The Long Education

Instruction and Interpretation in Milton's Major Works

by
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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the development of John Milton's views on teaching and learning and argues that each of Milton's major works contains within it a search for an effective pedagogical model. By performing close readings of key primary texts and grounding those readings within the historical context of shifting educational theory in the seventeenth century, this work attempts to demonstrate the ways in which Milton's texts foreground literature's pedagogical function while simultaneously questioning the ability of texts to engender spiritual and moral impacts on their readers. This study also attempts to trace the growth and maturation of Milton's views on education from the early works—especially *Of Education* and *Areopagitica*—in which Milton stresses the importance of the teacher, whether it is an individual or a text, to *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*, works in which the authoritative, educative voices of the texts are often unreliable and, in many cases, misguided. Milton's commitment to a pedagogy that is capable of producing reformed

readers, both in a spiritual and a civic sense, is in many ways incompatible with the pervasive concept in his works that the true source of learning is the expression of internal self-sufficiency brought about by external trials. This work argues that this incompatibility leads to conflicting attitudes toward teaching and learning in Milton's life and in his texts. The work concludes with a thorough exploration of *Samson Agonistes*, in which the text's unrelenting refusal to provide decisive valuations of the moral and spiritual justifications of its characters actions constitutes a pedagogy of uncertainty that is directed squarely at the reader.

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Contents

1. The Challenge of Choosing: Milton and Seventeenth-Century English Educational Reform.....1

2. Areopagitica, Of Education, and the Mechanics of Choice.....36

3. "By certaine signs I knowe:" the Possibilities and Limits of Education in A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle.....70

4. Modes of Instruction in Paradise Lost.....103

5. Samson Agonistes: The Pedagogy of Uncertainty.....132

6. Works Cited.....163

1. The Challenge of Choosing: Milton and Seventeenth-Century English Educational Reform

At first glance, Milton's *Of Education* seems peripheral to his work of the same period. Both the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and, to a lesser degree, *Areopagitica*, published in the same year as *Of Education,* proved in Milton's lifetime and in subsequent centuries to be more controversial and more definitive of his authorial character as a defender of liberty and a challenger to established social norms. The tractate's significance is downplayed by Milton himself who in the opening paragraphs both stresses the conditions of his production—he wrote it at Hartlib's request—and deliberately distances the work from the more substantial works of Comenius and other educational reformers of the period. Perhaps we are even invited to neglect the tractate when Milton casually dismisses it as a secondary text, framing the work as "a few observations which have flower'd off" of his primary pursuit of "religious and civil knowledge" (*CPW* 365). Furthermore, unlike the 1644 edition of the divorce tract, which bore Milton's initials, and *Areopagitica,* which the title page boldly proclaims to be "A SPEECH OF Mr. JOHN MILTON," *Of Education* (1644) was

initially printed anonymously, as though Milton were somehow reluctant to claim it as his own.

Yet nearly thirty years later Milton would append *Of Education* to his 1673 volume of poetry. It is a telling gesture, made at the end of Milton's life, indicating that the focus on teaching and learning that constitutes *Of Education* is fundamental to understanding the rhetorical and artistic goals of his poetic works. In those final years, Milton was publishing at an increased pace, deliberately solidifying his reputation and shaping his body of works to be received by future generations. While in Milton studies the tractate has come to occupy a peculiar spot—seen by turns as both marginal and central to Milton's larger body of work—I'd like to reframe the discussion, examining Milton's gesture—the inclusion of *Of Education* in 1673—in order to highlight the relevance of education to Milton's larger poetic project. To this end, I intend to explore the preconceptions and beliefs around learning that Milton's seventeenth-century readers could have possessed and the degree to which Milton's readers would have found their expectations about the didactic and pedagogical function of Milton's texts fulfilled or frustrated. Moreover, I will demonstrate that Milton's works repeatedly question their own ability to offer readers concrete answers to what was, for Milton, the most pressing question of the period: how do individuals bring about religious and political reformation in a fallen, flawed world? His poetry is instructional, but it is also *about* the nature of instruction, about its powers, its limits, and its methods. It is an exploration and an interrogation of the degree to which the new theories of education that came into being in the mid-seventeenth century could be brought to bear on the social and political problems of his time; the methods that Milton seems to arrive at, I will argue at various points in each

chapter, prove to be unexpectedly student-centered and anti-authoritarian, despite the top-down, hierarchical approach he describes in *Of Education*.

To begin positing an answer to the question of why *Of Education* was added to the 1673 volume, we should begin with the tractate's initial publication in 1644. Contrary to the vision of many of the reformers of the period who argued for a significantly more egalitarian educational system, Milton's tract can seem conservative. Unlike Comenius and others in the Hartlib circle, Milton proposed academies aimed at educating young, noble boys and made no allowance for young women or the lower classes. In an uncharacteristic moment, Milton places all of his students under a single headmaster, whom he calls the academy's "government of one" (*CPW* 380). His choice of words is strange; the notion of a "government of one" is contrary to Milton's later descriptions of civic society and his life-long opposition to monarchy and authoritarian rule. However, the months during which Milton wrote *Of Education* were, as G. Noel Vose explains in his mid-century reassessment of the tractate, crucial periods in the early years of the revolution. Vose explains that Milton would have surely seen how much was at stake in these months, explaining that what was at stake for Milton and his fellow revolutionaries was "not merely [...] victory for a particular party, but the total preservation or destruction of a way of life" (28). His school, with its top-down structure and its emphasis on martial training was constructed to produce not reformed citizens, but revolutionary leaders who were skilled in warfare, in the arts of "embattailing, marching, encamping, fortifying, beseiging, and battering" (*CPW* 411).

Elbert Thompson notes that "the need for true soldiers and far-seeing statesmen was imperative, and Milton felt that England's schools had been remiss in preparing the youth of

the country for the crisis" (264). *Of Education*, then, is very much a product of the 1640s and of Milton's revolutionary zeal. However, the circumstances of its publication suggest that Milton saw a need to distance himself from the text's argument. Each of the major works Milton published in the first half of the decade—*Of Reformation, Animadversions*, *Of Prelatical Episcopacy, An Apology for Smectynmnuus*, and *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*—are published anonymously. From 1645 on, however, Milton deliberately begins to attach his name to his texts, and the six significant prose works that were published between 1644 and 1650 are all attributed to Milton in various ways.[1] Of the anonymous texts of the 1640s, *Of Education* is the least controversial, and there is little obvious need for its anonymity. Nonetheless, Milton seems to be hesitant to claim the text as his own, a sentiment that the text's self-deprecation in the introductory paragraphs echoes. By 1644, Milton was ready to make a public name for himself. Why, then, does he hesitate in *Of Education*? Lewalski suggests in her *Life of John Milton* that the text was "privately printed for limited circulation to the Hartlib circle and perhaps a few others" and that he chose to publish it anonymously because he had not worked out his educational ideas in detail as he had with the divorce tract (172). If that were true, however, what changed in Milton's mind that allowed him to re-publish the text in 1673 with no major revisions or additions? In 1645, after all, Milton was perfectly willing to include less polished works in the 1645 volume, such as psalm 114, which he claimed to have written quickly and for which he had apologized to Gil for its

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[1] The *Judgement of Martin Bucer Concerning Divorce* (1644) lists "John Milton" as the author. *Areopagitica* (1644) declares itself to be "a speech of Mr. John Milton," and the 1645 volume contains, of course, the "poems of Mr. John Milton." *Tetrachordon* (1645) and *Colasterion* (1645) are both by "the former author, J.M.," while *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649) and *Eikonoclastes* (1649) list "the author J.M." on their title pages.

shortcoming due to his lack of practice in Greek since having left Gil's school (Carey, 229). He also included his youthful poem "The Passion," despite it being incomplete. Indeed, Milton repeatedly used less polished, sometimes incomplete works from his youth to demonstrate his powers (or lack thereof) as a young author.

I am suggesting, of course, that we can posit authorial intention behind the inclusion of the tractate in the 1673 volume and behind its anonymous, limited publication in 1644. The argument that there is meaning behind the structure of the 1673 volume is not without precedent. Significant work has already been done to demonstrate that Milton took great care in the composition and production of the 1645 volume of poetry. Louis Martz has argued that the volume is carefully structured to show the talents of the rising poet and that Milton intentionally includes his youthful poems to demonstrate his early ambition (21). In his essay "Poems (1645): On Growing Up," Gale Carrithers, Jr. extends Martz's argument by claiming that the volume contains a deliberate progression from youth to adulthood, from an entertainer poet to a priestly poet (162). John Hale, in "Milton's Self-Presentation in *Poems... 1645*" sees a more coherent and less artificial self-construction than Martz and Carrithers, but he nonetheless agrees with Martz that there is strong authorial intentionality behind the work by claiming that "the editorial acts of selection and grouping and sequential arrangement, therefore, add up to a major personal statement" (41). Leah Marcus, in her 1990 Milton Banquet Address, explains how Milton's concerted self-fashioning in the 1645 volume, what she calls his "tactic," would have looked "newer, perhaps even strange, to his contemporaries" (MQ 25.3 p. 121). Indeed, Marcus goes beyond both Martz and Hale in stressing the authorial intentionality that runs through the entire volume:

> By arranging his own poems in developmental order, by calling repeated attention, through both the frontispiece and the comments interspersed in the volume, to his own poetic achievement as a kind of *history*, Milton invented for England literary subjecthood as we have traditionally been taught to understand it. (124)

More recent reevaluations of the concept of the rising poet of 1645 have broadened our notion of the author behind the text by including the other individuals who would have been involved with the production of the volume. Stephen Dobranski has argued convincingly that Mosely the publisher, and the engraver William Marshall must have had a stronger hand in the volume's production than was previously acknowledged. This is an important line of criticism because it provides an explanation for why the implied author of the 1645 volume appears to distance himself from the more controversial prose texts of 1644. "That the book downplays Milton's unorthodox convictions," explains Dobranski, "may reflect Moseley's political leanings, not necessarily Milton's aesthetic preference" (92). Dobranski's argument guides us to a more nuanced reading of the authorial intention behind the volume, one that takes into account the volume's collaborators, but it does not diminish the fact that the organization of the volume is obviously intentional and in many ways profoundly rhetorical.

If, then, we accept that the 1645 volume was structured in a highly intentional fashion in which each poem within the volume accrues meaning from its position within the volume and its relation to the other poems around it, then it stands to reason that similar care would have been taken with the 1673 volume. Again, we can look to Dobranski for help in

understanding the 1673 volume. While Dobranski argues against our tendency to see Milton as the solitary shaping force behind the 1645 volume, he also suggests that the 1673 volume has "wrongly been viewed as entirely a product of the printing house" and encourages readers to see more of Milton's presence in the organization of the later volume (155). Indeed, Dobranski has persuasively argued that, while Milton did not control every aspect of the book's production, he did participate in the process of its creation. Along these lines, Dobranski suggests that Milton may have included *Of Education* in response to John Eachard's criticism of Milton's early prose works. In Dobranski's view, the addition of *Of Education* "represent[s] Milton's attempt to bolster his public image" (171). This begs the question, however, of why the text would have been a more effective means at bolstering his image in 1673 than it would have been in 1644. If Milton believed *Of Education* to be a reputation-booster, why did he initially choose to publish it anonymously? Or, for that matter, if Milton's goal was to show further indications of early talent (as he may have been aiming for in the inclusion of the vacation exercises, for example), why not append his prolusions in 1673 as he did with the closely related vacation exercise instead of publishing them a year later in 1674?

Campbell and Corns, in their recent biography, suggest an alternate reason for its inclusion. They note that "the addition of *Of Education* seems initially curious, since without this it was already a substantial publication and it needed no makeweight," and then continue to propose that the inclusion was due to (1) the fact that the first edition of the text had been circulated privately and had seen only a very limited readership and (2) that the argument of *Of Education* was especially relevant in the 1670s when there was "renewed

interest in godly pedagogy" during a period of increased toleration (369). The first point is possible, of course, but we can again question it by pointing to the prolusions, which also had not been widely circulated. In addition, there is recent evidence that Hartlib had circulated Milton's text outside of his immediate circle in the decades following its publication. Timothy Raylor has shown that Hartlib shared a copy of the text with one Mr. Bridges, the chaplain to the Earl of Northumberland at Petworth as late as 1657 (23). Raylor's argument suggests that Milton's work may have circulated among those who were interested in educational reform to a greater degree and for a greater length of time than was previously believed. Moreover, had Milton been more comfortable with this text, he would have had ample opportunities to reprint it, perhaps as an addition to *The Art of Logic* in 1672. I find Campbell and Corns' second point somewhat less convincing. The key works of seventeenth-century educational theory by Comenius, Dury, Webster, Brinsley, and others were nearly all published in the 1640s and 1650s. Moreover, we must not forget that, in 1673 as in 1644, *Of Education* deliberately and distinctly distances itself from the wider discussion of educational reform. Unlike most of the period's theorists of "godly pedagogy," Milton chose to situate his text outside of the general discourse; and, indeed, it does not appear to have been cited or referenced to any significant degree by his contemporaries.

I believe that Milton included *Of Education* in the 1673 volume because he meant for it to act not as an afterthought or as an attempt to bolster his reputation, but rather as an interpretative cue for understanding both the poems within the book and for understanding Milton's larger project. While the 1645 volume attempted to distinguish Milton the poet from Milton the prose author, the 1673 volume brought the two together, reminding us that

Milton's prose often provides the keys that will unlock his poetry. Indeed, the title page itself suggests the relationship between the prose and the poetry for two words stand out above the rest, set off in capital letters and larger type: "POEMS" and "EDUCATION." While the text of the tractate is essentially unchanged between 1644 and 1673, Milton does, however, add a note explaining that the work was "written above twenty years since," a sign that even as he made the remarkable gesture of including this early prose work in a volume of poetry, he continued to distance himself from it.

