resignation and pride in having lost his sight in the service of liberty. A moving sonnet on his dead wife, couched as a dream vision, plays off the classical myth of Alcestis restored to her husband Admetus. Here the sestet offers no resolution, but ends with a poignant sense of loss – of sight and of love: 'But O as to embrace me she inclin'd / I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night' (Sonnet XIX, lines 13–14). Most remarkable, perhaps, is '*On the late Massacher in Piedmont*', which transforms the sonnet into a prophetic Jeremiad, calling down God's vengeance for the Waldensians slaughtered by the forces of the Roman Catholic Duke of Savoy. It incorporates many details of the atrocities from contemporary news accounts, and creates for the sonnet a high, epic-like style. When Wordsworth revived the sonnet for the Romantics, Milton was his acknowledged model. In his sonnet beginning 'Scorn not the sonnet' Wordsworth declared that with Milton 'the thing became a trumpet.'

Some of Milton's English and Latin prose works are presented simply as polemic treatises arguing for particular positions, while other such arguments are identified by title as belonging to a specific rhetorical genre. One tract on reformation of the English Church, *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England ... Written to a Friend* (1641), is presented as a letter to an (unnamed) friend, addressed as 'Sir'; the title of another, *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence ...* (1641), indicates that it excerpts passages from the named treatise and answers each such passage in turn. *An Apology Against a Pamphlet* (1642) defends his *Animadversions* tract against a pamphlet attack, 'Apology' here signifying a strong defense, not an admission of wrong. Milton wrote two long Latin works termed 'defences' – *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio ...* (1651)

and *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda* (1654) – both of which defend the ‘English people’ for overthrowing and executing the English monarch and establishing a republic, against books by continental scholars. Milton’s most artful treatise is set forth as a speech, a deliberative oration designed to persuade a governing entity; the title points to a model in Isocrates’ address to the Areopagus of Greece, *Areopagitica, A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing. To the Parliament of England* (1644). One of Milton’s several treatises arguing for divorce on grounds of incompatibility is identified by title as a set of biblical commentaries, *Tetrachordon: Expositions upon the foure chief places in scripture, which treat of Marriage, or nullities in Marriage* (1644). By the title *Eikonoklastes*, idol-smasher (1650), Milton indicates that this treatise undertakes to destroy, chapter by chapter, the ‘idol’ that a book published just after the regicide as the King’s report of his sufferings and defense of his rule has become to an ‘idolatrous’ English populace.

In his Proem to Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, the Miltonic Bard alludes to a long period of gestation for his epic poem: ‘this subject for heroic song / Pleased me long choosing, and beginning late’ (*PL* IX. 25–6). He had been thinking about writing epic for decades – as far back as his collegiate ‘Vacation Exercise’ in 1628. When he wrote *The Reason of Church-Government* in 1642, he was thinking about an epic on the model of Virgil and Tasso, with a great national hero like King Arthur. But at some point the Virgilian model, celebrating the founding of the Roman empire and the concomitant ruin of the Roman republic, came to be problematic for this republican poet. And Tasso’s model, celebrating within the story of the First Crusade the restoration of Counter-Reformation hegemony over all kinds of rebellion and dissent, was not very useful to this staunch Protestant independent (Quint 1993: 213–47). We cannot be sure just when Milton decided that the great epic subject for his own times had to be the Fall and its consequences – ‘all our woe’ (*PL* I. 3): not the founding of a great empire or nation, but the loss of an earthly paradise and the need for a new epic heroism conceived in moral and spiritual terms.

By complex generic strategies and specific allusions, Milton set his poem in relation to other great epics and works in a variety of genres, involving readers in a critique of the values associated with those other heroes and genres, as well as with issues of contemporary politics and theology. He included the full range of topics and conventions common to the Homeric and Virgilian epic tradition (Blessington 1979): invocations to the Muse; a beginning *in medias res*; an Achilles-like hero in Satan; a Homeric catalogue of Satan’s generals; councils in hell and in heaven; epic pageants and games; supernatural powers – God, the Son, and good and evil angels. The poem also has a fierce battle in heaven between two armies, replete with chariot clashes, taunts and vaunts, and hill-hurlings; single combats of heroes; reprises of past actions in Raphael’s narratives of the War in Heaven and the Creation; and prophecies of the hero’s descendants in Michael’s summary of biblical history. Yet at a more fundamental level, Milton’s epic is defined against the traditional epic subject – wars and empire – and the traditional epic hero as the epitome of courage and battle prowess. His protagonists are a domestic pair; the scene of their action is a pastoral garden; and their

primary challenge is, 'under long obedience tried' (*PL* VII. 159), to make themselves, their marital relationship and their garden – the nucleus of the human world – ever more perfect. Into this radically new kind of epic, Milton incorporates many particular genres in many modes: romance, pastoral, georgic, comedic, tragic, rhetorical, lyric (Ide and Wittreich 1983; Lewalski 1985). And into his sublime epic high style he incorporated a wide range of other styles: colloquial, dialogic, lyric, hymnic, elegiac, mock-heroic, denunciatory, ironic, oratorical, ornate, plain.

In the Proems to Books I, III, VII, and IX, Milton explores the problematics of authorship (Grossman 1987). In no other formal epic does the poet insert himself so directly and extensively into his work, making his own experience in writing the poem a part of and an analogue to his story as he struggles to understand the roles played by prophetic inspiration, literary tradition, and authorial originality in the writing of his poem. By his choice of subject and use of blank verse, he distances himself from Dryden, Davenant, Cowley, and other contemporary aspirants to epic; but his allusions continually acknowledge debts to the great ancients – Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Lucretius – and to such moderns as Ariosto, Tasso, Du Bartas, Camoens, and Spenser. Yet he hopes and expects to surpass them, since his subject is both truer and more heroic than theirs, and since he looks for illumination and collaboration to the divine source of both truth and creativity.

With the striking portrait of Satan in Books I and II, Milton prompts his readers to begin a poem-long exploration and redefinition of heroes and heroism, the fundamental concern of epic. Often he highlights discrepancies between Satan's noble rhetoric and his motives and actions; also, by associating Satan with the heroic genres and the great heroes of literary tradition, he invites the reader to discover how he in some ways exemplifies but in essence perverts those models (Lewalski 1985: 55–78). Satan at the outset is a heroic warrior indomitable in the face of defeat and staggering obstacles, manifesting fortitude, determination, endurance, and leadership. He prides himself on an Achilles-like obduracy, a 'fixed mind / And high disdain, from sense of injured merit' (I. 97–8), and he commits himself, like Virgil's Turnus, to revenge, hate, and 'eternal war / Irreconcilable' (I. 121–2) – though he has not been wronged as those heroes were. He makes martial prowess the test of worth: 'our own right hand / Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try / Who is our equal' (V. 864–6). But instead of winning Achilles-like victories on the battlefield, he is defeated by the Son who wields God's omnipotence, yet displays it first and chiefly in acts of restoration and new creation (*PL* VI. 780–90). Like Aeneas, Satan departs from a burning city to conquer and lead his followers to a new kingdom; but he finds that hell is his proper kingdom, and that he carries it with him wherever he goes. Like Odysseus, he makes a perilous journey requiring the use of wit and craft, but not to return home to wife and son; rather, before he ventures into Chaos he meets but does not recognize his daughter-wife Sin and the offspring of their incestuous union, Death.

Satan casts himself in the mold of the tragic hero Prometheus, enduring with constancy, indomitable will and 'courage never to submit or yield' the punishment meted out by an implacable divine tyrant (I. 108) – though Prometheus angered Zeus

by bringing humans the gift of fire, whereas Satan brings them misery and death. Satan claims that his mind will remain unchanged and will transform his surroundings: 'The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven' (I. 254–5). But he finds the reverse: 'Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell' (IV. 75). Like many romance heroes, Satan enters a Garden of Love and courts its lady with exaggerated Petrarchan compliments (Giamatti 1966: 295–351), but he cannot win love, or find sensual delight, or enjoy sensuous refreshment or ease there; on the contrary, he feels more intensely than before the agony of his own loneliness, lovelessness, and unsatisfied desire. Against the model of Camoens' *Lusiads*, Satan is represented as an explorer bent on conquest and colonization, a 'great adventurer' undertaking to search 'foreign worlds' (X. 440–1). He sets out courageously to sail through an uncharted sea (Chaos) enduring as yet unknown dangers and difficulties; he discovers the site of a future colony, the Paradise of Fools, to be peopled chiefly by Roman Catholics; and he discovers the paradise of Eden where, after conquering Adam and Eve, he means to settle the fallen angels. At his first sight of Adam and Eve, he makes clear in soliloquy that he means to use Eden and its inhabitants for his own purposes, that his excursion is about empire-building as well as revenge. He justifies his enterprise by 'public reason just, / Honour and empire with revenge enlarged' – characterized by the narrator as 'necessity, / The tyrant's plea' (IV. 389–94). He then practices fraud on Eve, causing her to lose her rightful domain. Such associations do not mean that Milton thought exploration and colonization necessarily Satanic, but they do suggest how susceptible the imperial enterprise is to evil purposes. All these Satanic perversions of the heroic find their climax in Book X, when Satan returns to hell intending a Roman triumph like that attending the formal coronation of Charles II (Knoppers 1994: 96–114) – to be greeted instead with a universal hiss from his followers turned into snakes, as all of them are forced to enact a grotesque black comedy of God's devising. Milton does not use these comparisons to condemn the various literary genres, nor yet to exalt Satan as hero, but to let readers discover how Satan has perverted the noblest qualities of literature's greatest heroes, and so realize how susceptible those models of heroism are to perversion. He invites readers to measure all other versions of the heroic against the poem's standard: the self-sacrificing love of the Son, the moral courage of Abdiel, and the 'better fortitude' (IX. 31) of Christ in life and death, with which Adam and Eve at last identify.