The emphasis on education that the tractate brings to the 1673 volume is also present in many of the poems that were not present in the 1645 volume. "At a Vacation Exercise" demonstrates the distaste for Aristotelean logic and, by extension, scholasticism that figures heavily in Milton's vision of a reformed education. Like the prolusions, which are closely related, the inclusion of this poem reminds the reader that Milton was deeply skeptical of the efficacy of organized education in general. This skepticism makes an appearance in the Ludlow Maske, which I will argue expresses doubts about the possibilities for the Attendant Spirit to educate the two brothers, who instead receive their education at the hands of lived experience and worldly consequences. In a related vein, Sonnet XVIII to Milton's former pupil, Cyriack Skinner, asks its subject to refrain from study, to put aside his books and his learning "and know / Towards solid good what leads the nearest way" (9-10). Alongside the doubts about the efficacy of education that are present in the poem to Skinner and in the vacation exercise, Sonnets XI and XVIII, also added in 1673, contain doubts about the degree to which Milton's public is equipped to properly receive his work. In Sonnet XI, another 1673 addition, we see glimpses of Milton's fear that his audience will fail to

understand his works as he laments the loss of a previous age that "hated not learning worse than toad or asp" (13). Milton's anxiety over how his works have been received and about the degree to which he has a fit audience for his texts also appears in Sonnet XI, which accuses the public of mistaking license for liberty (11). We see this anxiety again in "Ad Joannem Rousium," also added in 1673, in which Milton laments the "vulgar mob of readers," and looks hopefully forward to future, better educated generations. Indeed, in the 1673 volume it is the epode of this poem that immediately precedes *Of Education*, and it is particularly fitting:

> But perhaps the children of the future, in some distant and wiser age, will see things in a fairer light and with unprejudiced hearts. Then, when spite and malice are buried in the past, posterity with its balanced judgment will know—thanks to Rouse—what, if anything, I have deserved. (302)

These are the final lines of poetry before the reader encounters *Of Education*. The effect is lost in modern editions that do not maintain the ordering of the poems, for *Of Education* arrives as a sort of answer to the problem outlined in the closing lines of "Ad Joannem Rousium." Education, it seems, will be the answer to creating this future generation of unprejudiced citizens, who will in turn judge Milton's work fairly. The inclusion of *Of Education* alongside the images of the unfit audiences and of failed pedagogy, which run throughout the poems included in the 1673 edition, signal Milton's attempt to recast his role as educator of the English people.

Milton's poetry, then, must possess within it a pedagogy. Numerous critics have noted this pedagogical impulse over the last hundred years. Michael Lieb, in *The Sinews of Ulysses*,

for instance, refers to it as Milton's "pedagogical imperative" (1). E.M.W. Tillyard declares that Milton "wished to sway men, to be a great teacher" and that his body of work composes a "mass of teaching" (*Academic Exercises*, XXXV). In *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance*, Jeffrey Dolven beautifully argues that Milton offers his seventeenth-century audience renewed possibilities in the form of a hopeful poetics of pedagogy that moves beyond that which could be comprehended by his predecessors, namely, Sidney and Spenser (255). Angelica Duran, in her recent work on Milton and the scientific revolution, illustrates the ways in which Milton's works form a "veritable chronicle of that transformation [of the English educational system], one that enables us to see how select pedagogical qualities that had been in demand since antiquity were filtered and then combined with new skills demanded by the English scientific revolution in order to produce a pedagogical model that remains powerful in educational settings and popular culture today" (33). There are other clues to Milton's interest in pedagogy, of course: Milton's decision (or, perhaps, that of his publisher) to append his tractate *Of Education* to his 1673 volume of poetry, an addition in which the prose acts not as an afterthought, but rather as a prodding incentive to guided interpretation; or the work he did himself as a schoolmaster in the 1640s, a period in which he most likely composed his work on logic for use in his classroom. In sum, Milton was intimately involved with instruction, not just in the more abstract sense outlined above, but also in a hands-on sense, in which he was a practicing teacher involved in contemporary debates about educational reformation.

How teachers teach and how students learn are not ahistorical concerns. And, as Joseph Wittreich has gone to great lengths to show us, readings that explore Milton from the

perspective of the reader's response as well as those that attempt to sort out the tensions in Milton's poetry ought both to historicize properly and draw out the historical horizon of expectations around those tensions.[2] That is, the reader of Milton is not ahistorical, and just as it's not safe to assume that a seventeenth-century reader would have brought the same set of assumptions to, for instance, the Samson narrative as the nineteenth-century reader would, it is not safe to assume that the instructional method in Milton's poetry would function the same way for today's contemporary audience as it did for an audience trained in the schools of early modern humanism. I hope to follow in Wittreich's footsteps, then, insofar as I hope to add to his construction of a "literary history of Milton's readers" (*Feminist Milton*, 153). In this work, I intend to explore the preconceptions and beliefs around learning that Milton's seventeenth-century readers could have possessed, as well as his or her expectations about how poetry fulfilled its didactic function in relation to the reader and the corresponding questions as to whether or not these expectations would have been fulfilled or frustrated. To this end, a good portion of this study is devoted to exploring seventeenth-century educational practices and pedagogical methodologies. In his more recent work *Why Milton Matters*, Wittreich describes how questions about the distance (or lack thereof) between the text the author produces and the horizons of expectations that anticipate it lead us to the old "crucial question" of new historicism: "what is the artistic project—containment or subversion? Is the objective to uphold or resist the dominant culture—its norms and values?" (62).

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[2] Wittreich has gone to great lengths in both *Interpreting Samson Agonistes* and *Shifting Context: Reinterpreting Samson Agonistes* to demonstrate the ways in which *Samson Agonistes*, for example, both acknowledges and then subverts the horizon of expectations that Milton's reader would have brought with them to the text. Similarly, in *Why Milton Matters,* Wittreich argues that "*Paradise Lost* reflects an early horizon of expectation that, over time, it alters" (99).

The developments in educational theory that were taking place during the first half of the seventeenth century are representative of a significant change in how Protestant (often independent) educators understood knowledge acquisition. We know that Milton was involved in these circles, both as a public intellectual and as the master of his own small school. There are distinct differences in how William Kempe, who wrote perhaps the most detailed instructional handbook for educators of the sixteenth century, approaches the task of educating England's youth and how John Dury, a prominent English activist for educational reform, along with the more well-known Samuel Hartlib and John Amos Comenius, approached that same task. During the first half of the century, not as much material change occurred in the schools as the reformists would have liked. As is often the case, theory outstripped practice, and most of the seventeenth-century advances in pedagogy would not be implemented until the following century. Nonetheless, attitudes about education did change, especially among those who were most committed to the educational project, as Milton was, and these attitudinal changes came about in part due to the introduction of the new sciences and in part due to the radical reorganizations of the English social structure that took place leading up to and in the aftermath of the English revolution. Examining both the practical and theoretical models that seventeenth-century educators used to explain how teachers ought to teach and how students learned will shed light on how Milton approached his pedagogical goals and will demonstrate the ways in which Milton's emphasis on the student's ability to choose wisely represents both an adoption of many concepts inherent in seventeenth-century educational reform while rejecting established precept-based humanist learning. Despite *Of Education's* surface

rejection of Hartlib and Comenius, Milton was deeply engaged in the seventeenth-century theoretical shift away from the precept in favor of curricula that valued practical, incremental knowledge acquisition over memorization and imitation.

The history of education in early modern England is fragmented, as it is rife with fits and starts. Neither the Tudor nor the Stuart government desired to set up a system of state education (Orme 335). That is not to say that there were not governmental educational policies put in place; there were. But, more often than not, policies were in place not because the crown had a determined desire to enact this or that educational program, but because religious or financial politics necessitated action (Orme 334). Over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, however, the system of education in England underwent a change in which the historical, traditional connections between the schools and the monasteries and chantries were ruptured as schools were increasingly brought under state control. Concurrent with this process was the increasing professionalization of teaching. By the middle of the sixteenth century, some teachers were even drawing pay directly from the state. Despite these changes, much of the curriculum was still deeply indebted to the medieval school system, which leads Orme to make the point that "medieval education was not a precursor of modern education. It was the same thing in different circumstances" (335).

Indeed, any discussion of educational reform during the English revolution is necessarily constrained by the profound lack of evidence that the theories of the reformers —especially Dury, Hartlib, and Comenius—were able to bring systemic change to the English educational system. Their efforts were not entirely without impact, however. Ruth

Watts' recent work on the impact of Bacon and the new science on the English educational system explains how Bacon's influence on educational theorists led to some aristocratic women receiving education that would have been previously unavailable. However, Watts qualifies her history with the observation that the ideas of the reformers were not integrated into English culture for "some time to come" and that, in general, "the new scientific and philosophical ideas had to struggle for acceptance against both old traditional thinking and each other" (83). Milton, Hartlib and Dury were all intensely focused on the immediate need for educational programs that taught students how to be productive citizens in the newly formed commonwealth; these programs were very much focused on the present day, and their works argue that by failing to reform the nation's schools, the commonwealth ran the risk of slipping back into monarchical idolatry. Unlike their scholastic predecessors, the Hartlib circle was focused on solving immediate, political and material problems. Joanna Picciotto has shown the extent to which Hartlib and his circle were focused on producing and communicating "applied knowledge" about practical matters—from beekeeping to medicine to public sanitation—and how their focus on material challenges has allowed them to be eclipsed by the more polemical, classically intellectual works of the period. While Hartlib's circle may have failed to enact short-term reformation of the schools, their focus on language as a tool of meaningful communication and their decision to shift the focus of study onto more practical matters is representative of a cultural shift that began with Bacon and continues through the seventeenth century.

In 1654, Cromwell began purging the schools by appointing ministers who were empowered to expel "undesirable" schoolmasters who were teaching "popish opinions" or

who advocated controversial leisure activities such as "Morris-Dances, May-Poles, Stage-plays, or such Licentious practices" (Cohen, 11). Following Charles I's execution, Parliament committed to funding the creation of schools in Wales, and more than sixty new schools were indeed created under that act and a subsequent, similar act. These changes, however, were not the changes that Bacon or Hartlib sought; they in no way represented a rethinking of curriculum or educational method. Taken in their context, the reformers that I will discuss in the subsequent pages were very much in the vanguard. While many of their ideas would indeed be adopted both in England and in America over the next one hundred years, few of them would be adopted in Milton's own lifetime. While theory outstripped practice, as it so often does in history, these theories are nonetheless incredibly useful for understanding the changing thinking about how people learn and how people ought to be taught that took place among those most closely connected to and concerned with the seventeenth-century English educational system. From 1550 to 1650, we do see evidence of visible shifts in theories of education in all areas related to the project of education. In the years leading up to the revolution, we will find new answers to the central questions: who should be educated, under what circumstances and with what methods their education should take place, and what texts and concepts compose the ideal curriculum.

William Kempe's *The Education of Children*, in its striking articulation and defense of the late sixteenth-century English educational system, is a good place to begin looking at the historical evolution of English education. While reading this text, one gets the impression that Kempe is responding to his own sense (and public accusations) of a failed school system, a system in which parents are not adequately involved and in which little knowledge

is actually transferred from teacher to student. In his account of sixteenth-century education, *Elizabethan Schooldays*, J. Howard Brown describes these fundamental problems with the early modern schoolroom. Expensive schoolbooks, writes Brown, led schoolmasters to continue to rely on a pedagogy based on the lecture:

> By this means, large numbers could be taught at once and so kept busy, but most of the real work devolved upon the master. All the class was expected to do was, to take in, remember, and reproduce on demand, what he had taught them. Everything had to be said 'without book,' and all this rote learning imposed the necessity of weekly repetitions, favoured the shirker, placed too much dependence upon the memory, and usually led to things being done 'without understanding the reason of them, or how to make use of anything.' Thus, Fearon comments, 'it is not likely that boys did much real hard work except when actually engaged with the teacher.' (103-104)

The entire Elizabethan school system was based on a fairly straight-forward principle, summarized by Kempe: "all knowledge is taught generally both by precepts of arte, and also by practice of the same precepts. They are practiced partly by observing examples of them in other men's workes, and partly by making somewhat of our owne; and that is first by imitation, and at length without imitation" (image 22). This concept, that the student is given instruction in how to accomplish a task—conjugating a Latin verb or, at a later point in his education, writing poetry following a classical model—and that he then fulfill that instruction exactly, is at the heart of Elizabethan education. Repetition, argues Kempe, will lead to invention, but only if the student has properly learned the precepts guiding the

repetitive act, which is itself the evidence that the student has learned the curriculum successfully. Because all knowledge may, in this view, be broken down into component parts, the task of the educator is to determine how to delineate those parts from the whole. Kempe's instructions for teaching students to pronounce words is a good example of this analytical method: "as if he had to learne this word mercifulnes, suffer him not, as some would, to go on thus: m-e-r, mer, c-i-f-u-l-n-e-s, mercifulnes. But according to the letters and syllables, which are as precepts in this behalfe, let him learne it by reason thus: m-e-r, mer: c-I, ci, merci: f-u-l, ful, merciful: n-e-s, nes, mercifulnes" (image 23).

The student, then, is taught to start at the first building block and to understand it fully. Then, the second block is to be understood and combined with the first block which will be repeated. At each stage of complexity, the student is both to repeat and reiterate all the precepts that preceded the current one. Knowledge, then, is for Kempe a thing that is profoundly iterable and capable of being composed and decomposed. Learning, likewise, is a step-by-step, iterative process. Teaching, it follows, is at least in part the act of making correct choices about how to decompose a whole into its component parts; good teaching, then, is careful, incremental analysis translated into a digestible and interlocked series of oral precepts. Insofar as imitation (and all its various forms including repetition, drills, and catechism) was the means by which Kempe's students were to learn their grammar, tracing—imitation's correlative—was the primary means for teaching them their handwriting. What works for the word works for the whole text as well: "Wherefore as in reading he learned letter by letter, syllable by syllable, so here let him learne word by word, phrase by phrase, until he has all the partes, which are equall to the whole" (image 24). Kempe's curriculum,

which we might call an analytical education, holds at its core a firm belief that the constitutive parts of a whole can, ultimately, be reassembled back into the whole, thus completing the process of knowledge acquisition. In this regard, we might think of Kempe's method as the inverse of the modern notion of deconstruction. Indeed, I prefer to think about Kempe's method as a series of compositions and decompositions in order to avoid the implied dissonance that is unavoidably attached to the word deconstruction. Where the modern deconstructionist deconstructs in order to find the places where language confounds us as it traverses an unrestrained spectrum of signification, Kempe decomposes in order to show the ways in which all knowledge (and, presumably, language) is ultimately coherently constructed by its component parts which can be segmented, isolated, and named. Nonetheless, Kempe is begrudgingly willing to recognize that not all knowledge fits into the systematic approach he describes. What works well when the student and teacher are breaking a word down into its component syllables and letters does not work as well when the subject matter is the conjugation of an irregular Latin verb culled from a piece of classical prosody. On encountering these irregularities in the curriculum, what Kempe calls the "rough ground in the way of the learner," the Master's job is to act as guide, "supporting the student agayne and agauyne least he fall" (image 24).

Following the process of repetition and imitation, the young scholar proceeds to practice composition without an example on which to base his work. Kemp located the final test of whether or not the lesson has been acquired in the act of creation, but it is not a truly creative act, insofar as it is always clearly constrained by genre and formal constraints. The student does not abandon the precepts that he has worked so hard to master; quite the

contrary, the student's repetitive creative acts reinforce the learned precepts, and in doing so, the student can be certain that he will "forget not the precepts of arte before continual use has ripened his understanding in them" (image 27).

This central principle of Elizabethan education—that the master's precept lies at the heart of all learning, and that the precept leads to practice which, in turn, reinforces the student's full understanding of the precept—was a principle that many educators in the seventeenth century, including Milton, came to reject to greater and greater degrees. When we stand back and take a broader look at seventeenth-century educational theory, we see a sharp reaction against the notion of the precept insofar as precepts, in order to function as an educational tool, require a kind of assent to authority that came to be seen as dangerous and suspect by the men and women who had witnessed the execution of Charles I, the kingdom's physical embodiment of all authority on earth. Beginning in the 1640s, English and continental education theory tends to deemphasize the role of the precept, memorization, and imitation in the classroom while emphasizing the student's rational ability to interpret and draw conclusions from sensory perception. Milton's poetry, I will argue, embodies traces of this shift insofar as it repeatedly places both its characters and its readers in the difficult position of having to choose from among the competing narratives put forward by the authoritative voices in his verse.

While the revolution shifted political power from the monarchy to the landed elite who made up parliament, the educational reformers of the 40s and 50s attempted to shift the focus of the school system's curriculum away from the precept toward problem-solving and other more useful subjects of study. Over the course of these decades, the nation

witnessed an outpouring of pamphlets, tracts, and plans treating the question of how to best shape educational methods and practices so as to make them most effective in contributing to the public good. The authors of these texts included ardent believers in Bacon's new philosophy, radical sectarians—who oftentimes loosely utilized Bacon in order to promote what they termed a "practical" education—and moderate puritans. In other words, reformers of all stripes in a time of rapid social change sought to reshape the national system of education, often in order to bring it more closely in line with their political and religious goals.

Many individuals inside and outside of the established system of education felt that it was in utter disarray; one of the predominant complaints that runs throughout these texts is the widespread belief that the current system, particularly at the university level, was by and large a failure and in desperate need of meaningful reform. Religious and political interests were often at issue; Oxford and, to a lesser degree, Cambridge were home to numerous malignant scholars well into the 1640s and 1650s. In addition to the relatively common charge of recusancy, schools were seen as potential loci of Royalist sentiment, prompting Parliament in 1651 to suppress all primers "used in the time of kingship" from being taught in any school throughout the nation, be it public or private (England and Wales 1). Furthermore, despite the creation of the Savillian chair at Oxford in 1619 and scattered pockets of scientific instruction, the universities had by and large neglected the new philosophy (Watson 341). In this regard, Cambridge was most likely even further behind than Oxford. But many reformers were equally concerned with the general well being of the nation, which they felt was endangered by universities that produced graduates ill-prepared

for public life and by grammar schools that produced students unready for university work. Nearly all reformers spoke to a need for the educational system to do a better job of contributing to the public good, although how this good was defined varied somewhat from one author to the next.[3]

Fundamental to this body of literature and the reform it sought to address was a larger question about the nature of education: What were the proper ends of education, both in the sense of ends as goals and ends as limits and boundaries? In other words, reformers sought to explore which kinds of learning were acceptable and which were not. The Early Modern Period was an age that was acutely aware of and often hyper-conscious about the tendency for knowledge to get out of hand, leading to potentially tragic consequences. Not only was knowledge potentially dangerous in a personal, spiritual sense, it was also dangerous in a larger social sense. Much of the knowledge produced during the seventeenth century had a disruptive effect on long-held, established beliefs, bringing into question much that had been universally accepted. The worry over the potential of new learning to cause problems was not limited to moderate puritans. In *The Puritan Revolution and Educational Thought*, Richard Greaves draws our attention to a pertinent piece of doggerel by the Fifth Monarchist preacher Anna Trapnel that exhibits a concern over the dangers of mixing learning with religious instruction, a common theme among the independents:

> For in the Chimny the fire is
>
> Useful and precious,

[3] See W. A. L. Vincent's *The State And School Education 1640-1660 In England and Wales* for a concise overview of the transformations that the English educational system underwent during the civil war and in its aftermath.

> But when the rafters it doth reach,
> it sets on fire the house.
> And so is learning, when you keep
> it within its true bound,
> But when you joyne it unto Christ
> he will then it confound. (Greaves 125)

So long as it remains in the hearth, its "true bound," learning is "useful and precious"; Trapnel's choice of "useful" is significant in that it functions as a keyword that immediately sets the education she's talking about against scholastic learning, which was understood by both puritan and independent reformers to have little utilitarian value. But once learning exceeds its "true bound," in addition to being confused, it is also dangerous. Again, Trapnel's word choice is precise; "confound" holds two related but distinct meanings, signifying utter ruin and defeat, as well as mental confusion. Misguided learning is not only incomprehensible, it also has the potential to bring about disastrous consequences, like flames in the rafters. Trapnel's poem locates the true bound of learning at the point of contact between knowledge and religion, but it doesn't in and of itself address the boundaries of a proper education. What, exactly, is the "true bound" of learning? Where does good learning end and dangerous learning begin, and how are we to distinguish reliably between the two? These questions, so central to the literature of educational reform, are also of central importance to Milton. His voice was one among many in the debate about education, and his was not a particularly loud voice, given that the reforms he urges in *Of Education* were both less radical and less developed than those put forward by many of his

peers (although it did include a significant emphasis on the character and development of individual students). It is when we move beyond the tractate into Milton's body of prose and poetry that we begin to see the ways in which Milton's work approaches the issue of proper and improper forms of learning, particularly in the exchanges between Adam and Raphael in *Paradise Lost*.

Nearly all of the authors involved in the debate about education understood their work to be in one way or another crucial to the health and future of the nation. John Dury, writing in 1649, and a member of the Hartlib-Comenius circle, begins his treatment of educational reform in *A Seasonable Discourse* by connecting it to the larger religious reformations concurrently taking place and by couching it in universal terms: "We are upon the design of a publick reformation wherein every body is in one way or another , if not engaged, yet concerned, some more some less, some in a private, some in a publick way" (1). As with all broad social questions, the participants in this debate sometimes disagreed about what it was, exactly, that constituted the public good, with their conclusions depending on the particular social groups with which they aligned themselves. That said, nearly all of the educational reformers in England during the seventeenth century were reformed protestants who were in greater and lesser degrees associated with the revolution. For his part, Dury defines the public good as "true religion and learning," arguing that it can only be reached by propagating religious truth and by the advancement of learning with the aim of making men rational (4). Like Milton, Dury envisioned a place for religion in the classroom and, ultimately, saw religion and education as two sides of the same coin. Dury defines the "principle of good" as attaining to that which the will of God has intended for humankind.

Likewise, the "publick good" is realized when humanity fulfills the will of god by leading, ruling, and employing "all things to their common end" rather than being ruled by the things of the world (3). For Dury, if the proper use of all matter is the ultimate aim, then reason is the sole faculty by which man is able to determine the proper use. Summing up this view, Dury explains that "the ground then of human society is Reason, the way of it is freedom of action according to reason, and the end, both of society and reason is the common enjoyment of good things" (3). Anything that did not directly lead to the benefit of society was, for Dury, secondary. Dury also believed that practical instruction was always more important than theoretical instruction, the latter following the former only after the student had fully grasped the practical application of a concept, a view that is in many ways an inversion of curriculum based on the precept. As far as what was taught, the reformed schoolmaster would let two principles guide him in his selection of the curriculum. First, all that was taught should be measured according to the degree to which it brought the student closer to God, and second, it should be measured by the amount of relief the subject could bring from suffering. Dury believed that these reformed schools would eventually provide schoolmasters with a tangible, discrete method for "proceeding towards an effectual reform," for it was Dury's belief, as it was Comenius', that there had been very little useful reform thus far (2). The method itself was something that would be exercised in discrete, reproducible steps, and it would be built from the ground up, serving as the educational foundation for a new religious reformation. This faith in method was characteristic of the educational thinkers that descended from Bacon—who served as a source for much of the

inspiration for the Hartlib circle—and Comenius, who believed it possible to find a method so perfect that it would be an "easie way" of teaching "all men all things" (4).

We can now hold the educational programs of Kempe and Dury up to one another and see a substantial difference emerging. As I've argued above, Kempe's method is by and large centered on the notion of the precept, which is reinforced and repeated through practice. The teacher defines the rules and boundaries of elegy, for instance. After learning those rules, the student moves through various degrees of imitation and creation until he can compose an elegy. At each point of the process, the student and the master may compare the student's output to the precept and gauge the degree to which the output conforms to the precept. In doing so, the student acquires a stronger hold on the precept itself. The sorts of education proposed by Dury and Comenius are remarkably different; where Kempe relies on precept, the reformed educator relies on method. Dury and Comenius want to instill in the student a rational capacity that allows the student to come to know a thing through a process of sensory engagement coupled with structured reasoning. The value in emphasizing method over precept is immediately obvious to most of us; after all, we work in institutions that, at least in theory, still hold "critical thinking" as the holy grail of the educational process.

Dury's beliefs that religion and learning were ultimately compatible, that they mutually reinforced one another, and that taken together they could lead the nation to a true spiritual and social reformation were quasi-utopian in their optimism. By the 1640s, educational reformers had grown accustomed to hearing the charge that their theories were utopian, a charge that also illustrates the horizon of expectations prevalent at the time. In

the shift from a reliance on precepts to a reliance on sensory engagement and structured reasoning, some pedagogical ideas seemed unreal, so to speak. John Webster, in the epistle to his *Examination of Academies*, foresees that his work will be compared to Plato's *Republic*, More's *Utopia*, or Bacon's *New Atlantis* as yet another book of impracticable, imaginary whimsies (image 7). In fact, a utopian strain in the literature of educational reform had gained strength by the 1620s; in 1621, seven or eight years before Milton delivered his scathing third prolusion, an attack on scholastic philosophy, John Brinsley wrote *A Consolation for Our Grammar Schools*. Brinsley's notion of a strong, methodical education as "foundational" is typical of the Comenian approach, in which anyone can be taught complex ideas so long as each idea is deconstructed into its component parts, which are then taught in a "clear and certaine order" (12).

However, Brinsley begins his consolation by situating it not as utopian but as a productive response to the "grevious complaints, which (to the disgrace of learning) are made almost in every place [...] because in so many schools, the children, which are the chief hope of parents and posteritie, are either spoiled altogether, or else do profit so very little" (2). The problem, according to Brinsley, is not so much a problem of intention, but rather a lack of method. Very few schoolmasters, he explains, "are acquainted with any good method or right order of instruction," and the end-result is that students were often unprepared at best and, even worse, were likely to be soured on learning in general by the time they were ready for the university (2). I see similar mention of societal attitudes towards learning in Bacon (As early as 1605), whose famously stated purpose in *The Advancement of Learning* is in part to deliver learning "from the discredits and disgraces which it hath

received" (1). While there is a good degree of anti-intellectualism mixed into the complaints as reported by Bacon, there is also plenty of anxiety about the potentially dangerous and disruptive effects of knowledge, which, to borrow Bacon's words, was thought by many to have in it "somewhat of the serpent" (1).