Milton's representations of hell, heaven, and Eden employ a variety of generic resources to challenge readers' stereotypes, and their bases in literature and theology. In his poem, all these places are in process: their physical conditions are fitted to the beings that inhabit them, but the inhabitants interact with and shape their environments, creating societies in their own images. Hell is first presented in traditional terms with Satan and his crew chained on a lake of fire, but they soon rise up and begin to mine gold and gems, build a government center (Pandæmonium), hold a parliament, send Satan on a mission of exploration and conquest, investigate their spacious and varied though sterile landscape, engage in martial games and parades, perform music, compose epic poems, and argue hard philosophical questions. Milton portrays

hell as a damned society in the making, with royalist politics, perverted language, perverse rhetoric, political manipulation, and demagoguery. By contrast, he portrays heaven as a unique place, a celestial city combining courtly magnificence and the pleasures of pastoral nature. The mixture of heroic, georgic, and pastoral activities and modes – elegant hymns suited to various occasions, martial parades, warfare, pageantry, masque dancing, feasting, lovemaking, political debate, the protection of Eden – provides an ideal of wholeness. But, surprisingly, Milton's heaven is also a place of process, not stasis, of complexity, not simplicity, and the continuous and active choice of good rather than the absence of evil. Eden is a lush and lovely enclosed garden with a superabundance of natural delights and a wide range of pastoral and georgic activities, and it is pre-eminently a place of growth and change. Adam and Eve are expected to cultivate and control their burgeoning garden and their own sometimes wayward impulses and passions; to work out their relationship to God and to each other; and to deal with a constant succession of challenges relating to work, education, love and sex, intellectual curiosity, the duties pertaining to their places both in a hierarchical universe and in a companionate marriage, and temptations from Satan. Milton presents these challenges as components of an ideal human life in innocence and as preparation for a more exalted state.

Paradise Lost also uses the resources of genre to engage with contemporary political and cultural issues. At some point while he was writing and revising his epic for its first publication in 1667, Milton decided on a ten-book format, thereby distinguishing his poem from the twelve-book Virgilian model consciously followed by Tasso and others. He may have rejected the Virgilian format to emphasize that his is not an epic of conquest and empire, but another reason was surely that royalists had appropriated the Virgilian heroic mode before and especially after the Restoration. In what Laura Knoppers terms the 'politics of joy' following the Restoration, poets hailed the new era in Virgilian terms as a Golden Age restored, and celebrated Charles II as a new Augustus (Knoppers 1994: 67–122). His coronation procession was designed as a magnificent Roman triumph through elaborate Roman arches that identified him with Augustus, Aeneas, and Neptune. Dryden's *Astraea Redux* (1660) rings explicit changes on those motifs: 'Oh Happy Age! Oh times like those alone / By Fate reserv'd for Great Augustus Throne' (lines 320–1). By contrast, Milton's opening lines indicate that the true restoration will not be effected by an English Augustus, but must await a divine hero: 'till one greater man / Restore us, and regain the blissful seat' (*PL* I. 4–5). And his portrayal of Satan contains a powerful critique of monarchy as civil idolatry, with allusion to Charles I and Charles II. By adopting a ten-book format, Milton associates his poem explicitly with the republican Lucan's unfinished epic, *Pharsalia*, or *The Civil War*, which was the font of a countertradition to Virgil's celebration of an Augustan empire predestined by the Gods. Lucan celebrated the resistance of the Roman republic and its heroes, Pompey and Cato, and by Milton's time the *Pharsalia* was firmly associated with antimonarchical or republican politics through several editions and translations, especially the 1627 English translation by the Long Parliament's historian-to-be, Thomas May (Norbrook 1999: 23–63). Milton alludes to and echoes Lucan especially

in the treatment of contingency in Satan's flight through Chaos, in the portrayal of the War in Heaven as a civil war, and in Satan's echo of Caesar's opportunistic republican rhetoric (Quint 1993: 255–6, 305–7; Norbrook 1999: 438–67). In 1674, Milton produced an edition of *Paradise Lost* in twelve books by dividing Books VII and X, but adding very little new material. By then, Virgil was no longer so obvious a signifier of royalism, and Milton seems to have decided to reclaim that central epic tradition from Dryden and the court for his own sublime poem and its values.

In the last two books of *Paradise Lost* Milton reworks another common epic topic, the prophecy of future history. The series of visions and narratives Michael presents to Adam show over and over again the few righteous overwhelmed by the many wicked, and the collapse of all attempts to found a permanent version of the Kingdom of God on earth. Adam and Milton's readers must learn to read that history, with its tragic vision of an external paradise irretrievably lost – 'so shall the world go on, / To good malignant, to bad men benign, / Under her own weight groaning' (XII. 537–9) – offset only by the projected millennial restoration of all things at Christ's second coming and the possibility, now, of inhabiting a pastoral of the spirit, 'A paradise within thee, happier far' (XII. 587). This might seem a recipe for retreat from political engagement, but the thrust of Michael's prophecy is against any kind of quietism or passivity, spiritual, moral, or political. His history shows that in every age the just rise to oppose, when God calls them to do so, the Nimrods, or the Pharaohs, or the royalist persecutors of puritans, even though – like the loyal angels in the Battle in Heaven – they can win no decisive victories and can effect no lasting reforms until the Son appears. Eve learns something of the history to come through dreams, which lead her to recognize her divinely appointed agency in bringing the messianic promise into history. Remarkably, Milton's poem ends with Eve's recognition of herself as the primary human agent in God's redemptive plan and the primary protagonist of *Paradise Lost*: 'though all by me is lost, / Such favour I unworthy am vouchsafed, / By me the promised seed shall all restore' (XII. 621–3). The poem ends in the elegiac register: the poignant, quiet, wonderfully evocative final lines conjoin loss and consolation. Prophecy and Providence provide part of that consolation, but so does the human love of Adam and Eve, as those new domestic heroes wander forth 'hand in hand' to meet the harsh challenges of life in the fallen world.

In a note added in 1668 explaining his use of blank verse, Milton openly contested the new norm for heroic poetry and drama, the heroic couplet. By remarkable coincidence, his blank verse epic greeted the reading public at about the same time as Dryden's essay *Of Dramatick Poesie* (1668) with its claim that rhyme is now the norm for modern poetry of all sorts, and especially for tragedy and heroic drama. Dryden's persona, Neander, affirms categorically that 'Blank Verse is acknowledg'd to be too low for a Poem, nay more, for a paper of verses; but if too low for an ordinary Sonnet, how much more for Tragedy' (lines 66–7) – or for epic, he implies, since drama and epic are of the same genus. In the preface, Dryden states that rhyme enjoys the favor of the court, 'the last and surest judge of writing' (sig. A3^r). Though Milton's note on the verse form was requested by his publisher, who recognized that in this cultural milieu readers expected rhyme, Milton did rather more than was expected, challenging not

only the new poetic norms, but also the court culture and royalist politics that fostered them: 'This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming' (*PL*: 54–5). That language of liberty and bondage associates Milton's blank verse with (it is implied) the restoration of English liberty from the bondage of Stuart tyranny (Zwicker 1987: 249), making Milton's epic an aesthetic complement to republican politics and culture.

In 1671, Milton published in a single volume a brief epic, *Paradise Regained*, and a tragedy, *Samson Agonistes*, which offer two models of political response in conditions of severe trial and oppression after the Restoration. The brief epic presents in its hero Jesus an example of unflinching resistance to and forthright denunciation of all versions of the sinful or disordered life, and all faulty and false models of church and state. The tragedy presents a warrior hero through whose deeds and final catastrophic act God offered the Israelites opportunities to free themselves from ignominious defeat and slavery, though only if he and they can rise to the moral and political challenges involved. These poems continue Milton's redefinition of the heroic. Even more directly than *Paradise Lost*, they challenge the aesthetics and cultural politics of the contemporary heroic drama: its pentameter couplets and what Steven Zwicker terms 'its bombast and cant, its aristocratic code of virtue and honor, its spectacle and rhetoric ... its warring heroes and virgin queens, its exaltation of passion and elevation of empire' (1995: 139–40, 151). Milton's largely dialogic brief epic celebrates in blank verse the heroism of intellectual and moral struggle and entirely redefines the nature of empire and glory. And his severe classical tragedy, written in a species of free verse with varying line lengths and some irregular rhyme, eschews every vestige of exotic spectacle, links erotic passion with idolatry, and presents a tragic hero whose intense psychic suffering leads to spiritual growth.

Paradise Regained offers a daring challenge to and revision of epic norms. Its epic proposition makes the quite startling claim that this poem treats a vastly more noble and heroic subject than *Paradise Lost*, with a hero who conquers his enemy, regains the regions lost to Satan and establishes his own realm. These lines allude to the verses, then widely accepted as genuine, that introduce the Aeneid in most Renaissance editions (Virgil 1960: 240–1) and supposedly announce Virgil's turn from pastoral and georgic to an epic subject:

I who e're while the happy Garden sung,
By one mans disobedience lost, now sing
Recover'd Paradise to all mankind,
By one mans firm obedience fully tri'd
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foil'd
In all his wiles, defeated and repuls't,
And *Eden* raised in the waste wilderness

(I. 1–7)

That echo, and the reference to *Paradise Lost* as a poem about a happy garden, suggest with witty audacity that Milton has now, like Virgil, graduated from pastoral apprentice-work to the true epic subject: in his case, the spiritual warfare and victory of Jesus. Also, several allusions to the Book of Job suggest that Milton is now carrying out the poetic project he imagined a quarter of a century earlier in *The Reason of Church-Government*, when he proposed the Book of Job as a 'brief model' for epic (CPW I: 813). This poem is in part shaped by the exegetical tradition that interpreted Job as epic, and also by the long tradition of biblical 'brief epics' in three or four books, in Latin and in the vernacular literatures (Lewalski 1966: 3–129).

Contemporary readers were no doubt surprised, as many modern critics have been, by Milton's choosing as his subject the Temptation in the Wilderness instead of the Passion–Crucifixion narrative, and by his portrait of an austere, nay-saying Jesus who discounts and refuses all worldly pleasures and goods. But this choice of subject follows naturally from Milton's belief that self-knowledge and self-rule are preconditions for any worthy public action in the world. The temptation episode allows Milton to present Jesus' moral and intellectual trials as a higher epic heroism, as a model for right knowing and choosing, and as a creative and liberating force in history. As a political gesture, it allowed him to develop a model of nonviolent yet active and forceful resistance to the Restoration church and state (Loewenstein 1994: 63–89). The debates between Jesus and Satan can lead readers to think rightly about kingship, prophecy, idolatry, millenarian zeal, the proper uses of civil power, the place of secular learning, and the abuses of pleasure, glory and power. The poem's structure gives primary attention to the Messiah's kingdom and its relation to secular monarchies and their values, with Books II and III, and much of Book IV, given over to that issue.