Added to concerns about danger and disruptions in relation to learning was the mid-seventeenth-century notion that education might not be very useful; in other words, there is tangible evidence of a concern about the extent to which education could bring about any kind of utilitarian good in society. One example of this utilitarian critique of education is a pamphlet published in 1641 called *The Country-Mans Care And the Citizens Feare, in Bringing up Their Children in Good Education*. This text, which was published anonymously in 1641, consists of a dialog between an urban alderman (the citizen) and a country gentleman. After asking for news from the city (it's not good -- the world is turned upside down), the countryman proceeds to pose a series of possibilities as to how to secure a good future for his son, each of which the citizen discards. The countryman would bring his son "up to some scholler-ship" by sending him to the University. That idea is roundly rejected by the citizen, for "the university is much polluted and contaminated with popish superstitions" which will inevitably lead to the son's "utter ruine" and the countryman's "perpetual sorrow" (2). Shall I send the son to the ministry, asks the countryman. No, replies the citizen, for in the ministry all learning is abused, condemned, derided, neglected, and despised. For the more one knows, the more capable one is of being wicked. Sending him to the Innes of Court, we are told, will transform him into a "suckling." A military career will make a foul mouthed braggart of him, if he's lucky, and, if he's not so lucky, he'll end up in jail after

being capriciously accused of treason of one form or another. Having given up hope of finding a fruitful career for his son, the countryman asks the citizen to name his own profession:

> Citz: I am a Vintner by my trade
>
> Count: I am very glad to hear of that, and if my Sonne be wise enough, but to take fourty shilling a tunne, he may prove an alderman too. (4-5)

The conclusion, then, upholds the rejection of learning (the university), religion (the ministry) and rhetoric (the Inns of Court) that run throughout the text by redefining wisdom as profit. In line with this conclusion, the countryman agrees to send his son to the citizen to begin an apprenticeship, so that he too, presumably, can learn how to overcharge for wine. So if, on one hand, we see a deeply optimistic if not utopian faith in learning and in educational method on the part of Dury and the Hartlib circle, we also have, as reflected in this anonymous pamphlet, a cynicism that questions the legitimacy of the new methods even as it indicates their necessity.

The anonymous author, as is the case with many of the authors in the debates about reformation of the English Universities in the 1640s, uses the terminology of illness and disease to drive home his point about the dangers of learning. The Citizen, for instance, complains that universities are "much polluted" and "contaminated with popish superstitions" (5). We see similar language in a brief pamphlet called *The Pollution of Universitie-Learning*, the title page of which promises to demonstrate that universities are places "whereby most of the youth are infected" (1). By the end of the pamphlet, which broadly attacks universities using the common anti-Catholic rhetoric of the day, the author

has ratcheted up the imagery. The universities "always have been, and still are the very hives and nurseries of their armed poisoned Locusts and venomous Scorpions" (13). The author continues to spend the bulk of the paragraph itemizing the "false ministry of Antichrist," which includes bishops, preachers, friars, and, "(as we now call them), Schollers" (13). These scholars, we are told, have "swarmed and issued out of these hives into the face of the whole earth, corrupting and destroying every greene thing, poysoning the pure fountaines of Gods Word with their accursed glosses, deepe learning, subtill and figurative interpretations, darkening the sunne and infecting the aire therewith" (13). The pamphlets of the period repeatedly portray ineffectual teaching as infection and contagion, capable of metastasizing within the mind of the student.

We see more of the same in *An Answer to the Petition Sent from the Universitie of Oxford to the Honourable Court of Parliament*, published in 1641.The author's disdain for the scholars of Oxford is strong and relies on similar imagery as that of the previous tracts: "nor dare they speak any thing without booke; they would faine live merrily, and feed upon the fat, and drinke the sweet, like lazy drones which rob the labouring Bees; & no government will admit of it but that which is contrary to all government, the tyranical government of bishops, that they have bin the running plague-sore of this nation" (4). Even the defenders of national education sometimes relied on the language of infection to describe problems in the school system. Comenius, for example, notes in *A Reformation of Schooles* that the schools have "infected" the students with "serpentine venome" (10). Again and again, the scholars are linked to sickness, infection and, ultimately, to the Antichrist. These attacks on the universities represent an extreme strain of anti-catholic sentiment among the puritan and

independent pamphleteers. Attacks against the episcopacy were couched in the language of anti-Catholicism, and the universities, which had come to be seen by many as seats of scholasticism and pedantry, proved to be a convenient target.

There can be little doubt that Milton shared many of the larger complaints against the universities, as evidenced by our knowledge of his own experience at Cambridge and by his own voice in his university prolusions. Milton's critique of Cambridge, specifically expressed in the third prolusion, is evident in all of the exercises. As Barbara Lewalski notes in her L*ife of John Milton*, even when Milton is operating within the rules of university debate, as is the case with the fourth prolusion, he is unable to contain his well honed "polemic bent and resistance to authority" (34). The attack on scholastic method in the third prolusion contains linguistic hints of the popular criticisms of the universities, although his critique is far more sophisticated and careful in its polemic, which could be a response to Laud's appointment and, depending on how we date the third prolusion, to Alexander Gil's punishment in 1628 at the hands of the Court of Star Chamber for toasting the assassination of Buckingham (Lewalski 32). The prolusion takes aim at the form of argument and debate that Milton refers to as "the blight of disputation," echoing some of the terminology of sickness and infection used by other authors. In a clever image, Milton describes the "monkish" scholastic scholar as having reached "such a pitch of madness as to believe himself utterly blind when in fact there is nothing for him to see" (*Riverside Milton*, 853). The end result of scholastic philosophy in the third prolusion is emptiness -- worse than blindness, it is nothingness. Milton's imagery isn't filled with rot, disease, and infection so much as it is haunted by what is missing. The debates of the universities are "unreal

ghosts and phantoms"; the scholastic mind is "empty of true wisdom"; the scholar, consumed with "tricks and fallacies" worries about questions of no importance until "excessive fretting, like Prometheus' eagle, eats out his heart and consumes him altogether" in an act of extraordinary self-negation (*Riverside Milton*, 853).

Consequently, the real challenge, for Milton, is not how to devise increasingly elaborate threads of argumentative logic. Rather, it is how to find the right questions to ask in the course of one's own education, which, as it turns out, is not a trivial task. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam comments on the tendency of "the Mind or Fancie" to "roave / Uncheckt, and of her roaving is no end" (8.188-89). Only experience teaches the mind "not to know at large of things remote from us, obscure and suttle, but to know that which before us lies in daily life" (8.191-93). Anything beyond that which is before us in daily life, explains Adam, "is fume / or emptiness" or, even worse, "fond impertinence" (8.194-95). Adam's decision to redirect his conversation with Raphael away from celestial matters and towards "a lower flight" is a decision he makes in response to the angel's gentle command to "Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid, / Leave them to God above, him serve and feare" (8.167-68). Other critics have incorrectly taken this line to be at odds with the program laid out by Milton in the tractate, but, as Irene Samuel demonstrates, taken in context of the entire conversation, it's clear that Raphael is not suggesting that Adam refrain from asking questions. Instead, he's encouraging Adam to ask the right questions -- questions that are both answerable and directly relevant to Adam's day-to-day existence, which will aid him in maintaining an appropriate relationship to God (709-712).

The idea that true learning takes place on the practical rather than on the theoretical level is a belief that Milton shared with many of the sectarian reformers of the 1640s and 50s. John Webster, who was certainly well to the left of Comenius and Hartlib, writing in 1654 in his *Examination of Academies*, expresses a similar sentiment in his critique of the Aristotelian school of philosophy as

> void of true and infallible demonstration, observation, and experiment, the only certain means, and instruments to discover, and anatomize natures occult and central operations; which are found out by laborious trials, manual operations, assiduous observations, and the like, and not by poring continually upon a few paper idols and unexperienced authors. (68)

Only that which can be repeated through demonstration, seen through observation, and confirmed by experimentation would have value in Webster's academy. Unlike Milton, however, Webster argued that one of the great mistakes of the universities was their decision to attempt to teach knowledge of God, which, for Webster, could be known only through inspiration and revelation, not through education. As Webster well understood, it is exceedingly difficult to prove assertions about God or other Heavenly matters through empirical methods. Therefore, Webster creates a distinct split between empirical knowledge, which can be learned, and religious knowledge, which he saw as inherently unteachable. Aristotelian philosophy, then, was for Webster fundamentally misguided because it lacks the requisite "true and infallible demonstration." This does not, however, mean that the mind is unable to grasp the secrets of nature; Webster is careful to argue that guided learning about nature is good insofar as whatever is learned can be proved by means more tangible than

mere argument and debate. So, while Webster is critical of idle, unguided speculation, he is strongly in favor of a hands-on investigation into God's creation: "But that which I defend," writes Webster, "is that noble and laudable Science [...] And indeed is that worthy, and wonderful science which leadeth cognition of occult [hidden] forms unto wonderful works, and by conjoining actives to passives, doth manifest the grand secrets of nature" (69). Webster offers us the guide for finding the "true bounds" of learning; probing Nature's secrets is a justifiable act to the degree to which it produces actual good in the world, and in fact, Nature's secrets are only fully manifested when they are utilized for the pubic good. "Sublime knowledge," continues Webster, is the combination of discovering the "wonderful works of the Creator" in such a way that those works produce benefits to "the poor creatures" of society.

What we see, then, in the first half of the seventeenth century is a theoretical shift that refocuses the process of learning on the student's ability to create order out of information instead of on the student's ability to memorize, recite, imitate, and articulate through performance the lessons and precepts of the master. Instead of memorization, the new education encouraged the student to adopt a critical stance in relation to the world, in which sensory perception and empirical evidence were the raw fuels that fed the rational mind and led to concrete, practical knowledge of the world. The job of the teacher, in a world rife with competing voices and contradictory sensory feedback, was to lead the student to develop the faculties necessary for negotiating these voices and to enter the adult world in secure possession of the ability to choose correctly. It is with this in mind that we turn to *Areopagitica* and delve deeper into Milton's exploration of choice and choosing in

order to better see the how Milton's work engaged the core ideas while it simultaneously questioned those ideas and the ultimate efficacy of education, teachers, and reason as a means for navigating a dangerous, hypocritical world.

2. *Areopagitica*, *Of Education*, and the Mechanics of Choice

In the previous chapter, I argued that during the seventeenth century educational theory shifted away from an emphasis on instruction by precept and moved toward an emphasis on the teacher's duty to help students cultivate their faculty of reason. I also argued that this change effectively recast the role of a teacher from that of an authority figure to that of a guide whose job it was to steer the student toward fit and away from unfit areas of study. One of the important effects of the new science was the growing public realization that education could be generative rather than repetitive, that students could generate new knowledge instead of simply memorizing and repeating existing forms of knowledge. Moreover, the measure by which new knowledge would be gauged was its immediate utility and applicability. After centuries of scholasticism, the reformers of the 40s and the 50s were fundamentally interested in methods for producing knowledge that was relevant. Picciotto captures the commitment to social change that is present in the tractate in her concept of the "University of Eden." For Milton and his peers in the Hartlib circle, "The subordination of words to things," write Picciotto, "fosters a deeply practical model of education as apprenticeship to productive action" (168). Consequently, the mode of instruction

championed by educational reformers began to favor invention over repetition and the process over the proof of learning. Milton, like many of the progressive educational thinkers of the period, understood educational reform as a crucial step in the larger project of religious reformation that would lead to a more egalitarian, productive world in the here and now. This belief is nowhere more evident than in *Areopagitica* and *Of Education*.[4]

The old education, like the papist religion that Milton derides repeatedly during the 1640s, was composed of repetition and imitation. These repetitive practices were the pedagogical equivalent of the catechism, and they also served to reinforce the teacher-centric classroom that was at the core of the educational system at all levels. Milton's attack on the Book of Common Prayer—the old "mass-Book don into English"—in *Eikonoklastes* is just one example among many of Milton's belief that the "sett formes" of prescriptive prayer and ritual are both restrictive and ineffectual compared to inspired, voluntary prayer (*Riverside Milton,* 1088). For Milton-the-puritan, the catechism robbed the Christian of her ability to enact her own religious faith through inspired, sincere prayer and, equally important, was an unreliable indicator of the individual's spiritual bearing, as was any compelled expression of faith. Set forms and "formalitie," then, are the religious equivalent of the pedagogical precept, and Milton argued that both not only were poor substitutes for free choice led by the exercise of reason but—of greater concern—could actively impair one's salvation by depriving one of the "exercise of that Heav'nly gift" of inspired prayer (*Riverside Milton,* 1089). In Milton's works, the Christian subject reaches inspired prayer not through

[4] See Jackie DiSalvo, *War of Titans: Blake's Critique of Milton and the Politics of Religion*, for further analysis of Areopagitica as representative of Milton's "engagement to revolutionary struggle," in which Milton "consistently defines his own role in relation to the actual battles involving his countrymen" (25). According to DiSalvo, Milton saw a "concrete relationship" between the ideological battles of his prose and the martial battles of Cromwell and his soldiers (25).

repetition and imitation but by way of the trial, within which the Christian subject is given the opportunity to exercise her reason and, in doing so, engage in an incremental progression toward salvation.

The critical centrality of the trial in Milton's works is well-established. In "Milton and Self Knowledge," Albert Fields, for example, argues that for Milton:

> … the self-knowing person should be aware that the external world is his to enjoy by wise choosing, but he should also realize that the divine image within him that empowers him with rational choice obligates him to be "tested" for his "salvation," or resurrection of the body—the consummation of his relationship with God. (392).

Coming from a very different perspective, Donald L. Guss argues in his thoughtful article, "Enlightenment as Process: Milton and Habermas," that truth, for Milton, is a "meaning within life" that emerges from "difference and conflict" (1158). For Milton, reason and choice allow an elect people to become a nation of prophets; and Guss continues, "it is in the medium of discourse—and so of difference, undecidability, and conflict—that these prophets and sages constitute society and social reason" (1159). George Williamson, on the other hand, describes the ways in which Milton's insistence on "the freedom of moral choice subordinates his doctrine to character and the agency of plot"(285). In "The Fall and Milton's Theodicy," Dennis Danielson, like many critics before him, explores the centrality of the Boethian problem of divine foreknowledge free will in Milton's writing (171). Ongoing debates about Milton's Arminianism significantly hinge on Milton's views on

choice, reason, and free will.[5] Choice is, for Milton, so many things and so rich of a concept, and it runs throughout every one of his works. It contains Samson's choice of a wife, and his choice between the sun and the shade as well as Satan's decision to rebel and Abdiel's decision to remain faithful. It contains God's free agency and the necessity of his "choice of act" that Milton describes in the *Christian Doctrine* (30). It contains Milton's commitment to the idea of a chosen people, and not just what it is to choose, but also to what it is to be chosen. It is reason and the purest expression of free will that Milton understood to be at the center of human experience. For Milton, the individual's life is defined by its choices, each of which relies on the use of reason (employed synonymously with the act of choosing at various points in Milton's writing).[6] Choice occurs by way of the trial, which is the path by which Milton's Christian subject perfects himself.

We must not forget, however, that the process of perfection by trial was not an abstract or solely spiritual concept for Milton, for he repeatedly situates this process of trial and error firmly in the public sphere. Sharon Achinstein has made a compelling case in *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* for Milton's confidence in his countrymen, arguing that "in Milton's line of thinking, English citizens were qualified as readers, worthy to exercise their reasoning abilities amid a barrage of conflicting opinions" (62). The antithesis of the public political discourse was, for Milton, the authoritarian state in which the individual's basic humanity is repressed by removing what Achinstein calls the people's "fundamental liberty

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[5] Cf. Hunter, Patrides, Adamson's *Bright Essence* as well as Shawcross's *John Milton: The Self & The World*, in particular p. 139.

[6] For example, see book three of *Paradise Lost*, where God reminds the son that "reason also is choice" (3.8). Milton believed this at both early and late stages of his career. In *Areopagitica* he claims that "reason is but choosing" (1010).

of choice" (62). Throughout his early prose, and particularly in the *Areopagitica,* Milton portrays this liberty of choice as a profoundly humanizing freedom, one that makes possible the promises of his post-reformation theology. Moreover, the importance that Milton places on choice is representative of larger cultural changes, as well as the specific changes, that were taking place in educational theory. Catherine Gimelli Martin has shown the ways in which Milton's emphasis on the trial channeled Bacon's ideas about how knowledge is produced to both Locke and Jefferson via the *Areopagitica*, claiming that "For both [Milton and Bacon], the improvement of man's estate proceeds not by overcoming strife, as both Hobbes and Locke believed, but by making strife an ingredient in progress" (879). From strife—which is public debate, argument, and choice—comes knowledge and social progress.

Much Milton criticism has tended to focus on the nature of the specific choices that we see in Milton's texts and on the consequences and meaning of those choices, especially in relation to how they reveal the character who is doing the choosing. For example, Fredson Bowers has argued that Adam's decision to allow Eve to leave the Garden has the effect of rendering him culpable for her fall (271). However, fewer critics have adequately examined the mechanics of choosing and the ways in which Milton tries to educate his readers not about the correct choice, but about how to choose in general.

The overwhelming critical focus on Milton's reader, who as Fish has convincingly shown is repeatedly made to choose between the numerous interpretive positions offered by Milton's works, has similarly tended to focus on which choices are correct instead of on how Milton's text often frustrate our ability to choose, forcing us to engage in the hard work of justifying our own interpretive decisions. By approaching Milton as an educator and

focusing on the ways in which Milton's characters (and his readers) are provided with the critical tools that allow them to make the proper choices rather than focus on the plot or the use and misuse of reason that leads Milton's characters to make the decisions they make, we begin to see that Milton is oftentimes more concerned with how one chooses than with what one chooses. In other words, rather than addressing the moment of choice itself, let us examine the moments that lead up to the choice. Rather than attempting to stress the consequences of the choice, let us tease out the challenges and contradictions inherent in the process of choosing, and illuminate the tools Milton offers his characters and his readers to help them and us to make better choices as we work through his texts.

If life is a series of trials, as Milton suggests it is in *Areopagitica*, then it follows that no single choice is particularly important in and of itself, at least not in the positive sense. Choice unfolds upon itself—choosing leads to more choices. The individual must continue to make the same good choices over and over, in order to continually reaffirm their spiritual orientation in relation to the surrounding world. It is with this in mind that I put forward the suggestion that in many ways the substance of choice is irrelevant. More important than the choice itself is the process by which the subject arrives at the correct choice, or, in the case of a bad choice, the process by which the subject comes to understand the choice as mistaken. In other words, it's not what one chooses so much as how one chooses that matters to Milton, and his work offers both his characters and his readers instruction in choosing. Balachandra Rajan describes both the centrality and unending persistence of choice that runs throughout Milton's portrayal of the postlapsarian world and reminds us

that in Milton's texts the emphasis is always on the journey back to the garden rather than on the garden itself:

> The house of God on the contrary is not an unfinishable edifice. It is put together by choosing rather than finding pieces, and by the human effort of 'moulding' them so that they fit with 'gracefull symmetry' into a 'pile and structure.' Every stone will be 'laid artfully together' in the commitment to building the temple. But those who build it will see only the contiguity of the edifice, its togetherness rather than its animating principle. The implicit forms will not be known in time. But it is brought into existence by the earnestness of its builders. The shift from the insufficience of human effort to the enduring validity (as yet not discernible) of that effort is important. (146)

It is not what is chosen (or what is found) that matters, but rather the effort put into the discovery. The choices that, put together, compose the temple are unknowable and impossible to value while the temple is still being developed, yet it is the very act of choosing —and the earnestness and commitment that are crucial elements of this act—by which the Christian subject builds the temple in the here and now.

It is fundamentally correct and fruitful to follow Fish's alignment of Milton with Blake as a politically engaged poet whose works expressed the idea, especially during the latter part of his life, that it was possible to create a better society in the here and now on England's green, an idea that we hear throughout Blake's work and that is encapsulated in Blake's notion of the "mental fight." As such, much, if not all, of Milton's work was written with the express purpose of effecting actual change in his readership. The tendency in

Milton's writing to engage actively his audience in complicated and contradictory instructions makes Milton a natural fit for Fish's methodology in which he reads Milton by way of Milton's reader (or Milton's historical reader, or any number of interpretive communities engaged with Milton). That said, I reject the subtext throughout Fish's critical works on Milton that argues that his texts are less interested in effecting change than in shouting the same fundamental conclusions to his readers over and over again. Even if, as Fish argues, the end-point in a reading of Milton is always the same place, such a conclusion misses an essential point of Milton, which is not where one ends up, but rather how one got there at all.

Going against the grain of those critics who have seen *Areopagitica* as a defense of free expression and religious toleration, Fish argues in *How Milton Works* that Milton is "finally, and in a profound way, not against licensing, and that he has almost no interest at all in the 'freedom of the press' as an abstract or absolute good" (189). Indeed, Fish's claim goes against most significant recent work on the pamphlet. Lewalski, for instance, notes in *The Life of John Milton*, that *Areopagitica* "draws upon and contributes to the lively controversy about religious toleration in 1644," although she is careful to note that such toleration pointedly excludes Popery and that which is outwardly "impious or evil absolutely against either faith or matters" (191). In *Writing the English Republic*, David Norbrook, on the other hand, takes a view of the text that is closer to Fish's, in which he points out that Milton "nowhere calls for universal freedom" (120). Instead, Norbrook claims, Milton is primarily objecting to the means of censorship and its current targets. Milton, he argues, would have not objected to censoring royalist opinions, for example, which seems to directly contradict

Lewalski's claim that Milton ultimately thinks that books should be forced to fend for themselves in the marketplace of ideas.

There is much to be said for both arguments; surely we should resist our tendency to map present-day liberal values onto Milton in 1644. And it is clear that both Fish and Norbrook are correct in reminding us that there are limits to Milton's endorsement of free speech and to his religious toleration. But these limits should not, ultimately, be read as a rejection of the principle of free speech. Indeed, in order to make a convincing case that Milton is not deeply invested in the fundamental principles that underlie arguments for freedom of speech—the principle that reason and judgment flourish when ideas are allowed to engage in free and open conflict in the public sphere and the principle that censorship is always profoundly limited and even corruptible by the character and interests of the censor—one would be forced to define such freedom in the most absolute terms, as freedom for all people, in all places, and in all times and historical circumstances. Milton, of course, does not do that, for Milton sees freedom of speech as being, in the final analysis, the corollary to freedom of choice and for Milton, choice is always historical, always contingent on context and circumstances. Royalist propaganda, for example, has no place in Milton's public sphere because the memory of the monarchy is still too fresh in the public consciousness and the associated risks are simply too high for that particular time and place. One must also remember that toleration is, for Milton and his peers, a very focused problem that was limited to a single religion. Rajan is correct, of course, to note that "Globalizing tolerance and multiplying its dimensions cannot be posed as a problem even on the horizons of Milton's thought" (136). That is, Milton can be for free speech in a fundamental sense and

also against it, in specific contexts: the liberal twenty-first-century concept of toleration would not have been a concept available to Milton in the seventeenth century.

One of Milton's great concerns in *Areopagitica* is that oversight of book publication not be made into a monopoly practice in which the licenser or group of licensers possess complete oversight over all publications. Rather, Milton sees the free market of ideas as a more beneficial alternative to licensing. In this market of ideas, books are always allowed to be published. After publication, they are expected to fend for themselves on the merit of what they have to offer to individuals and groups in the public sphere. This market, however, is not without regulation. In the early days of the still fragile commonwealth, Milton argues that it would be reckless to allow covertly royalist or papist books to be published, and it is this regulatory bent in *Areopagitica* that some critics have seized on in order to make the claim that Milton is perhaps not as devotedly in support of free speech as has been suggested by his liberal champions.

The question of free speech and the degree to which Milton champions it in *Areopagitica* is, no doubt, an interesting question, but more relevant for the purposes of this examination than determining whether or not Milton was for or against licensing is the question of how the marketplace of ideas was supposed to function. That is, if books are to be allowed to enter into the marketplace and compete freely in the public sphere (with the aforementioned exceptions, such as papist texts, which it seems would change frequently and be entirely contingent on historical circumstances), what did this competition look like? What sorts of epistemological tools would the participants in this marketplace need to possess in order to determine which books held promise and which did not? If we work

from the premise that Milton always gives us the tools we need to understand his texts—that, in other words, the act of reading *Areopagitica* ought to prepare the reader for the more important act of entering the marketplace of ideas and, as it were, making wise purchases—then, placed side by side, *Areopagitica* instructs us on the goals and methods of reading in a commonwealth and *Of Education* contains the program that will create individuals capable of participating in the sort of public sphere presented to us in *Areopagitica*.

The place to begin, in looking at *Areopagitica*, is the book itself. In reading *Areopagitica* as a defense of free speech, we risk making the mistake of thinking that the book, as it figures in the text, is a simple stand-in for speech in general, which it is not. Milton is, of course, concerned about problems of authorship and, more specifically, the inability of the author to provide an interpretive gloss on the text once it's left the safety of the authorial nest and entered the public sphere. These problems do not necessarily face the politician or the rhetorician in the same way they face the book, which is fundamentally disembodied from the author. Milton's earlier texts dealing with the book indicate anxiety about this problem and to some degree suggest that the book is perhaps an inadequate medium for the circulation of ideas.

Milton's interest in the tripartite relationship between the reader, the author, and the book is present throughout his body of work, and it is present as an important theme that runs throughout the 1645 volume of poetry. We see him struggle with this relationship in the volume itself, in the way in which he carefully (mis)represents himself to the reader in the title page, and in the ways in which he shapes his own authorial identity throughout the

volume by organizing and dating his own work.[7] He negotiates the relationship between the reader, author, and book more directly in his epigraph "On Shakespeare."

The first two couplets of the epigraph set up the central problem of the poem, in which the speaker attempts to determine what form a fit monument for Shakespeare would take by pointing to the inadequacy of an earthly monument:

> What needs my Shakespeare for his honour'd Bones,
> The labour of an age in piled Stones,
> Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid
> Under a Star-ypointing Pyramid? (1-4)

The speaker locates the value of Shakespeare's life in his "labour," and suggests that this labour is unable to find expression in either stone (an earthly, fixed material) or in the pyramid-shaped monument (a form that gestures toward Heaven). Both fail to reveal and instead conceal Shakespeare's accomplishments, which are hidden beneath the monuments. Because traditional monuments only symbolically represent the creator, they are "weak witness[es]" to Shakespeare's legacy. The actual monument, continues the speaker, was built by Shakespeare himself during his life and after his death and is composed of the "wonder and astonishment" that exists within his readers, and is constituted Shakespeare's own words. Unlike physical monuments that are fundamentally static and unchanging, the author's monument is ever-growing and ever-changing, so long as Shakespeare's words continue to affect their audience. By locating the authorial legacy in the effect of the authors works on

[7] Louis Martz, in *Poet of Exile*, describes how, in the 1645 volume, Milton takes "unusual care in dating his Latin poems, so as to make clear their youthfulness and the rising poet's precociousness" (39).

the mind of the reading public, Milton prefigures the argument he will later present in *Areopagitica*, in which books are again said to be a sort of posthumous extension of the author, containing the author's "precious life-blood" (*Riverside Milton,* 999). True to the genre, however, the sonnet complicates this idea in the following stanzas. After rejecting earthly monuments and making the implied question of the first two couplets explicit—"Dear son of Memory, great heir of fame, / What need'st thou such weak witness of they name?"—the speaker continues to address Shakespeare directly: "Thou in our wonder and astonishment / Hast built thyself a live-long monument" (7-8). As is often the case in Milton's poetry, the semantic crux of these two lines is located where we least expect it, in the preposition "in." To illustrate this point, compare the actual lines to this intentional misreading: "Thou to our wonder and astonishment / Hast built thyself a live-long monument." In the misreading, we, the readers, are astonished by that which Shakespeare has created (his books—his body of work). While this isn't what Milton writes, it's hard not to approach the poem with this idea in our minds—after all, most readers of Shakespeare will in fact locate Shakespeare's legacy in the body of Shakespeare's work rather than in the "wonder and astonishment" that Shakespeare has produced in his readers over time. As he often does, Milton writes the poem with a firm grasp on his reader's expectations and allows those expectations to linger on the edges of the text while he subtly asks us to challenge those expectations. On being asked where to locate Shakespeare's legacy, if not in earthly monuments, most of us immediately answer "in his book." Milton semantically anticipates this answer and redirects us away from the book as a vehicle of authorial essence and toward ourselves as readers. This is an important shift insofar as it is similar to the shift we see in *Areopagitica*, in which books—

which can be both good and bad, beneficial and malevolent—are given significantly less meaning than what is done with them and how they are read and consequently used. This subtle distinction represents both a fear, that books can be used in ways other than that which the author intends, and also a hope, that books can have fundamental effects on their readers in the material world.