Milton reworked and adapted epic conventions and topics to this unusual subject. He transformed the central epic episode, the single combat of hero and antagonist, into a three-day verbal battle, a poem-long intellectual and moral struggle. The poem begins *in medias res* with Jesus' baptism. There are two Infernal Councils in which Satan plots his temptation, and a Council in Heaven in which God prophesies his Son's immediate and ultimate victory over Satan. Also, there are two transformed epic recitals – Christ's meditation about his youthful experiences and aspirations, and Mary's reminiscences about the prophecies and promises attending the hero's early life – as well as a transformed prophetic vision in which the hero, instead of viewing his own destined kingdom (as Aeneas does), sees and rejects all the kingdoms that are not his. There is an epic catalogue of the Kingdoms of the World displayed to Jesus, a martial pageant of the Parthian warriors, and a few striking epic similes. Like *Paradise Lost*, this poem incorporates other genres into the epic frame: continuous dialogue in which Satan's inflated epic rhetoric is met by Jesus' spare answers; a pastoral grove where Satan presents a sensuous banquet, and the still more enchanting 'Olive Groves of Academe'; a romance situation in which Jesus reprises the trials of a young knight in the wilderness before he is recognized as champion or king; and angelic hymns at the beginning and end of the temptations. But this poem forgoes the soaring, eloquent

style of *Paradise Lost* for one appropriate to this subject: more restrained, dialogic, and tense with the parry and thrust of intellectual exchange.

The title page of *Samson Agonistes* terms it a 'Dramatic Poem', not a drama: Milton did not suppose that it might be presented on the Restoration stage alongside Dryden's exotic tragedies. But as a written text it might still prove 'doctrinal and exemplary to a Nation', the effect he had projected for tragedy in *The Reason of Church-Government* (CPW I: 815). Milton made large alterations in the biblical story from Judges 13–16: conflating the biblical strong man with Job and the Psalmist (Radzinowicz 1978: 188–260), he creates a hero capable of self-analysis, intellectual struggle, tragic suffering, and bitter self-castigation as he seeks to understand God's ways to him. In the preface, Milton's only extended commentary on a poem of his own, he explicitly sets his practice against that of his contemporaries, describing his tragedy as 'coming forth after the ancient manner, much different from what among us passes for best' (Milton 2008: 67). Milton begins by paraphrasing Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy (*Poetics* 6.1, 1973: 24–5) in terms tailored to his own poem:

TRAGEDY, as it was anciently compos'd, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems: therefore 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, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. (Milton 2008: 66)

Unlike Aristotle, Milton emphasizes the moral profit of tragedy. He glosses catharsis as a purging or tempering of the passions by aesthetic delight – a concept encapsulated in the drama's final line: 'calm of mind all passion spent'. He also changes the object of imitation: for Aristotle, it is an action, the plot or mythos; for Milton, it is the tragic passions, pity or fear and terror, that are to be 'well imitated' – a definition that locates the essence of tragedy in the scene of suffering, the agonies and passions of Samson. In Aristotle's paradigmatic tragedy, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the hero falls from prosperity into abject misery through an error or fault (hamartia) that enmeshes him in the toils of Fate. Milton's tragedy begins with Samson already fallen into misery, like the heroes of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* or Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonnus*. Again, as he did in *The Reason of Church-Government*, Milton finds a biblical model for tragedy in the Book of Revelation and the commentary of David Pareus, who described that book's tragic subject as the 'sufferings and agons' of the saints throughout history (Lewalski 1970: 1050–62). Whatever intimations of providential design or apocalyptic destruction of the wicked are conveyed by Milton's drama, they do not dispel the tragedy of Samson's agony and his people's loss.

Pointing to Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as 'the best rule to all who endeavor to write tragedy' in regard to the disposition of the plot, Milton follows the structure of Greek tragedy closely (Milton 2008: 68). There is a prologue spoken by Samson, a parados or entry song of the Chorus, five agons or dialogic struggles with visitors separated by choral odes, an exode containing the report of and responses to Samson's

death, and a kommos containing a funeral dirge and consolations (Parker 1970). Like Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*, Samson gains self-knowledge through the dialogic agons, in this case partly by encountering and overcoming versions of his former self: as a Danite circumscribed by his tribe and family, as a sensualist enslaved by passion, and as a swaggering strong man. Milton states that his Chorus of Danites is designed 'after the Greek manner', but it is much more than the voice of community mores. Especially in the long segment after Samson leaves the scene, it falls to them to try to understand what Samson's life and death mean for Israel, and what they themselves are called to do. The preface also indicates the drama's adherence to the neoclassical unities of time and place: the action takes only a few hours with no intervals of time, and the single locale is a shady bank in front of Samson's prison, with all the action in the Philistine Temple reported by a messenger.

The tragic effect of *Samson Agonistes* is intensified by its portrayal of the great obstacles to political liberation, whether in Israel or England. All human heroes are flawed, and peoples generally are more disposed to choose 'Bondage with ease then strenuous liberty' (line 271). Yet in the drama's historical moment a future in bondage is not yet fixed and choices are still possible. If the Israelites, or the English, could truly value liberty, could reform themselves, could read the signs and events with penetration, could benefit from the 'new acquist / Of true experience' (lines 1745–6), moral and political, that Samson's experience offers to the Danites and that Milton's dramatization of it offers to his compatriots, liberation might be possible. But that can happen only when a virtuous citizenry understands the political stakes and places a true value on liberty. Milton's exemplary tragedy makes a fitting poetic climax to his lifelong effort to use the resources of genre to help create such citizens.

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The Classical Literary Tradition

John K. Hale

What have Milton's modern-day readers to gain from awareness of the classical literary tradition in which he repeatedly and explicitly placed himself? Should we press that question, indeed, and ask what is lost by unawareness or neglect of the tradition? Or should we put it aside, taking the view that nothing is lost, since there is always some other way of reading him that will yield the same understanding, and hence pleasure? Although these questions are too large and personal to receive balanced answers here, some suggestive ones will emerge from the following case studies.

Being case studies, they cannot help privileging texture above structure (close reading above detached meditation); but truly it *is* moment-to-moment, textural reading that makes Milton's voice distinctive, and gains him his readership. I shall be glancing at a few larger structures too, since these certainly draw benefit from his classical attainments; the emphasis, nonetheless, should remain on the texturing. Similarly, Milton's power to speak to us is not at all limited to *Paradise Lost*. But since readers who do not enjoy *Paradise Lost* seldom enjoy his other poetry, still less his prose, where better to begin on case studies than with that poem's own beginning?

The Opening Sentence of *Paradise Lost*

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, 5
 Sing heavenly Muse, that on the secret top
 Of Oreb or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
 In the beginning how the heavens and earth
 Rose out of chaos: or if Sion hill 10
 Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
 Fast by the oracle of God[,] I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues 15
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
 (I. 1–16)

Any reader meeting this for the first time and willing to confront its texture in detail will check the allusions, and perhaps observe that most are biblical, in accordance with the chosen subject (Jesus in line 4, Moses in lines 6–11, three sacred mountains and Siloa's brook). Thus, 'Aonian' sticks out, as the kind of classical allusion that must receive a gloss, but that may also irritate the reader who is eager to get up steam. 'Aonian' means 'belonging to Mount Helicon, sacred home of the classical Muses'; and so it links back to the 'heavenly Muse' of line 6, differentiating that from the Homeric/pagan one. Yes, but so what? the eager reader might object – and how readers enjoy objecting to this poet! – that the sense boils down to a routine claim that the biblical subject is loftier than those of Greek and Roman epics. The same reader might object that the distinction between the regular classical sisterhood of Muses and the 'heavenly Muse' of line 6 is a footling or confusing one.

A fit reply to the first misgiving would be that precisely because the ploy is routine the point lies in listening to *how* this poet appropriates it, how he makes the detail arresting in his opening bid for our attention. The second point is the more important one: Milton has a new Muse, a 'heavenly' one (perhaps the divine Logos of John's Gospel), and yet to call it a *Muse* is his way of upholding both originality and continuity, indeed, originality because of continuity. The two Greek names together have brought into view, this early in the poem, a persistent dialectic within Milton's texture. He will persist in two related mental acts: to affirm that his subject holds greater spiritual worth than the pagan predecessors' do; but yet to avail himself of their resources, while still carrying on a dialectic with himself about the truth status and moral worth of his classical inheritance.

He avails himself of the classical resources as if by second nature. In the passage, for example, he claims to 'sing' (line 6) and 'soar' (line 14): both are classical images of the poet's activity. And by 'Aonian' (line 15) or (in the same verse paragraph) 'what in me is dark' (line 22), Milton may begin moving his opening utterance closer to Homer as the archetypal, originary blind poet (with pun on 'seer'). The alignment will become wholly explicit in his next invocation, the 'blind Maeonides' of

Book III, line 35. Here at the poem's opening Milton undertakes an emulation with Homer, and yet not one where the competitor is slighted, for the self-image is the same.

The Dialectic, as Seen in Further Allusions

The dialectic appears in innumerable forms, each unique. Let us take three further instances of classical allusion. One is an abrupt dismissal of a particular detail of classical myth, as false. The second is a generalizing address to the issue we have just adumbrated, explicitly problematizing it. In the third, however, conflict is absent: the back-reference to Virgil becomes (to use a favorite Renaissance metaphor) a grateful making of fresh honey from the ancient flowers.

First, he tells the famous myth of Hephaestus (Mulciber, Vulcan) thrown from Olympus by angry Zeus; then he says it is lies!

Nor was his name unheard or unadored
 In ancient Greece; and in Ausonian land
 Men called him Mulciber; and how he fell
 From heaven, they fabled, 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
 Dropped from the zenith like a falling star,
 On Lemnos the Ægæan isle: thus they relate,
 Erring; for he with this rebellious rout
 Fell long before;

(I. 738–48)

The thought-content here is insisting on the primacy, the aboriginality and superior truth, of the biblical over the classical. But the main impact within the reading experience is less of solemn triumphalism than of a witty surprise. The allusion is a '*dissimile*,' a 'narrative intrusion like a simile but declared by the intrusive author to be unlike' (*PL*: 106; my italics). It disconcerts the attentive reader, who is led up the path of a lengthy retelling of Homer, only to be informed that close attention was a waste of time. Yet not a total waste, surely, because the rhetorical lurch is diverting and alerting. And the jape itself may come from a classical author, Lucretius (*De Rerum Natura* I. 393, *PL*: 105–6).