The third quatrain continues the thematic movement of the first, in which we are made to hold the speaker's answer to the question up to our own answer to the question:

> For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art,
> Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
> Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book,
> Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,

In the absence of close reading, each line syntactically and rhythmically stresses Shakespeare's artistic production over the effect it has on the reader. In these lines we see the "slow-endeavouring art" of others and, in sharp contrast, the "easy" flow of Shakespeare's production. We see the pages of his "unvalued"—invaluable—book. We see the prophetic nature of his "Delphic lines." But, again, it is that which Shakespeare effects in his readers, not Shakespeare's words, pages, or books that ultimately contain his legacy: "Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving, / Dost make us marble with too much conceiving" (13-14). A couple of decades before Milton wrote his poem on Shakespeare, Ben Jonson published "To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author Mr William Shakespeare." In this poem, Jonson, too, grapples with the problem of where to locate Shakespeare's legacy. We see the seeds of Milton's decision to locate Shakespeare's legacy within the ongoing responses of his audience

in Jonson's verse: "Thou art a monument without a tomb, / And art alive still, while thy book doth live, / And we have wits to read, and praise to give." (22-24). Jonson locates Shakespeare's enduring legacy in the relationship between the physical books that Shakespeare has left behind and in the continued positive reception of his future readers.

The idea that the meaning of a text is derived from its reception in the public sphere appears in Milton's ode to John Rouse as well. The ode, written in response to Rouse's complaint that Milton has not yet sent him a copy of the 1645 volume of poetry, humanizes the book as the speaker fears that it has been lost in "some cave or hidden shelf," which Milton metaphorically characterizes as the "depths of Lethe," which is the very essence of that which has been forgotten, lost, and concealed (40-45). The book lives, for Milton and for many early modern poets, only as long as it plays a meaningful role in the public discourse. Remove the book into the private sphere and it loses its meaning as the author loses his legacy. Again, the 1645 volume of poetry is a good example of Milton's effort to shape his works' reception. We see an example of the interplay between the book's reception and the author in Milton's decision to describe his texts as citizens or as figurative stand-ins for the author. In Sonnet XI, for instance, in the 1673 volume, Milton describes his *Tetrachordon* as having "walk'd the Town a while, / Numbring good intellects" before becoming unpopular (3). The book, significantly, is a living, engaged interlocutor rather than a static object in the bookseller's stall. It walks through the public space of the town, participating in a public exchange of ideas with other intellects.

The balancing act between authorial intention and rights and the continued relevance and significance of the text in relation to the responses of its readers forms an essential

backdrop to understanding Milton's ideas about the roles of books in the public sphere. If books are defined by or are one part of a formula for meaning that is ultimately constituted by their readers, then authors often find themselves on the defense against the opinions of a fickle and often ill-informed public. Throughout his career, and in his early works in particular, we see Milton struggling to accept the loss of authorial control that publication represented. In any discussion about authorship and Milton, it is important to keep in mind that the very concept of the professional, published author was still a very young and fragile concept. For decades texts had been circulated among small, select groups of courtiers, and the dividing line between public and private was more fluid and less sharply defined than it was in the 1640s. Milton, like many authors of his period, struggled at times to maintain control over his textual products and at other times to relinquish that same control. At various points in his early prose works, there is direct attention paid to the problems of publication and authorship. Kevin Dunn, in his recent article "Milton among the monopolists," does an excellent job of explaining Milton's concern over authorial rights, as he is in *Eikonoklastes* when he condemns Charles I for improperly appropriating Sidney's *Arcadia*. Dunn discusses the ways in which Milton "lays the groundwork of authorial individualism necessary for a notion of authorial property" (190). Dunn continues to explain how Milton's representations of the authorial body in *Areopagitica* "imply a conception of texts with clear moments of origination in an enunciating subject, a subject that could at least theoretically claim proprietary rights over that text," while at the same time noting that, for Milton, the text "takes its value from its free circulation in the market-place—a text, that is, that can be owned without being embalmed" (190). Dunn is arguing, rightly so in my

mind, that Milton discovered a way of thinking about the relationship between the author, the text, and the audience in which the author was able to own the text, at least in a theoretical (perhaps even legal) sense, without "embalming" (making lifeless) the text, for the text would continue to live in the response of its audience.

The function of the book in society, of course, receives its fullest treatment in *Areopagitica*. Early in the text, Milton personifies the book, giving it agency in his pronouncement that both the Church and the Commonwealth should watch carefully how books "demeane themselves" (*Riverside Milton,* 999). Books, like men, can be "malefactors," for they are not "absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule was whose progeny they are" (999). Books, like men, may be killed, and their murder is, arguably, worse yet than the murder of a person. Men, Milton writes, are images of God; they are creatures that possess reason. Books, however, are reason itself, the very embodiment of reason. Books are like men but also unlike them in their life expectancy. They preserve and store up the life of man within their pages. To kill a book is to kill an "immortality" rather than a mere single life (999).

If books are the worldly embodiment of divine reason, as Milton suggests they are early in the tract, then what does it mean to read a book? Throughout *Areopagitica*, Milton stresses how readers are affected by books as central to the function of books. Books are, we are told, "as meats and viands are; some of good, some of evil substance," like infections that may sicken their reader, and like "usefull drugs and materialls" may be used to heal their reader (1005, 1007, 1008). In all three of these passages, Milton figures books as vehicles for changing the reader's fundamental state of being, for better and for worse. The question

suggested by the various personifications and representations of the book in the text all point to the overarching question posed by the text: what affect, in the end, do books have on readers? And, naturally, there is no simple answer to this question. Good books, it seems, can have bad effect on bad readers. Bad books, not surprisingly, can do good things in the hands of good readers. Good books can be written by bad authors and bad books can be written by good authors. The truth itself, when used improperly, can be heresy: "a man may be a hertick in the truth; and if he beleeve things only because his Pastor says so, or the Assembly so determines, yet the very truth he holds, becomes his heresie" (1015). At the very end of the text, there is a profound "indeterminacy," to use Fish's description, around what books actually do to their readers. This indeterminacy comes, of course, from the fact that meaning in books is produced in readers, much like Shakespeare's legacy was produced in the response to his texts rather than in the texts themselves. Given this clear indeterminacy of books, Milton's early emergence as a proto-copyright activist, as per Dunn's argument, makes sense. If meaning is constituted in reading—in the relationship between the text and the reader—and not an intrinsic part of the text itself, then that reading can be profoundly influenced by how the text is presented to the reader. Milton accepts, in a rather sophisticated way, that the author is unable to contain and curtail the meaning of a text, yet he is deeply concerned with the possibility that texts may be misappropriated and intentionally misused. The best example of this anxiety, perhaps, is Milton's attack on the king in *Eikonoklastes* for his plagiaristic appropriation of Sidney's *Arcadia* for his own purposes. This example of a book being manipulated by another speaker to speak against the values of the author strikes me as a logical consequence of Milton's

destabilizing understanding of the function of the text in social discourse. This understanding, in turn, leads us to ask not whether Milton thinks books should be licensed, or even whether Milton is concerned that a given book is good or bad, but how Milton thinks individuals come to read and understand books. If a book's value is not inherent in the book itself and in no way can be fixed within the book or within the author's intent, then is it possible to trace in *Areopagtica* Milton's thoughts on the "best practices" of reading for the seventeenth-century reformed protestant?

To answer this question of how people read, we must first understand why people read, which is implied at various points in Milton's argument against licensing. The *Areopagitica* contains two principle lines of attack against licensing: that effective licensing is not possible, and that if it were, it would not be desirable for it removes the possibility of expression of the will. The first argument is that essentially effective licensing is too complicated and is therefore fundamentally impossible to implement. In the context of the tract and the licensing order itself, a successful licensing program would entail the removal of all books that threaten the well-being of the commonwealth while also ensuring that authors and publishers can produce works in a climate that guarantees protections over their intellectual and economic property. In order for a licensing scheme of this magnitude to be effective, Milton argues, the state would have to employ unrealistically sophisticated licensers. Finding licensers that are more qualified than the intellectuals producing the texts under scrutiny is impossible. Moreover, Milton argues, the subject of the licensing act—books—is entirely arbitrary. At the core of licensing is the idea that it is possible to remove dissent, heresy, error, and other malignant ideas from the public sphere.

Books, Milton argues, are only one form that these ideas take. Indeed, "what ever thing we hear or see, sitting, walking, travelling, or conversing may fittly be call'd our book, and is of the same effect as writings are" (1010). Licensing books, consequently, is a slippery slope. If, hypothetically speaking, we were able to license all dangerous books and if we believed in this course of action, then, he argues, we would have little choice but to expand our licensing program into other spheres of public life: singing, dancing, discussion, and so on and so forth. The second attack on licensing is based on the claim that even if it were possible to enact an ideal licensing program—something that Milton clearly believes is not possible—the licensing program, if effective, would do more harm than good. The removal of bad ideas, according to his argument, only serves to dilute the efficacy and value of good ideas in the world, which can only be meaningful if they are freely chosen and adopted. That is, if we live in a world that contains only good, then we never are given the opportunity to choose that good because it is always the default choice. Good without choice, what Milton thinks of as "cloistered virtue," is no good at all, insofar as it denies human beings the opportunity to enact the most Christian act of all: choosing good over evil, and in doing so avoiding the bad decision of our prelapsarian ancestors. Even the prelapsarian world of *Paradise Lost* contains, as we will see, ample opportunities for choosing evil. These opportunities must be present for Milton, if the choices for good are to have any meaning.

That said, it's not difficult to miss the point here and to come to the conclusion that the job of Milton's Christian citizen of the commonwealth is to strive always to choose correctly. Fortunately, in *Areopagitica* there is no absolutely correct choice, for choice is always profoundly contextual and situational. Examples abound in the text of bad books and bad

ideas serving a good purpose for good people. We see St. John Cryostam reading "loose" works by Aristophanes in order to learn how to use invective in his own sermons. Dionysius Alexandrinus, Milton reminds us, read books written by heretics in order to "avail himself" against them. When questioned on this practice, he received a message from God himself telling him to "Read any books whatever come to thy hands, for thou are sufficient both to judge aright, and to examine each matter" (1005). St Paul, another example, was able to incorporate pagan Greek poetry into holy scripture without bringing "defilement" to himself or to scripture. Milton enacts his own argument, as he does throughout this text in subtle ways, by condemning Epicurius yet teaching Lucretius in his own classroom for the poem's scientific value. Bad books, Milton explains, may server readers who possess good judgement to "discover," "confute," "foreward," and "illustrate" (1005). A "wise man," we are told, "like a good refiner can gather gold out of the drossiest volume" (1008). A good man, then, is able to take good from a bad book as well as from a good book. The reverse, then, holds true. Give the best book to a fool, Milton explains, and it will do no more good than a bad book. Bad books, in the hands of bad men, will most likely do nothing, as in most cases, explains Milton, a bad book requires a teacher (or a priest) to do harm to a fool who in all likelihood won't understand it (1007).

Milton's argument, then, is that books do not have absolute, objective value that can be pinned down. Instead, the value of a book is entirely dependent on the effect it produces in its reader and, as a result, this value is always going to be situational and contextual. Meaning is not a thing that is inherent in a text; meaning is constituted in the act of reading. If the meaning of a book is contextual and situational, there can be no fixed grounds on

which to justify censorship of a text. Milton did, however, make exceptions for texts that brazenly denied the right of the reader to find subjective meaning in the act of reading. These exceptions included any papist texts as well as any work that was profoundly anti-reformation. This exception has been taken by some critics, mistakenly, to suggest that Milton is somehow in favor of licensing or that he is not adequately against licensing.

While Milton does expect his reader to determine at some level whether a given book is good or bad, the greater challenge is to determine whether a book is good or bad for the individual reader at the present time. Put somewhat differently, as readers we do not sit in judgment of books. Rather, we sit in judgment of ourselves and, in doing so, we come to be in a position where we are able to judge whether a specific book or idea has something to offer us at a present moment within a lifetime of spiritual development. This idea is what Milton refers to in the *Areopagitica* as Man's "leading capacity." (1005). While much of the preceding paragraphs of the tract focus on the ability of the good reader to judge the quality of a book, in this section, Milton argues that good readers will always take instruction from good books and caution from bad books.

How we judge the book itself, however, is less important than our judgment in determining what our intellectual diet will be. To the pure, all things are pure and to the sick, all food is sick. Luckily, most of Milton's readers are not entirely pure, nor are they entirely sick. In Heaven, where all would be good, there would be no point to reading. On earth, however, there is a point to reading; indeed, the process of choosing one's intellectual diet is exceedingly important. It is this choice—the choice of what to read, of what company to keep in the world of ideas—that is at the center of the *Areopagitica*. A man who has

slouched towards heresy, for example, demonstrates spiritual growth by choosing to resist reading heretical texts. A religious man, on the other hand, has no such concern. As always in Milton, there is a struggle, here, and the struggle is the struggle inherent in making difficult choices. Again and again, the tract returns to the importance of individual and positioned choice. There is, for instance, the image of the writer burning his own book while Milton tells us that the book being burned is not, of itself, necessarily bad—only bad for that person. There is also the converse of this situation, in which Milton describes the possibility of being a "heretic in truth," in which the individual speaks the truth but without conviction, understanding, or actual belief. Truth spoken in this context, argues Milton, is as bad as speaking a falsehood.

Much of the perceived ambiguity in *Areopagitica* derives, then, from the text's pervasive reluctance to assign a fixed value not just to texts, but to ideas in general. The problem in *Areopagitica* is a problem that can be found in any belief system that aggressively values openness and toleration as a core principle. When all ideas, by definition, potentially have value, then we may conclude that the idea that some voices in a discourse are destructive and should be silenced is, potentially, an idea with value. In that regard, by espousing a completely open exchange of ideas, *Areopagitica* necessarily allows for the possibility of censorship, the opposite of open exchange. This leads to an experience of reading the text in which Milton's argument, at times, turns back on itself and even seems to contradict itself. For example, after tracing the lineage of licensing back to the Roman church in order to denounce licensing, Milton asks a rhetorical question of the reader: "What though the Inventors were bad, the thing for all that may be good?" (1004). The

question is an important one, since it echoes the preceding pages, in which Milton argues that bad texts, such as those by Aristophanes, "the loosest of them all," can indeed serve productive functions.

The question, then, as to whether or not censorship as adopted by the Catholic church can possibly be good, given its origins, is a question that Milton must seriously address in order to remain true to the concept of bad authors producing good texts. However, the narrator of the pamphlet is not naive. He recognizes that the outward signs of a thing—in this case, the perceived ethical character of the historical regimes that adopted censorship and the reluctance of less despotic regimes to embrace licensing—ought to serve as a clue about how to approach it. Consequently, Milton suggests that we should distrust censorship and regard it as a "suspicious fruit" until we are able to analyze and dissect it (1004). Censorship becomes not only the cause for the pamphlet, but also a prime example of both what kinds of things his reader should question, and how they should be questioned. The worse the idea appears to be, in other words, the more actively the Miltonic subject ought to be compelled to engage it and to submit it to deep interrogation. Ultimately, of course, Milton rejects popery, for it is ultimately contrary to his doctrine of intellectual openness: "as it extirpats all religions and civill supremacies, so it self should be extirpat," but only after making an honest effort to instruct and convert. Milton's belief in freedom of speech extends to all except that which undermines that very freedom, and even then, only that which does so aggressively, for under the "bond of peace," reasoned discussion is always possible, even among those who hold opposite opinions (1022).

The world of *Areopagitica,* then, is one in which the outward appearance of things (including people, ideas, and books) gives us clues as to how we should respond to them, but does not necessarily act as reliable signifiers of their moral character. Indeed, throughout *Areopagitica* Milton draws our attention to the ever-present gap between signifier and signified. De Saussure has enabled generations of literary critics to build off of the discovery that there is not a natural, inevitable connection between the "meaning" of the text (the signified), and the text itself (the signifier). Following from this foundational concept, Anthony Easthope synthesizes early structuralist linguistic theory, Russian formalism, Marxist theory, and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to demonstrate, compellingly so, that literature in general (and poetry in particular) is fundamentally discursive and that "the meaning of a text is always produced in a process of reading" (7). Easthope acknowledges that texts are materially and ideologically determined by the material conditions of the text's being as well as by the historical conditions that allow the text to come into being. His focus, however, is on the ways in which literature is "subjectively determined" and is a "product of the reader, for whom it offers a position as transcendental ego" (47).

Like Easthope and Easthope's theoretical predecessors, Milton understands that it is not possible to ascribe a fixed meaning to a text, and throughout the text we see Milton resisting the urge to lay out rules for gauging the social value of a text. Because meaning (and, therefore, civic value) is not inherent in the text itself, it is impossible to effectively determine guidelines for allowing and disallowing texts, which will, in turn, render any licensing useless and ineffectual. This core indeterminacy is what allows Milton seemingly to

contradict himself when, for example, he clearly says that the state should not tolerate "Popery and open superstition" while he himself is able to cite freely Catholic texts as sources for his argument, as he does on a couple occasions when he cites Pietro Sarpi's *Istoria del Conilio Tridention* (1022). The text constituted by Milton in his reading and use of Sarpi is, ultimately, a vastly different thing than the same text potentially would be in the hands of the general public. To license, then, is always already ineffectual because that which it licenses has no absolute meaning in the public sphere.

The argument I am making here—that *Areopagitica* embraces the inability of texts to signify in stable ways due to the contextual nature of reading in which reading is necessarily an encounter between a variable (the reader) and a constant (the text)— is very much influenced by Fish's argument in *How Milton Works*. In "Driving from the Letter: Truth and Indeterminacy in Milton's *Areopagitica*," Fish sensationalizes his important argument by couching it in what seems, at first glance, to be an attack on the reading of the *Areopagitica* that characterizes Milton as the "apostle of unrestrained freedom" (188). Fish's stated position, at the beginning of the chapter, is that:

> Milton is finally, and in a profound way, not against licensing, and that he has almost no interest at all in the 'freedom of the press' as an abstract or absolute good (and, indeed, does not unambiguously value freedom at all); and that his attitude toward books is informed by none of the reverence that presumably led the builders of the New York Public Library to have this sentence from the tract preside over their catalogue room: 'A good Booke is the precious life-

> blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and teasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life. (189)

By the end of the chapter, however, Fish lands in a far less polemic position, in which he explains that by abolishing Licensing, Milton is able to recreate every human subject as licenser:

> Ironically it is only by permitting what licensing would banish—the continual flow of opinions, arguments, reasons, agendas—that the end of licensing—the fostering of truth—can be accomplished; accomplished not by the external means that licensing would provide, but by making ourselves into the repository of the key values that licensing misidentifies when it finds them in a world free of defiling books. (211)

By following the advice of *Areopagitica*—by constantly engaging in the hopeless battle between truth and falsehood—we become a licenser, "someone who is continually exercising a censorious judgment" (211). Fish is correct in his claims that the *Areopagitica* is always pushing the reader away from the texts that it cites and, in the end, away from *Areopagitica* itself (206). In Fish's description of Milton's take on the function of reading (or the function of the social exchange of ideas), texts have very little to offer readers except for the repeated reminder that what the reader is looking for—Truth—will not be found in the text or, for that matter, in any other text. Licensing, as a political act, removes or reduces the space in which this reminder exists by implicitly suggesting that individual texts can serve a unique purpose (as in, this text can offer me, the reader, something that another text cannot) rather than a universal purpose of demonstrating over and over again that all texts are necessarily

incomplete fragments of the truth, which in turn can never be completely reconstituted, never made whole again, by the individual. Citing *Paradise Regained*, Fish reminds us that to be a "living oracle" is to be a "totally unified being," a state of being that is profoundly unattainable by postlapsarian man (212).

And with this, we're full circle, back to the opening arguments in *Surprised by Sin*, in which Milton's texts invariably serve to remind us that we are always already fallen and that the place from which we have fallen may be regained, but may never be reconstructed in the here and now. Because Fish has chosen to couch his argument in polemic—by painting Milton as somehow contrary to modern liberalism and as opposed to free speech, a claim that is perhaps the least compelling and least convincing of all of Fish's arguments—it is easy to read this analysis of *Areopagitica* as yet another reading of Milton in which the reader is engaged in an endless cat-and-mouse game with no reward at the end. To read Fish in this way, however, is to misunderstand his argument. The low point of the tract—that "genuine knowledge" is fundamentally unavailable to man—is also the high point for Fish, in which, looked at from a different perspective, man is able to constantly renew, refresh, and "drive" forward through the process of searching for that which is unavailable (211). The lesson of the tract, then, is "the lesson that we can never stop" in our search for an unattainable truth, for it is in the related acts of searching and choosing that we enact the role of Christian subject.

By showing the ways in which Fish fails to take into consideration his own theory based on the notion of an interpretative community, Peter Herman has aligned Fish with the camp of critics who see Milton as a "poet of certainty." It is true that in many places

throughout Fish's works, the Milton he creates is indeed a seemingly singular, univocal figure. He does this, ultimately, with *Areopagitica*—in the end, it appears that Fish's goal is, in a final and decisive way, to declare what Milton thought about censorship, and about the roles of books and ideas in man's path to salvation. In this regard, Fish's argument works against itself, and one wonders if, in the process of writing about *Areopagitica*, Fish considered the irony of arguing for a totalizing vision of Milton's "meaning" in the text. Clearly, throughout Fish's chapter, the Milton whom he formulates is a man who saw a profound lack of certitude in intellectual discourse. Truth, as we are famously told in *Areopagitica*, has fled from the field and shows little signs of returning. Rather than focus on what this means for licensing or for freedom of speech, which I agree is really rather secondary to the general thrust of the text, I want to suggest that *Areopagitica* opens up a far more important question than what we should read, and that is how we should read. Looking at Milton—a practicing educator for many years and later in his life, a licenser—through the lens of seventeenth-century educational writings reveals Milton to be a poet of uncertainty, a poet who was much more interested in instructing his reader in how to read and think for herself than in telling her what to think, or how to act.[8] Fish understands this, I think, in a very important way, insofar as he understands speech acts to be essentially contextual and determined by the tripartite relationship between speaker, audience, and speech, and his tendency to return to the reader's experience is an important illustration of the privileged regard in which Milton,

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[8] It is worth noting the numerous occasions in *Areopagitica* in which Milton draws strict connections between licensing and teaching. Milton refers to those who licensing seeks to stop as "false teachers" and describes the "backwardest schollers" of the reformation, those who could have instead become God's "teachers" (1022, 1019). He also famously closely aligns the licenser with the "pupil teacher" and the instructor with the 'overseeing fist" (1012). For Milton, the roles of licensor, teacher, and prophet were points on a single continuum.

in particular, held his reader, who he often treats as a sort of student. When Herman's text points to the value of Fish's work, it does so by returning to Fish's work on interpretive communities and on speech acts, and that too is an important illustration of just how central the reader is to Milton's works.

The production of what Sharon Achinstein calls the "fit reader" is, then, at the heart of Milton's educational program and at the heart of his poetic and prose texts, and it is within the moments of instruction, throughout his texts, that Milton most clearly works to produce this reader. Given the importance and centrality of the reader to Milton's entire artistic project, it follows that reading would hold a central position in the educational program outlined in *Of Education*. If *Areopagitica* instructs us in what to read and instructs Milton's reader to look to her own spiritual authority as her guide in choosing which texts to read and which to avoid, then *Of Education* offers us a set of guidelines on how to read. The tractate opens with a strong parallel to *Areopagitica*. In the former, Milton tells us that the end of learning is to "repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright," which recalls the passage in *Areopagitica* in which Milton reminds his reader that the human condition is a constant struggle to find the scattered limbs of truth, which cannot be repaired until the second coming, at which point in time Christ "shall bring together every joynt and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection" (1018). Both *Areopagitica* and *Of Education* ask their readers to engage in the constant struggle for truth, "to be still searching what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it" (1018).

This idea, in which we search for that which we do not know by way of that which we do know, is the fundamental epistemological process that is at the heart of Milton's educational program, and he expresses it in various ways throughout *Of Education*. One way that this idea plays out in Milton's pedagogy can be seen in his decision to follow the pedagogy of Comenius and Dury by seeking the spiritual world by way of the sensible world:

> But because our understanding cannot in this body found it selfe but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible, as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessary to be follow'd in all discreet teaching. (980)

Knowledge is, then, incremental and contextual. Students are to be taught subjects that build properly on the knowledge that they already possess. Moreover, the Miltonic teacher is careful to remember that just as knowledge proceeds from the sensible, language proceeds from the tangible. Language is, along those lines, "the Instrument convaying to us things usefull to be known" and not a substantial educational subject in and of itself (980). The highly contextualized view of language and instruction is, then, very much in keeping with the conditional values that Milton places on books in *Areopagitica*. Just as it is possible for a reader to be a heretic in truth, and for bad books to do good things for the right person in the right spiritual context, the subjects *Of Education* take value by their place in the curriculum—by their context, rather than their content. Consequently, we see Milton stress that subjects should always be taught "in due order"—and that language instruction should stress the "substance" of things rather than the surfaces of language itself (981).

In keeping with the emphasis on the strong relationship between the curriculum of Milton's ideal school and the material world that his students will eventually occupy, *Of Education* is structurally split into three sections on the students' studies, their exercise, and their diet. In a surprisingly non-bookish gesture, Milton devotes a significant portion of his tract to expounding on the responsibility of the teacher to attend not just to the student's mind and spirit, but to his body as well. Within the tract, Milton does not distinguish between the mind and body as separate entities. Rather he sees them both as equal gateways to the construction of the student's Christian self. Physical exercise is directly and explicitly correlated with the student's spiritual and moral qualities. As the Christian truth-seeker progressively and methodically utilizes existing truth to create new truths out of that which was unknown, the student's physical training progressively leads to important moral and spiritual qualities:

> The exercise which I commend first, is the exact use of their weapon, to guard and to strike safely with edge, or point; this will keep them healthy, nimble, and strong, and well in breath, is also the likeliest means to make them grow large and tall, and to inspire them with a gallant and fearless courage, which being temper'd with seasonable lectures and precepts to them of true fortitude, and patience, will turn into a native and heoick valour, and make them hate the cowardise of doing wrong. (985)

What stands out here is the syntactic drive that propels this sentence forward with each subordinate clause. Repeated exercise of the body leads to physical growth. Physical growth leads to personal growth in the form of courage, which, when combined with proper

instruction and study, leads to individual valor and hatred of bad deeds. The physical program, in its determined movement from the physical to the spiritual, is in keeping with the progressivism of the intellectual program of study that he lays out in the preceding pages of the tractate. We see similar structures at other points in the tractate as well. The act of studying abroad, for example, is not just an opportunity to expand the horizon of the young student's understanding. Rather, it is just the starting point for a progressive, incremental movement from the simple act of traveling to another country to a sweeping change in which other nations will be inspired to imitate the English ways (986).