Rather different is the invocation by which Milton girds the bardic loins to narrate the Fall itself:

sad task, yet argument
 Not less but more heroic than the wrath
 Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued

Thrice fugitive about Troy wall; or rage
 Of Turnus for Lavinia disespoused,
 Or Neptune's ire or Juno's, that so long
 Perplexed the Greek and Cytherea's son;
 If answerable style I can obtain 20
 Of my celestial patroness, who deigns
 Her nightly visitation unimplored,
 And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
 Easy my unpremeditated verse:
 Since first this subject for heroic song 25
 Pleased me long choosing, and beginning late;
 Not sedulous by nature to indite
 Wars, hitherto the only argument
 Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect
 With long and tedious havoc fabled knights 30
 In battles feigned; the better fortitude
 Of patience and heroic martyrdom
 Unsung; or to describe races and games,
 Or tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,
 Impreses quaint, caparisons and steeds; 35
 Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights
 At joust and tournament; then marshalled feast
 Served up in hall with sewers, and seneschals;
 The skill of artifice or office mean,
 Not that which justly gives heroic name 40
 To person or to poem. Me of these
 Nor skilled nor studious, higher argument
 Remains,

(PL IX. 27–43)

The main thrust is certainly to propose that a Christian fortitude is 'better' than the ancient, martial varieties. But the proposal comes in the course of an epic invocation, one among a host of features of classical epic on which the poet relies; I almost said, has to rely. And as the comparison proceeds, from classical epics (lines 14–19) to medieval and romance ones (lines 30–9) we find him *more* scathing toward the latter, whose trappings of feasts and colorful detail sound lesser – and are excoriated for longer – than the fortitude of Homeric heroes and those of secondary epics like those of Virgil or Lucan. Indeed, it has been argued with force that Milton owed much to Roman stoic writers, whose creed (whether in action or when undergoing exile or political repression) was precisely an inner fortitude (Shifflett 1998: 129–54). The ranking of biblical above classical in the poem does not seem to have been decided once and for all. Milton keeps coming back to it, thinking it out afresh, viewing it from another angle. What is more, he always uses classical weapons to address it, so begetting a further dialectic within the main one. There seems to be a tension, even a threat, or at any rate a perpetually altering issue for him.

In a third instance, however, no tension is felt. When Satan first finds voice in the poem, speaking to his chief ally Beelzebub as they lie weltering upon the livid flood of hell, his words are

If thou beest he; but oh how fallen! how changed
 From him, who in the happy realms of light
 Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine
 Myriads though bright:

85

(PL I. 84–7)

Many readers have found here an allusion to the shock with which Virgil's Aeneas meets the ghost of his kinsman Hector: 'quantum mutatus ab illo / Hectore qui redit exuvias indutus Achilli', 'How greatly changed from that / Hector who returned wearing the armour of Achilles' (*Aeneid* II. 274–5). Why does this matter? Even if it does allude, what is the reader to do with this ostensibly indigestible hunk of information? Gilbert Highet rightly declares that while the poignancy of the phrase is owed to the translating from Virgil and acquires the charm of reminiscence, 'the meaning also is enriched': without any more description Milton is making us feel the 'anguish, and foreboding, and defeat', of fallen but still heroic persons, with strong recognizable human passions (Highet 1949: 156–7). In short, the allusion enables Milton to implant several pertinent things at once in the responsive reader; to start up a turmoil of sympathies, and to do it economically and mimetically.

The variety by now observed within the dialectic suggests, then, a provisional answer to our opening questions. Where the dialectic is overt, awareness of the classical side of the tussle is the most direct way of joining in Milton's acts of thought. Where the dialectic is quiescent it can be ignored or savored at will. Where it becomes a special effect, however, awareness must stretch and keep up with the moment-to-moment energy of this poet's mind. And lastly, the dialectic is so frequent that awareness of the classical literary tradition seems the quickest way to chart it.

The Variety of the Debts, and their Treatment Here

So far I have been examining Milton's use of classical literary resources in terms of allusions. The resources in question go much wider. They include such further textural features as syntax and diction, as well as more structural ones such as invocation and prosopopoeia, motifs or themes, bardic stance, and metaphor. They include large structures such as the division of *Paradise Lost* into ten and then twelve books. One could go on listing. Instead, it is best to perceive the resources energizing the poem locally, and so savor the diversity of the usage and of its benefits. I continue first with examples from Book I, as being the portion in which the problems with classical influence arise first, and perhaps most often; for here Milton is using his epic and other classical reading to establish his very credentials. Then, I look outside *Paradise Lost* in a mainly

chronological order, so as to work back to it. However, chronology sometimes yields to generic coverage: Milton's genres, not his highest poetic ones alone but one and all, draw their vitality from the classical literary tradition. They never cease to help make Milton Milton. And this I finally demonstrate by examples from Book IX of his epic, that obvious climax of his life's whole work.

Further Examples from *Paradise Lost*, Book I

Plunging like Homer and the rest *in medias res* ('into the midst of things'), Milton invokes, then narrates, then hands over to speeches, before going on into a series of full-length and profoundly felt similes, which then usher in a catalogue. All of these bear the hallmark of the ancient epics. If anything, Milton (as a latecomer to the tradition of epic) is assailing the reader with a *concentration* of the recognized distinctive elements of ancient epic. Thus, an unusual number of epic's extended similes populate Book I; the poem's epic catalogue comes far earlier than in Homer or Virgil; and so on. It behooves modern readers, as best we may, to receive the impact as thus designed if we want the expressive pleasures that result.

Consider, for example, the simile of the fallen leaves:

Natheless he [Satan] so endured, till on the beach
Of that inflamèd sea, he stood and called 300
His legions, angel forms, who lay entranced
Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks
In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades
High overarched embower;
(PL I. 299–304)

The numberless dead of Homer and Virgil and many another poet become the lost fallen angels. But the repetition gives much more than the pleasure of recognition. These fallen leaves are *not* dead: so much the worse for them, since they will know their own loss for ever, will suffer from that knowledge for ever. The effect of the simile as read within its classical subtradition is of a simple, but ironic and most incremental repetition.

Or consider two apparently minor matters: the spelling of the biblical place names in the catalogue of the fallen angels; and Milton's 1674 revision of a ten-book poem into the twelve-book one which we read. The spellings are often neither the usual English ones nor the Hebrew transliterated, but Latinate or Greekish. 'Azotus' not 'Ashdod' (I. 464); 'Oreb' not 'Horeb' (I. 484). Was this an acoustic preference or a philological/etymological one? I have found that although the latter aspect might enter into the matter where a secondary meaning was to be gained, Milton also does it where that is not the case: there was something about Greek or Latin *sounds* that, on occasion, he preferred to those of Hebrew or English. Whether the preference was

conscious aural taste or some unexamined predilection, either way we are catching an instinctive reliance on the classical, which has governed how he hears.

As for the revision of the ten books of 1667 into the twelve of 1674, not only is the idea of a 'book' itself classical, but the change moves their number and the poem's whole large shaping toward the classical. Though Homer's two epics were articulated by others into twenty-four books apiece, the number of the letters of the Greek alphabet, Virgil deliberately kept the number-base, as a sort of arithmetical if not numerological allusion to Homer, while making it his own by the choice of twelve. As Virgil, so – finally, and upon reflection – Milton (Hale 1995: 131–49).

In short, Milton's borrowings from antiquity are appropriations, made for his own new, original creation. They empower him to say many things at once, to say them densely and strongly, to acquire and maintain a voice which has *authority*. He seeks that authority by seeking, like his ancient models, to be heard as a *doctus poeta*, a 'learned poet', in the same way that the ancient world esteemed its greatest poets. As readers, we ignore this role and its ancestry at considerable cost (Hale 1997: 114–15).

Development and Range

The diminutive scale in the spelling of those names and the opposite scale of that late re-division of the books emphasize that Milton heeded antiquity in multiple ways. Next, beginning a sketch of Milton's classicizing imagination outside *Paradise Lost*, I offer further passages which show Milton's debate with himself upon our theme. As Yeats put it, 'Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry.'

Just as most readers feel that 'Lycidas' marks a growth-point in the development of Milton's poetic voice, so the growth stems from the degree and kind of its engagement with Virgil's *Eclogues*. Individual debts can readily be documented – by names, including 'Lycidas' itself, or by allusions, or by portions of speeches. The number of them makes a stronger point, as does the weightiness of individual *cris de coeur* ('Alas! What boots it ...', line 64; 'Were it not better ...', line 67). While these are listed in editions, they become far more instructive when used to drive a whole new interpretation of a still problematic poem. Such an interpretation is that of J. Martin Evans, done in terms of the whole argument of the poem, as it absorbs, or inverts, or extends several eclogues, and (in one word, again) appropriates them. 'If the muse is not only thankless but powerless to boot, then what is the point of serving her so strictly?' (Evans 1998a: 80). Evans shows that Virgil's Tenth Eclogue provides impetus and theme as well as forms and texture, and that from all this together can be gained a *secure* basis of interpretation, a measure of Milton's appropriation, a sharp sense of the ultimate difference and uniqueness of his poem. For the poem requires an answer to the underlying question: why is it termed a 'monody,' yet ends with a narrative eight lines said by another voice? Who, in fact, says the last words of all, 'To morrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new'? To overstate for emphasis, Milton's Virgil finds him this sudden new voice.

Now, Evans' approach is not the only one, nor indeed does he rely exclusively on insights deriving from Virgil. Yet Virgil begins, grounds, and controls his reading. Virgil's were not the only ancient or Latin eclogues, but they have always taken pride of place in the genre: Evans starts where Milton in all probability started. And that security leads into a very fresh reading.

That the oldest approach may here be the freshest suggests a wider need for awareness of Milton's classical inheritance. Not just 'Lycidas,' but many of his works have Latin or Greek titles. We can see this with special clarity in cases where we have only the titles, from his list of titles of projected tragedies in the Trinity Manuscript (Milton 1970: 34–9). It teems with hellenizing epithets, and I shall dwell on them here as a rare chance to watch his imagination at the initial, sketching stage. His classical languages and his sense of Greek tragedy combine to express his ruminations, as he sought for a tragic theme.

At page 34 we read a run of the hellenizing epithets: 'Elias *in the mount*. 2 Reg. 1 *oreibates*. or better Elias *Polemistes*. Elisaeus *Hydrochoos*. 2 Reg. 3. *Hudrophantes Aquator* Elisaeus *Adorodocetos*. Elisaeus *Menutes* sive in Dothaimis 2 Reg ...' (emphases added). A title like those of the great Greek tragedies ('Prometheus *Vinctus*,' 'Oedipus *Tyrannus*,' 'Hercules *Furens*,' and so on) is being built into each such project. He is *thinking* in Greek or Latin about these English projects, trying to capture the essence of each projected dramatic action by the classicizing epithet. Indeed, we catch him in the very process of the thinking, his thinking in Greek about a Hebrew subject which he might make into an English tragedy, as he dawdles through the pages of his Old Testament. For when he says 'or better Elias *Polemistes*' (Elijah as warrior) he is pushing his conception closer to the essential, its conflictedness. We can watch him 'pushing.' Elijah is at first baldly 'in the mount,' but swells into the more grandiloquent Greek *oreibates*, 'mountain-ranging' – a word found in Sophocles and Euripides. And yet *polemistes* is 'better' still, either because it is a Homeric word or because the sense comes nearer to catching what Elijah is actually doing on those mountains – not hiking or gazing up there, but warring, for the Lord against Beelzebub (2 Kings 1: 2–3).

Milton is less vivid, and more head scratching, when he moves onward in his contemplation of possible subjects for biblical tragedy to Elijah's successor as prophet, Elisha. Is Elisha best epithetized as 'water-pourer' (*Hydrochoos*)? Or as 'water-revealer' (*Hudrophantes*)? After the two Greek attempts, the Latin 'Aquator' (water-carrier) still does not clinch the matter. It may again be worth going into more detail, to show how Milton's thoughts were shifting, and shifting among classical thought-forms, as he brainstormed the subjects of his proposed tragedy. In 2 Kings 3, Elisha is summoned by the three kings because he 'poured water on the hands of Elijah' (verse 11); in other words, had been his servant or acolyte. Thus, 'water-pourer' was a sensible, if prosaic, *first* attempted epithet. But in the sequel Elisha creates a landscape of ditches which are filled with water in such a way that the watching Moabites see it as blood. They are lured by the sight to think the three kings' armies have destroyed one another: hastening forward 'to the spoil' (verse 23), they are slaughtered by the Israelites – who then, to complete this 'water' motif in the chapter as a whole, stop up all the wells of

Moab. So Milton altered 'Hydrochoos' to 'Hudrophantes,' 'water-revealer' (with a side-glance at 'hierophant?'), to shift the title's attention on to the decisive stratagem: how Elisha made the water – prophetically and ironically – look like blood. But the suffix '-phantes' is a little obscure, a little indecisive. 'Aquator' is weaker still. It may be significant that the ancient users of all the three epithets are minor, compared with the earlier heavyweights, *oreibates* and *polemistes*. At all events, Milton's page-turning and pen-pushing went on, to Elisha 'incorruptible' (*adorodoketos*, 'accepting no bribe') – presumably the story of Naaman and his simoniac servant Gehazi (2 Kings 5), on which he would come next. Though one and all of these tragedy projects from Kings proved abortive, the Trinity Manuscript lists the moving of his thoughts, and their instinctively classical thought-forms. There is a continual grecizing preoccupation in Milton's searches for a theme, and to keep it in mind is constantly enlightening, since after all the search is for the fittest subject for the work (be it tragedy or epic) by which Milton hoped his name should live 'to aftertimes' (CPW I: 810).

Areopagitica is another Greek title, and this one is no abortive gesture, but decisive and central to the whole speech-act, the 'oratio' of which 'Areopagitica' is the adjective. If in 'Lycidas' a close attention to classical sources helps readers ask the right questions, in *Areopagitica* Milton's readings in ancient history provide him with his best exemplars, the substantiation of his theme (the liberty of printing). It is not simply that the 'speech' is named after the Athenian Areopagus, which had been addressed by Orestes and Paul as well as by Demosthenes and Isocrates, though that is quite a roll-call of predecessors. Nor is it simply that the historical examples of right and wrong responses to the dilemmas of government control versus liberties come densely from the histories of Greece and Rome. Even the non-classical examples had come to Milton through massive readings in world history, readings to which his Greek and Latin had given him the access (Hale 1997: 67). And precisely because his views on history were so colored by naive acceptance of the sympathies and emphases of his sources – in favor of Athens, in favor of republican institutions at Rome – the modern reader must reckon these enthusiasms *into* the interpretation of *Areopagitica*. It is a work of rhetoric, of would-be persuasion; a speech, albeit not spoken but printed. We need to feel the enthusiasms on our own pulses, and the English prose fervor impels this; but the reader's mind needs to be engaged as the writer's was, and with the same evidence.

To expand the point, although Milton's classical languages gave him best access to the classical evidence, they gave him equivalent access to evidence from many more ages and cultures. Among these we must include the Bible and biblical history, because he read exegesis in Latin and church history in Greek as well. Milton was resolute upon the matter, because for him Paul who spoke on the Areopagus did more than use Greek to do it: he 'thought it no defilement to insert into holy Scripture the sentences [*sententiae*, maxims] of three Greek poets, and one of them a Tragedian' (CPW II: 508).

A sonnet from the same decade, and a polemical prose extract from the next, both attest this gravitational pull within Milton's mind to classical or at least classically mediated proofs.

In the sonnet he imagines himself, a poet, speaking with an army leader from the opposing side in the Civil War, whatever officer of the invading royalists comes seeking billets (or worse):

Captain or Colonel, or Knight in Arms,
 Whose chance on these defenceless dores may sease,
 If deed of honour did thee ever please,
 Guard them, and him within protect from harms,
 He can requite thee, for he knows the charms 5
 That call Fame on such gentle acts as these,
 And he can spred thy name o're Lands and Seas,
 What ever clime the Suns bright circle warms.
 Lift not thy spear against the Muses bowre,
 The great *Emathian* Conqueror bid spare 10
 The house of *Pindarus*, when temple and towre
 Went to the ground: And the repeated air
 Of sad *Electra's* poet had the power
 To save th' *Athenian* Walls from ruin bare.
 (CWJM III: 44)

Although one could call the two closing anecdotes 'allusions,' really they are more than that. They are the climax and the whole point.

Ignoring as side-issues the moral dubieties of Alexander in line 10 and of the repellent Athenian imperialism that had brought the city's own walls under threat, Milton keeps his focus on what was once felt due to poets as such. First, Pindar's 'house' was spared during the general act of reprisal. The defeated city of Athens, Milton's beloved Periclean Athens, was saved from razing by the thought that it had produced a Euripides. His power to arouse pity toward a fiction aroused pity in return toward his fellow citizens. Milton in turn is moving the putative officer, and thus his actual readers, through personal fear to a thrilling moral, by simple appropriations from the classical literary tradition.

To put that another way, the poem depends throughout on the figure by which the poet's 'dors' (where the poem is imagined to be affixed) stand for the whole house, which in turn stands for the household or indwelling people. They are quite as 'defenceless' as the doors. Thus, the comparison proceeds from the London house 'when ye City expected an assault,' as a note in Milton's hand in the Trinity Manuscript observes (CWJM: 567) in late 1642, to the 'house of *Pindarus*.' Plutarch had recorded that Pindar's descendants were spared, but Arrian makes it explicit that house and descendants alike were spared; the *oikia*, embracing both these senses, comes within Milton's view, because delicately though he mentions buildings throughout, he intends the extension to their inhabitants.

Similarly for the closing anecdote, Milton entreats that some human rights should obtain even in wartime. Humans need protection in their social living from other humans as well as from the elements. Let not war become mere vengeance and pillage.

The point has been questioned on the grounds that after the Peloponnesian War the Spartans and their allies did not just debate whether to pull down the walls of Athens, but did pull them down. Milton, however, knew that the walls pulled down were not those that protected the citizens' houses, but the 'Long Walls,' which ran from city to port and (by ensuring that supplies went in and out) had enabled the Athens of Pericles to use sea power to maintain a far-flung empire. By dismantling the Long Walls Lysander ensured the end of that empire. Enough was enough, for Lysander, what with the contribution of Euripides. The closing moral exemplum of the sonnet makes many points at once for Milton in his own time, his own situation of internecine conflict, and danger to non-combatants.

In his important *Defences* of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, composed in Latin for European consumption, Milton wields classical knowledge and Latin style in tandem against his opponents, as a way of gaining credibility with the uncommitted reading public on the continent. He not only keeps sounding a patriotic Ciceronian note, of the republic saved by resolute citizens against a domestic tyrant; he also mimics the Roman style and voice alongside the Roman content, while incorporating as a clincher that he does it 'with this over and above of being a Christian.' For instance,

Meminisses quid te non solùm libri sacri, sed etiam Lyricus doceat:

—*Valet ima summis*
Mutare, et insignem attenuat Deus
Obscura promens.—

(WJM 7: 32)

('You [the opponent, Salmasius] should have recalled what not only the scriptures but the lyric poet Horace teach us: "God has power to make high and low change places; God enfeebles the mighty and raises up the lowly."')

Milton drives home the paradox he has already made from the Magnificat – 'Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles' (Luke 1:52: 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree') – by a secular corroboration from the esteemed Horace. Nor should we think it weak to follow up sacred with secular; for Milton makes the argument *a fortiori*: this must be true for Christians, since even the pagans knew it. He is using the dialectic he has felt on his own pulse to win an argument with an opponent.

Moving past *Paradise Lost* before returning to it, we can discern within Milton's last two poems a similar intimate and critical but admiring reliance on classical literature. *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* were published together in 1671: the one seems to contest this assertion of reliance, the other to presuppose it, but the two brought together as in a diptych demonstrate its importance and ubiquity.

In the strange (because generically unclassifiable) sequel to *Paradise Lost*, when Satan tempts the Son with the delights and depths of classical literature itself, our present topic (*Paradise Regained*, IV. 221–84), the Son rejects them in favor of biblical Hebrew,

both its genres and their insight (IV. 286–364). In the heat of the argument he prefers ‘*Sion’s* songs, to all true tastes excelling’ (IV. 347). In the wider context of the whole debate, he is rejecting the assumption that classical literature holds sufficient truth. After all, the Messiah is given the reflections of the Roman historian Tacitus to criticize the Rome of Tiberius. It is a nice irony that the question: what is world power worth if built on sleaze? is itself a Roman thought. Tacitus implies it in *Annals*, Book VI, when describing the degradation of Rome’s emperor, Tiberius, his ‘daily perishing’ and innermost anguish (see CSP: 487, 489). Milton’s Satan and his Messiah are arguing as Romans also did, about how to deal with the crisis of an ailing tyrant. Thus, it is the classical literary tradition that hands Milton the terms of his critique. *Samson Agonistes* has a considered preface that seeks to grasp and advance on Aristotle in the understanding of his highest genre, tragedy; a preface that answers to the poem’s own reflection on tragic effect, as ‘calm of mind all passion spent’ (line 1748, the poem’s closing words). Milton to his very last writings used antiquity to think with; to critique everything, including antiquity. Two of his last acts as a writer were to publish his Latin letters, and to modify the architecture of *Paradise Lost* toward the Virgilian.

Classical Tradition in the Fall of Eve and Adam

Since for most readers Book IX of *Paradise Lost* is the climax of all Milton’s work, we might wonder whether the classical tradition of literature contributes to it less, or more, than elsewhere; and whether, in particular, Milton’s reliance on the tradition here surpasses that of Book I, eager as that was to establish epic credentials. It would be agreeable but merely partisan of me to argue (as I draw to a close) for a surpassing reliance. Book IX does *not* so thrust its epic appurtenances upon the reader. They contribute, nonetheless, distinctively at apposite points throughout, and to widely varying effect.

The book opens with an epic invocation that surveys the epic tradition itself. It hinges on extended similes, and on extended or crowded allusions to the culture of antiquity. Just as in ancient epic, speeches are important: many of the key transactions are persuasions, by means of speeches; what Wittgenstein called ‘speech-acts.’ The action might be read as five acts, formed as in Greek tragedy by the punctuations of the poet as Chorus. For sure, the poet declares that he must change his ‘notes’ to ‘tragic’ ones (IX. 6) – a reminder that Milton had hesitated between presenting Adam’s fall as tragedy and as epic, the two highest genres of mimesis according to Aristotle in the *Poetics*. For detail here, however, two case studies of epic simile must suffice.

To feel their force, we need again to see that Milton does not work as rigidly as does a classifying pedagogy. The first simile is also an allusion, or indeed a bunch of such, and is so discriminating that it might be called instead a figure of intensifying qualification (PL: 491). The second simile could equally be read as allusion or as irony. The inherited motif of extended or epic simile is nevertheless the natural place to begin, since Milton inherited not only the thing, but also the discussions and scholarship

of antiquity concerning it. He heralds both similes with the formulaic syntax or recognition-devices of simile: 'like' and 'As when.'

Eve has had her way, and sets off on her separate gardening:

Thus saying, from her husband's hand her hand 385
 Soft she withdrew, and like a wood nymph light
 Oread or dryad, or of Delia's train,
 Betook her to the groves, but Delia's self
 In gait surpassed and goddess-like deport,
 Though not as she with bow and quiver armed, 390
 But with such gardening tools as art yet rude,
 Guiltless of fire had formed, or angels brought.
 To Pales, or Pomona, thus adorned,
 Likest she seemed, Pomona when she fled
 Vertumnus, or to Ceres in her prime, 395
 Yet virgin of Proserpina from Jove.

(IX. 385–96)

The outstanding features of the comparisons are, first, that they are manifold (seven-fold!); and, second, that each is qualified. Milton is far from demonstrating a torrential fluency of mythological allusion, a fault that bedeviled his early Latin verse, but that by this date he had long outgrown. He is *ransacking* his lore, as if eager in his own or epic voice to express the moment exactly before it is gone for ever. It is expressed all the more exactly because whereas no single avatar is enough, perhaps all of them together may approach exactness. The sequence reaches its climax upon Ceres 'Yet virgin of Proserpina' (Ceres before her losses began). The mythological lore conveys the poet's mental act here, a piercing precision of praise.

It instantly becomes Adam's mental act also: 'Her long with ardent look his eye pursued' (IX. 397). Ancient similes regularly included an observer-figure in the extended comparison of the primary scene with a scene from some other life, real or mythical: Milton is using the 'other life' that pagan culture comprises in order to increase Adam the loser's sense of loss, felt before it happens. The logical impossibility of unfallen innocence knowing what loss could be is obliterated here because the extended crowding allusions from the epic voice bring in the reader's own ironic awareness. That irony is not at all the irony of detachment or superior awareness. Rather, the wrenching slowness of the pacing, the persevering lingering upon the watching Adam's ache, are producing the emotions of tragedy, namely, pity and fear – to which, in fact, the epic voice has begun by referring: 'I now must change / Those notes to tragic' (IX. 5–6). Without heavily glossing that some nymphs are mortal (die when their trees die) or that the birth of Proserpina led to the infliction of winter on mankind, the allusions that gather at speed to become the whole simile – in their brevity and cumulative impact – avail the reader of such further meanings for Eve's slow departure. Milton's classical appropriations are not only apt, they free the reader to make his or her own appropriations.

This same holds good but differently in my second instance, the speech by which Satan finally ensnares Eve, beside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

As when of old some orator renowned 670
 In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence
 Flourished, since mute, to some great cause addressed,
 Stood in himself collected, while each part,
 Motion, each act won audience ere the tongue,
 Sometimes in height began, as no delay 675
 Of preface brooking through his zeal of right.
 (IX. 670–6)

Two things at once distinguish this simile. First, there is no particular, named orator: the simile is general (*'some orator'*). Second, there is no observer within this simile. Both of these distinguishing features challenge the reader to think and feel what Milton is communicating by this secondary world, the world of the politics of antiquity.

The first feature keeps our attention on the public world as a whole (undeflected into thoughts about Cicero or Demosthenes or whoever), thereby avoiding contentious value judgments of policy, and keeping focus on the oratorical arts as arts; which in turn keeps us detached, cool, and discerning – just the opposite of the impact of the female-victim simile preceding. The names which do enter into the allusion, 'Athens or free Rome,' show Milton himself at his most discerning. These are the societies that were the heroes of *Areopagitica*: the Athens that (for Milton anyway) represented 'free speech'; and the Rome of the republic, the Rome of self-discipline and patriotic sacrifice and free speech, which was ended (for Milton as for Lucan and Tacitus) by the Caesars. Milton seeks his kind of desired authority from the reader by the gratuitous yet judicious mental exercising that the sidelong phrasing here encourages.

The second feature, the absence for once of a witness-figure inside the simile, is another deft touch of obliquity. 'Audience' (IX. 674) can mean not only 'attention, hearing,' but also the people who comprise the entailed auditory. But the precision lies in the generality and focus: we are made to think about the oratorical powers that compel listening, not about who is listening or to what. That is forgotten. Indeed, that is the whole trouble with political eloquence: Hitler was a terrific orator. In other words, Eve is the audience but we forget her, just as she forgets conscience while she listens – an especially powerful instance of Milton's constant onomatopoeia. Compatible with this is the further reflection, however, that God is listening (IX. 826: 'what if God have seen?'). Are we, then, we the readers, in another sense the missing 'audience'? The extreme generality, going as it does with the absence of usual specificity and of audience within the secondary discourse ('vehicle'), encourages the thought that we are the helpless witnesses; and, hence, like the audiences of tragedy, watching Oedipus or Othello make his hideous misjudgment.

The many meanings co-present typify Milton's engrossment in his subject, such that we sense the whole in every part. Such readings of a wider whole in the given part will not all convince everyone, of course, and other readings may seem more

important. For example, Alastair Fowler finds the simile to have no fewer than 'three vehicles: oratorical, theatrical, and theological' (*PL*: 509). Though I can find only the first two, the essential thing is the emphasis, the sense that Milton in this simile is (rather like Satan) pulling out all the stops. And this sense of an extra-special, purpose-built, unique synergy of allusion and tradition with simile is what the awareness of classical literature produces. Knowing what had been done by Homer and Virgil, and by the continuing line of epics before Milton gives one the most natural and relevant standpoint from which to watch him doing the same differently, doing their thing in his own way, and because of them. It is seeing with his eyes.

Conclusion

I conclude, accordingly, that at the supreme moments of the poem (rather than just at its quieter places or its flat ones) the classical literary tradition provides us with reliable instruments and starting places for a most active researching as our own response. I hope to have illustrated some of the typical as well as best evidence. I hope to have shown that awareness of the classical within the texture encourages a richer reading than could exist without that awareness; and offers a flexible, many-sided method of seeking pleasure from the moment-to-moment experience of the reading. To my own sense of things, so far from being a worm-eaten crutch, the awareness of the tradition – from Addison to Highet, from Curtius to Martindale and beyond – has given readers of *Paradise Lost* a strong lens through which to see for themselves. Without claiming that similar insights could not be gained by other, perhaps newer lenses (such as intertextuality or reader-response theory), I see huge advantages in principle as well as practice when we try to stand first where Milton himself, composing, had placed himself.

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Milton on the Bible

Regina M. Schwartz

John Milton was not only a poet, thinker, theologian, and political figure; he was also one of the most astute 'literary critics' of the Bible. That is not to say, of course, that the Bible was only a work of literature to him. Scripture was the revealed Word of God. But it does mean that when Milton interpreted the Bible, he did so not only with the thought of a theologian and with the faith of a believer, but also with the sensibility of a poet. For him, biblical theology was inseparable from biblical poetics – *what* the Bible means is bound to *how* it means – and it is no accident that despite writing a lengthy theological treatise, Milton wrote his own theology most forcefully in his poetry. He lived during a period when biblical interpretation was part of everyday life. The legacies of the Renaissance, with its humanist emphasis on the text, and the Reformation, with its emphasis on interpretation of the Bible, were to infuse common vocabulary with scripture. During the English Civil War, soldiers carried a Bible into battle; before entering the fray, they sang its psalms; before bedtime, parents recounted its narratives; during parliamentary conflicts, proponents cited its verses. The Bible was used in Parliament, in pamphlet wars, in education, in courtship, and in conversation to an extent that is hardly imaginable today. As Christopher Hill warns, 'the Bible was central to the whole of the life of the society: we ignore it at our peril':

[The Bible] was everywhere in the lives of men, women and children. Not only in the church services they had to attend, but in the ballads they bought and sang, and in their daily surroundings ... almost all houses had hangings to keep out draughts and to cover the rough walls. These often took the form of 'painted cloths', 'the real poor man's pictures', among which Biblical scenes seem to have preponderated. In accordance with Deuteronomy XI. 20, Biblical texts were very often painted on walls or posts in houses, 'probably representing the most common form in which an "illiterate" would encounter

the written word'. In addition, walls were covered with printed matter – almanacs, illustrated ballads and broadsides, again often on Biblical subjects. More elusive, 'godly tables [tablets]' specially printed for decorating walls and 'most fit to be set up in every house', often contained texts from the Bible ... (Hill 1993: 38)

The 'use' of the sacred text was not always savory, for the Bible was not only invoked to inspire ethical conduct and goodwill, but also asked to lend authority to less charitable positions: for bolstering self-interest, for justifying lawlessness, for slaughtering innocents, and for defeating enemies. Because God's will was conveyed to fallen humanity and employed by fallen humanity, fallen interpretations of God's word were not always synonymous with divine will. Between human understanding and divine will was a murky realm of interpretation. 'It is no hard thing', wrote John Hales in his *Golden Remains* (1659: 4), 'for a man that hath wit, and is strongly possessed of an opinion, and resolute to maintain it, to find some place of Scripture which by good handling will be wooed to cast a favourable countenance upon it' (cited in Hill 1993: 43). The hermeneutical feats performed to turn the word of God into justification for any and every agenda had begun to make biblical interpretation overtly suspect; the hazards of interpreting the word of God were notable even to its interpreters. Shakespeare, among others, took this un-holy instrumentality for granted.

Gloucester: But then I might; and, with a piece of Scripture,
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil:
And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With odd old ends, stol'n forth of Holy Writ.
(Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, I. iii)

John Milton was no exception: he accused Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, and Tertullian, among other church fathers, of 'the ridiculous wresting of Scripture' (*Of Reformation*, CPW I: 551) and the church of being 'so rash to raise up such lofty Bishops and Bishopricks out of places in Scripture meerly misunderstood' (*Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, CPW I: 631).

With his three great epics, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, all based upon episodes in biblical narratives, Milton is surely the most biblical of English poets. His prose is also saturated with biblical citation: whether he writes on divorce, on censorship, on church government, on the sins of Charles I's monarchy, or on the virtue of Cromwell's republic, whether he defends the English revolution or the justice of God, his method is to invoke biblical verses and with them, biblical authority. As an adept practitioner of biblical hermeneutics himself – even going so far as to craft consistency between two completely contradictory biblical mandates about marriage in order to justify his doctrine of divorce – Milton was well aware of the uses and abuses of scripture. His enemies cite the Bible as frequently as he does, so he must counter them by rejecting their use of scripture; for 'a wise man will make better use of an idle pamphlet, then a fool will do of sacred Scripture' (*Areopagitica*, II: 521).

Those who misinterpret the Bible are guilty of ‘resting in the meere element of the Text,’ and of committing the grave error of ‘not consulting with charitie, *the interpreter* and guide of our faith’ (*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, CPW II: 236; my italics).

In the tracts that Milton devotes to ‘personal liberty’, his four tracts on divorce, he is so preoccupied with biblical hermeneutics – interpreting the Bible according to the right principles completely justifies divorce – that *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* could have been justifiably titled *The Doctrine and Discipline of Biblical Exegesis*. It almost is: the full title of the first version, 1643, reads *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce: Restor’d to the Good of Both Sexes, From the bondage of Canon Law, and other mistakes, to Christian freedom, guided by the Rule of Charity*. While the Old Testament Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 24: 1–2) maintains that a husband can divorce his wife if ‘she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her,’ in the New Testament Christ seems to forbid divorce, except on grounds of ‘fornication,’ which the church interpreted as adultery. Determined to reconcile these differences, Milton claims that the church has interpreted the words of Christ erroneously. The main passage of contention within the New Testament is Matthew 19: 3–9:

The Pharisees also came unto him, 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. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

Milton asserts that those who interpret the scripture as forbidding divorce except for adultery are imagining that Christ is willing to abrogate the law of Moses despite his explicit refusal to ignore ‘*one jot or tittle*’ (CPW II: 283) of that law. Not only do they fail to take into account the ‘precedent law of *Moses*,’ which they should do because ‘God hath not two wills, but one will, much lesse two contrary’; they also misinterpret the ‘attestation of Christ himself’ (CPW II: 325). According to Milton, Christ left the Mosaic permission for divorce intact. To interpret the words of Christ correctly, they must be interpreted according to the principles he himself embraced. That is, ultimately, Christ must be interpreted so as ‘to preserve those his fundamental and superior laws of nature and charitie, *to which all other ordinances give up their seals*’ (CPW II: 325, my italics). Milton argues here and elsewhere that all biblical laws are submitted to the higher divine laws of nature and charity – it is by these principles that we should judge the validity of biblical injunctions and by these principles that he will labor to interpret them. Milton tells us directly what he means by ‘nature’: the ‘two prime statutes’ of nature are ‘to joyn it self to that which is good and acceptable and friendly; and to turn aside and depart from what is disagreeable, displeasing and unlike’ (CPW II: 297, 345–6).

What, then, does Milton mean by the other principle, of 'charitie'? This principle of charity is so crucial to Milton as not only to be included in the title of his first divorce tract, but also to figure as the very last word of the tract, which concludes by enjoining readers, yet again, to submit the biblical text to the rule of charity. While he began his treatise with the considerable claim that charity is 'the interpreter and guide of our faith' (CPW II: 236), when he signs off he strengthens his rhetoric further with the warning that if his readers cannot learn (1) that the Law and the Prophets depend upon mercy and not sacrifice, and (2) that the purpose of the Gospel is mercy and peace, then (3) 'how will they hear this, which yet I shall not doubt to leave with them as a conclusion: That God the Son hath put all other things under his own feet; but his Commandments he hath left all under the feet of charity' (CPW II: 356; see also 1 Corinthians 15: 27 and 1 Timothy 1: 5). When we try to discern both how to interpret God's will and how to act, we must remember that God never intends ill for us (like bondage to a tyrannical government in the state or the church, or the bondage of a miserable failed union in marriage), nor does he intend for us to do ill (commit adultery to satisfy the longing for a helpmeet that a failed marriage does not address). Charity dictates not only Milton's biblical hermeneutics, but also his revolutionary politics, his personal life, and his critique of church government. To drive home the centrality of charity, he challenges a rebellious Parliament pointedly, 'if charity be ... excluded and expulst, how yee will defend the untainted honour of your own actions and proceedings.' And he maintains, 'If [a whole people] against any authority, Covnant, or Statute, may by the sovereign edict of charity, save not only their lives, but honest liberties from unworthy bondage, as well may he against any private Covnant ... redeem himself from unsupportable disturbances' (CPW II: 229).

Furthermore, in his charity, God has made available to human reason the justness and goodness – indeed, the charity – of his laws. While many of God's ways are mysterious, this is not: 'hee hath taught us to love and to extoll his Lawes, not only as they are his, but as they are just and good to every wise and sober understanding' (CPW II: 297–8). This may not sound radical to our ears; it may even ring of some vaguely familiar early modern piety; but it is an astonishing claim. Except for Nicolas Malebranche in a provocative essay, 'The Treatise on Nature and Grace,' none of the philosophers of this burgeoning age of reason – not even Descartes – was willing to make the claim that divine justice could be apprehended by human reason. Such a correspondence between divinity and humanity – between divine justice and the law of nature imprinted in us – was unthinkable. Nonetheless, Milton asserts that while 'God indeed in some wayes of his providence, is high and secret past finding out: but in the delivery and execution of his Law ... hath plain enough reveal'd himself, and requires the observance therof not otherwise then to the law of nature and of equity imprinted in us seems correspondent' (CPW II: 297). The Bible lay open to reason; and, interpreted according to the principle of charity, God's justness and goodness also lay open to reason. This explains why Abraham had the temerity to question God's actions, for Abraham well understood the principle of charity and understood that God is the giver of charity: 'Therefore *Abraham* ev'n to the face of God himselfe,

seem'd to doubt of divine justice, if it should swerve from that irradiation wherewith it had enlight'ned the mind of man, and bound it selfe to observe its own rule. *Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee; shall not the Judge of the earth doe right?*' (CPW II: 298). Here justice, or charity, or the right has irradiated the mind of man, and Abraham is at pains to correct the Lord according to the Lord's own principle which is now internal to Abraham.

But how does one interpret according to charity? Perhaps the most succinct example is Milton's explication of 1 Corinthians 7 – an exegesis that adopts the technique of the divorce tracts in miniature. His discussion begins, in the method followed throughout the tract, with a comparison to another biblical text, here Genesis 2: 18:

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. God supplies the privation of not good, with the perfect gift of a reall and positive good; *it is mans pervers cooking who hath turn'd this bounty of God into a Scorpion, either by weak and shallow constructions, or by proud arrogance and cruelty to them who neither in their purposes nor in their actions have offended against the due honour of wedlock.* (Tetrachordon, CPW II: 595–6, my italics)

Milton, interpreting according to the principle of charity, sees God's charity, his bounty, in correcting something that is not good (aloneness) by turning it into something good (having a companion). Only an interpretation that is weak or perverse could turn this correction, by God, of what is not good into a new problem. He then turns to a troubling text, 1 Corinthians 7:

Now whereas the Apostle speaking in the Spirit, I Cor. 7. pronounces quite contrary to this word of God, *It is good for a man not to touch a woman*, and God cannot contradict himself, it instructs us that his commands and words, especially such as bear the manifest title of som good to man, are not to be so strictly wrung, as to command without regard to the most naturall and miserable necessities of mankind. (Tetrachordon, CPW II: 596)

When Milton interprets the command according to the principle of charity, it becomes clear that God could not mean that man cannot touch a woman at all times – after all, he made woman as a companion for man, and he cannot contradict himself. And he made his commands to respond charitably to the 'natural' and even 'miserable' (i.e., lowly) needs of man. Surely, the Apostle cannot mean that a man is never to touch a woman. How then does Milton resolve the apparent contradiction? By explaining that the Apostle only means his pronouncement to apply in this circumstance or 'present necessity': 'Therefore the Apostle adds a limitation in the 26 v. of that chap. for the present necessity it is good; *which he gives us doubtlesse as a pattern how to reconcile other places by the generall rule of charity*' (CPW II: 596, my italics). This example suggests that the rule of charity reconciles biblical passages that seem harsh and unpleasant to those that seem kind and generous. Such a hermeneutical exercise is no small task.

Milton will understand Genesis 2: 24 according to the same interpretive rule of charity: 'Thus a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves unto his wife and they become one flesh.' He asserts that the biblical injunction for a man and a woman to become one flesh cannot refer only to legitimating the carnal act, but must signal a union of souls 'that can never be where no correspondence is of the minde.' And he proceeds to assert that to understand 'one flesh' in any other way, to understand it as a physical joining, would not be one flesh, but would 'be rather two carcases chain'd unnaturally together; or as it may happ'n, a living soule bound to a dead corpse' (*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, CPW II: 326). Milton goes on to explain that God intended a wife as a remedy for loneliness, and since 'joyning ... another body' will not 'remove loneliness,' 'it is no blessing but a torment, nay a base and brutish condition to be one flesh, unlesse where nature can in some measure fix a unity of disposition' (CPW II: 327). Now, according to Milton, yoking together such dead corpses, torments, etc., cannot be the right interpretation of the biblical injunction to become 'one flesh,' for to create such a condition for mankind is not charitable. Hence, Christ must (according to the principle of charity) endorse the law of the 'inspired Law-giver *Moses*.' '[T]he Gospel enjoyns no new morality, save only the infinit enlargement of charity, which in this respect is call'd the *new Commandement* by St. *John*; as being the accomplishment of every command' (CPW II: 330–1). The 'accomplishment' or fulfillment of *every* command, according to Milton's understanding, is quite simply to love one another. His precedent is biblical: 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another' (John 13: 34–5).

The words of Christ simply 'can not command us to self-cruelty, cannot hinder and set us back, as they are vulgarly tak'n,' argues Milton (CPW II: 331), for 'if we mark diligently the nature of our Saviours commands, wee shall finde that both their beginning and their end consists in charity: whose will is that wee should so be good to others, as that wee be not cruel to our selves' (CPW II: 330). In Milton's exquisite version of Christ's version of the golden rule, he has embedded two meanings: not only that we should be good to others as we are good to ourselves, but also we should be good to others because anything less would be cruelty to ourselves. He unequivocally asserts that charity is the cause informing Christ's commands, and that their purpose is charity. 'It is no command of perfection further than it partakes of charity, which is *the bond of perfection*' (CPW II: 331). Those who think differently from Milton about the biblical injunctions are in error, and sorely lacking in clear thinking: 'this recited law of *Moses* contains a cause of divorce greater beyond compare then that for adultery; and whoso cannot so conceive it errs and wrongs exceedingly a law of deep wisdom for want of well fadoming' (CPW II: 332). What follows is a strong gloss on so many Reformers' assertion that the Bible is perspicuous, on the commitment of many to what Milton perceives as a 'pretious literalism' (CPW II: 334): '*we cannot safely assent to any precept writt'n in the Bible, but as charity commends it to us*' (CPW II: 340, my italics). This is Milton's radical reinterpretation of 'charity beleeveth all things' (1 Corinthians 13); that is, charity guides us in what to believe: we should 'hold that for truth, which accords most with charity' (CPW II: 340).

If charity is the principle that will govern Milton's biblical interpretation, it must be the principle that governs that procedure not only in his prose, but also in his most remarkable and enduring biblical interpretation, *Paradise Lost*. Charity, the ability of man to apprehend the justice and goodness of divine law, must govern his understanding of the narratives of the Fall and expulsion of humankind from Paradise. If not, then charity would not be the 'sovereign' that governs all belief, but an expedient principle for his argument on divorce alone, easily exchanged for other guiding principles when the occasion serves. Contrary to any accusation of such opportunism, Milton turns to charity repeatedly. In the wide wilderness of interpretation it is John Milton's guide, assuring him that each step in his interpretation is a safe one as long as charity charts the course.

How, then, does Milton choose to interpret the episode from Genesis relating the loss of Paradise? Does he interpret this narrative according to the principle of charity? Milton seems to have chosen the most difficult test case from the spectrum of biblical narratives. It is a brutal story – the story of the temptation of innocent humanity by a vengeful Satan, the succumbing of humankind answered with the most terrible consequence, for man's first disobedience 'Brought death into the world, and all our woe' (*PL* I. 3). How could *this* story, of the introduction of evil and of death into the world, be interpreted according to the principle of charity? It is plausible, I would argue, to read *Paradise Lost* as just that: an interpretation of the narrative of the Fall according to the principle of charity, that is, according to the principle that the goodness and justice of God prevail, and that they are even available to human reason. Adam and Eve do not live in Paradise without ample explanation of the goodness of God, and Adam and Eve do not leave Paradise without knowledge of God's forgiveness, knowledge that their punishment will be mitigated and their disaster redeemed. In *Paradise Lost* humankind is offered motivation for obeying God: they are taught that God created the world and its creatures, given certain knowledge, not just intuitive awareness, of their contingency so that they cannot deny their creator. They are given an explanation of the purpose of the divine law: to grant to humans freedom of the will; and they are shown the consequences of making the wrong choice, with vivid descriptions of the punishment for Satan's disobedience. Through these narrations and explanations, Milton's God gives not only checks, but also goads. Furthermore, the account of the Fall of humankind could hardly have been made more sympathetic: at the hour of noon, hungry and alone, Eve is duped, and she falls, not out of narcissism (although any such tendency is also depicted sympathetically, as part of her created nature), but out of hunger for more knowledge. When Adam follows in sin, he is not deceived; rather, he falls for love of Eve. At the very moment when our sympathies should be furthest from the criminals who brought death into our world and all our woe, Milton makes their Fall seem so understandable. Who would condemn anyone for craving more knowledge? Who would condemn anyone so devoted to his partner that he willingly shares her misery? And yet, throughout all this charitable interpreting, Milton unflinchingly depicts the first error as terrible: 'Earth felt the wound, and nature through her seat / ... gave signs of woe, / That all was lost' (*PL* IX. 782–4), even while those who commit

it inspire our love and our compassion, not our stern judgment. After the horrible event, humankind is again offered explanations, not only of the consequences of their disobedience, with visions and auditions, but also, charitably, a disclosure of the final redemption, a disclosure that the terrible consequences of their disobedience will eventually end. Death will be that charitable end. In short, Milton endeavors to make divine justice, mercy, and goodness available to human reason. Whether or not he succeeds depends on the reader, who can freely accept or reject these charitable explanations. Regardless, Milton certainly offered them. It is no accident that grace functions in this way in the Arminianism Milton embraced: grace is offered freely, and one can either reject or accept it. Milton, as creator of his poem, is doubtless modeling himself on his Creator. He sets out to exonerate a God who might seem punitive, to depict human freedom as no burden but a gift, and to understand the psychology of evil, even admiring the courage of one foolish enough to rebel against the Almighty. Charitable indeed.

In his dogged commitment to the processes of reason, Milton asks questions of the biblical narrative that the Bible does not ask: where does the serpent come from?; why does God command Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit? He presses contradictions in the biblical narrative that the Bible story gracefully elides: how can God know the outcome and not determine it? How can man be condemned to death, but Adam and Eve go on living? He demands that the story offer explanations for more than the biblical narrative purports to explain: the nature of evil and of divine justice; the aspirations and limits of human knowledge; the relations between the sexes, between man and nature, between man and God; and the origin of just about everything. So powerful is his reading of the brief biblical story, so compelling his interpretation in his own epic, that generations of readers have proceeded to confuse Milton's narrative with the Bible's. They think that Satan, rather than a serpent, tempted Eve, that Satan fell from heaven before tempting humankind, that Eve was alone during her temptation, that Adam fell for love – none of which is biblical. In the Bible, the story of a paradise that is lost takes up only forty-five verses. The narrative is cryptic, and, as Erich Auerbach described in his important distinction between biblical and Homeric prose, it brings certain parts into high relief while others are left obscure (1953: 23). While Auerbach describes the story of the 'sacrifice' of Isaac (Genesis 22), his insights are equally applicable to the Fall in the first chapters of Genesis:

In the story of Isaac, it is not only God's intervention at the beginning and the end, but even the factual and psychological elements which come between, that are mysterious, merely touched upon, fraught with background; and therefore they require subtle investigation and interpretation, they demand them. Since so much in the story is dark and incomplete, and since the reader knows that God is a hidden God, his effort to interpret it constant finds something new to feed upon. (1953: 15)

About two millennia after the terse biblical story of the Fall was written, Milton presumes to fill in its background, turning full light upon it. When he does so, he not only lights up the background of the story, but also illuminates his understanding of it: 'what in me is dark / Illumine' (*PL* I. 22–3). He invokes the Celestial Light to brighten his reason:

So much the rather thou celestial light
 Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
 Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
 Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
 Of things invisible to mortal sight.

(III. 51–5)

Painting descriptions, seeking causes, offering explanations, exploring motives, and delineating consequences to make a fairly unintelligible story intelligible: for Milton, these are the methods for interpreting according to the principle of charity.

When Milton applies his brush to filling in the dark background of Paradise, he fills it copiously. Charity abounds. Paradise is a place where our first ancestors know no deprivation, feel no dearth. Paradise has more fruits than Adam and Eve can possibly eat, more varieties of trees than they can possibly know, more growth than they can tame. Remarkably enough, Eve describes Paradise that way to her tempter; in the face of his wily allusion to a prohibited fruit, Eve recalls the bounty of Paradise's gifts.

many are the trees of God that grow
 In Paradise, and various, yet unknown
 To us, in such abundance lies our choice,
 As leaves a greater store of fruit untouched,
 Still hanging incorruptible, till men
 Grow up to their provision, and more hands
 Help to disburden nature of her birth.

(IX. 618–24)

Paradise is so fecund that there are not enough midwives to attend her constant births. And according to Raphael, the God who so provided humankind did so out of generosity:

He brought thee into this delicious grove,
 This garden, planted with the trees of God,
 Delectable both to behold and taste;
 And freely all their pleasant fruit for food
 Gave thee, all sorts are here that all the earth yields,
 Variety without end;

(VII. 537–42)

Gratitude for the bounty of Paradise comprises the heart of the liturgy in Adam and Eve's evening prayer:

Thou also mad'st the night
 Maker omnipotent, and thou the day,
 ...
 and this delicious place