It is particularly telling, then, that Milton chooses to end his description of his ideal school's curriculum with poetry. Unlike any other educational program put forth in the period, Milton's is capped with the instruction of the "sublime art" of poetry and drama (984). Only at the end of the student's course of study, which has included instruction in grammar and languages, arithmetick and geometry, natural sciences and philosophy, and ethics and theology, is the student ready to proceed to the study of poetry per se. And lest it seem that this placement of poetry is left to chance, Milton is careful to stress that "from hence and not till now will be the right season of forming them to be able writers and composers in every excellent matter" (984). The underlying goal of this phase of the student's curriculum is to prepare him for a role in public life or in the reformed church, and the student would be empowered by having been shown "what Religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of Poetry both in divine and human things" (984). It is surprising, given the underlying pragmatism of the tractate that Milton lands on poetry the

way he does, but it is also telling, for poetry is, for Milton, the battlefield in which the struggle for truth ultimately takes place.

3. "By certaine signs I knowe:" the Possibilities and Limits of Education in *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*

A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle is ostensibly structured around a series of trials that, on closer analysis, prove not to be trials at all. In any case, they are not trials in the sense of trial "by what is contrary" that Milton articulates in *Areopagitica.* Certainly critics have had good cause to focus on the importance of the trial throughout Milton's works. In *Of Education*, as we have seen, Milton boldly declares that the end of learning is "to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright" and includes poetry as an important component of that education (980). *Of Education* gives us the goal, then, but *Areopagitica* provides us with the method:

> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. (*Riverside Milton*, 1006)

We recover the ruins of our parents through repeated purification, and the vehicle for our purification, Milton explains, is trial by what is contrary. Indeed, for Milton, the very act of

teaching is itself a sort of trial that requires subjects who are up to the important challenge it represents. Milton turns to the trial in his closing address to Hartlib at the end of *Of Education*, where he again excuses himself for not writing a more detailed work: "many other circumstances also I could have mention'd, but this to such as have the worth in them to make triall, for light and direction may be anough" (986). Those who "make trial," Milton suggests, have less need of detailed, methodical instructions; for they are guided by their own light and direction, not by the words of others. By downplaying the tractate's ambitions, Milton downplays the text's ability to create revolutionary educators out of its readers. Indeed, it is as though the tractate speaks to a private club, to those readers who are already on the road to purification and who need only slight, prodding instruction rather than the step-by-step methodology of a modern *Janua* or *Didactics*.[9]

The centrality of the trial runs throughout Milton's later works as well, where it often takes the form of a temptation. In his *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, Milton describes the good kind of temptation that God uses to test man:

> A good temptation is that whereby God tempts even the righteous for the purpose of proving them, not as though he were ignorant of the disposition of their hearts, but for the purpose of exercising or manifesting their faith or patience, as in the case of Abraham or Job; or of lessening their self-confidence, and reproving their weakness, that both they themselves may

[9] Stanley Fish takes a similar view of the Lady in *Comus* in *How Milton Works*: "The Lady of course is already proceeding in the light, if only because it is a light she shed" (161).

> become wiser by experience, and others may profit by their example. (Sumner, 255)

Milton contrasts the good temptation to the bad temptation, which is used primarily to expose hypocrisy on the part of the sinners, hypocrisy being the one thing that, according to the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, is "Invisible, except to God alone" (3.684). The *Christian Doctrine's* notion of the trial as the means by which God not only reveals but also improves—through self-realization—the Christian subject is in accordance with *Areopagitica's* portrayal of the trial as a vehicle for self-purification. Here, as elsewhere, Milton in his poetry tests and pushes back against the more concrete propositions of his prose. In *Paradise Lost,* Eve echoes the sentiment of *Areopagitica* as she asks Adam "what is Faith, Love, Vertue unassaid / Alone, without exterior help sustaind?" (9.335-336). But Adam questions the eagerness with which Eve seeks her trial by reminding her that "Trial will come unsought" (9.366).

Critics of Milton's maske have increasingly come to see evidence of the trial in the various initiations that take place in the text. William Schullenberger reads the text as a revolutionary re-writing of the Stuart Masque, in which "Milton subsumes the customary and conservative genre of celebratory monarchic liturgy into the novel and progressive task of initiation of the conscientious early modern self" (70). Schullenberger returns to *Areopagitica* frequently in his argument to remind us that the contrary in Milton's "trial by what is contrary" is not limited to external threats and temptations. That which is contrary, he explains, can also be found "in the inward motions of heart, will, and mind, with which external threats and temptations often correspond" (117). For Schullenberger, the Lady's

response to the temptation presented by Comus contains a sharpening of her "as yet unchallenged chastity" into a mature virtue that is fit for "divine service and praise" (117-118). In *Milton's Puritan Masque*, Maryann McGuire takes a similar position on the centrality of the trial, arguing that by the narrative's end, the children have progressed through a formative process and have come out the other side in possession of refined virtue to the approbation of their parents and the audience:

> The children's repeated mistakes and their need for continuing education are a necessary part of their 'trial by what is contrary.' Not only is their youngling virtue tested and purified by its encounter with vice, but also truth gradually emerges through experience with error. The children learn a series of lessons regarding their abilities, the nature and power of evil, and the aids and weapons available to them. Their virtue intact and strengthened by trial, they are finally welcomed triumphantly into their parents' presence. (87)

McGuire and Schullenberger are backed by earlier criticism of the Masque that takes the Elder Brother's words—that "even that which mischief meant most harm, shall in the happy trial prove most glory"—as a sure sign that the Lady and the brothers have undergone a typically Miltonic trial by contraries (591-592). In John S. Diekhoff's classic collection of essays on *A Maske*, for example, C.L. Barber supports his claim that the Masque fulfills its generic requirements by arguing that its various movements support the text's central theme, a "trial of chastity" (198). In the same volume, E.M.W. Tillyard's "The Action of Comus" describes how "the emphasis is on the trial and the struggle, through the winning of which Virtue may legitimately be reconciled with Pleasure" (55).

But where is the true trial in this text? And if there is a trial, what lessons can we claim that the children have learned? At the play's end, the younger brother continues to mistrust the efficacy of chastity. For his part, the elder brother fails to succeed in taking action, as he does throughout the play, bursting onto the scene only to fail at the one significant task—snatching Comus's wand—that was explicitly entrusted to him. The Lady does not give way under pressure, but what lesson does she learn about her abilities or about the powers of Chastity? Her temptation takes place after she's been given multiple indications that to accept that which is offered to her would be foolish and self-destructive. The Lady neither bests Comus physically—were it not for the Spirit, she would remain bound to her chair—nor does she best him in argument, for she steadfastly refuses to engage him in discourse. Her response to the proffered trial is not to engage, but to assert.

In short, Milton's conception of the trial in the Masque is significantly less developed than it is in *Areopagitica*. Indeed, in the Masque, we see indications that Milton is of two minds when it comes to education and purification by way of the trial. On one hand, the Milton of both 1634 and 1644 is deeply skeptical about the possibilities for external forces—teachers, books, ideas—to make Christian subjects anything other than that which they already are. On the other hand, Milton commits himself in his poetry and his prose to testing the degree to which subjects can become virtuous following a test of virtue. This uncertainty about the possibilities of education is present, as I will demonstrate below, throughout Milton's body of work.

Blake's reading of Comus, by way of his illustrations, provides a precedent for questioning both the centrality and effectiveness of the trial in the Masque. His illustrations

consistently downplay the threat that Comus presents to the Lady. Indeed, in the 1815 illustrations created for Thomas Butts, Blake's depiction of Comus is quite similar to that of the two brothers. Both Comus and the brothers have close-cut, curly hair and are wearing similar, almost transparent, clothing. Comus' face possesses the same gentle, soft innocence of youth that we see in the brothers. The effect of these similarities is to place Comus within the same juvenile world that all of the children occupy in the forest. The difference between the 1801 and 1815 representation of the moment of temptation in which Comus offers his cup to the Lady is representative of the general softening that the narrative undergoes at Blake's hand (see illustrations, below). Blake's representation of Comus underwent a number of changes in the later version. Blake softens Comus' facial features and gives him a more boyish body, thereby downplaying his overt sexuality and masculinity. Moreover, Comus' bestial entourage are softened considerably as well. In the earlier version, the creatures at the table are avian, with sharp beaks and lacking most human facial features. In the latter version, however, Blake accentuates the wide-eyed wonder of the monsters, replacing the hard beaks with soft fur and the animals of childhood: lions, elephants, and cats. The character of Comus, for Blake, came to represent not so much a threat, but an opportunity. Stephen Behrendt has convincingly argued that Blake's illustrations of Comus are representative of Blake's abiding belief that the Masque was an ideological and artistic failure: "Blake considered *Comus* the record of Milton's reversion to oppressive moralizing [...] The Lady's response to Comus's temptation, to which Milton devotes such attention, is exposed as no proper response at all, but rather a paralyzing retreat from salutary psychological conflict" (41). I believe that Milton had not yet fully formed his concept of

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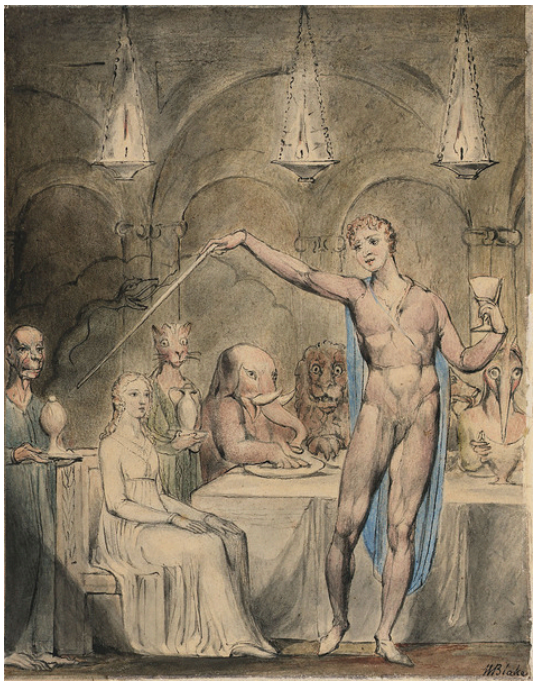

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salutary conflict in 1634 and, moreover, that throughout his career he continued to find it difficult to move away from his tendency to see individuals as spiritually fixed and already predisposed to stand or to fall.

Irene Tayler has argued, in "Say First! What Mov'd Blake" that Blake viewed the character of Comus as an expression of the Lady's divided being. "When a thing is divided," explains Tayler, "reunion seems like death to the separated parts—as indeed it is death to their separateness" (243). In Tayler's view, Blake understood Comus and his wild rout to be a threat that existed solely within the Lady's mind, "the very expression of her mind's terrible bondage" (244). According to Tayler, this is why Blake decorates the Lady's chair with images of the serpent, which are representative of the Lady's fallen commitment to moral

law and division between the sexes. [10] If we accept Tayler's articulation of Blake's retelling, it is difficult to see where a process of initiation takes place in the poem. By rejecting Comus' cup—a decision that Tayler suggests Blake would have agreed with, since Comus represents masculine power and continued sexual division—the Lady does not reject her divided view of the world. Rather, she reinforces it by clinging to chastity and its presumption of female sexual power over men. Perhaps in reducing Comus' threat of male sexuality by aligning him more closely with the narcissistic and asexual brothers in 1815, Blake is attempting to introduce his own trial into the text. We might read the desexualized Comus of the 1815 illustrations as an effort on Blake's part to suggest that the Lady's temptation is not to resist the false choice of dangerous male sexuality, but rather to give in to Comus' charms by denying the false moral law her chastity represents.

The masque contains three individuals whom we can think of as students (the Lady, the younger brother, and the older brother), as well as three whom we can think of as teachers (the Attendant Spirit, Comus, and Sabrina). In keeping with this division, a number of critics have commented on the instructional function of the masque. Lewalski, in *The Life of John Milton*, for example, reads the masque as a fundamentally instructional text that attempts to teach virtue through its demonstration by the play's youths. Milton's masque, claims Lewalski, "makes large claims for the poet's educative role as it locates virtue in, and teaches virtue to, a worthy noble family" (76). McGuire suggests that the three youths "undergo an educational experience that alters their basic assumptions about themselves and

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[10] In the 1815 illustrations, Blake makes the serpent more visible. He removes the image of the serpent from the chair and places its ghost-like figure floating above the Lady's head, running parallel to Comus' wand.

their world" (61). However, for a text that is so outwardly concerned with the education of children—the masque is an opportunity for the Bridgewater children to perform their virtue, their competence, and their good judgment for their parents and presumably for their parents' peers—its participants are left relatively unchanged at the play's end.

The principal characters do not experience epiphanies in this text, and the trial seems consistently staged, unlike, for example, the central trial in *Paradise Lost,* which makes every outward effort to convince us that its trials are fair and honest tests. The young lady in the masque ends with her chastity and her faith in the power of that chastity intact, as it presumably was before she encountered Comus. Indeed, at no point in the narrative does her devotion to and faith in her chastity waver in the face of temptation. As the Lady is unwavering in her faith, the younger brother is unwavering in his fear. Despite the younger brother's discussion with the Elder brother and the Attendant Spirit, in which both try to persuade him to put his faith in the safety of a chaste soul, the younger brother's final spoken words—"Is this the confidence you gave me Brother?"—do not contain signs of a changed mind, and instead reiterate the doubt with which he enters the masque (582). The elder brother, more like his sister, ends the masque in possession of the certainty with which he began, convinced that the chaste soul will be protected from both physical and spiritual harm. Throughout the course of the masque, these attitudes are challenged, but in meeting these challenges, the children only re-affirm what they already know. They do not end the play profoundly changed (unlike, for example, Adam and Eve, who leave the garden as transformed individuals with new choices ahead of them) and in this regard the play offers a very different picture of the trial than does *Paradise Lost*.

This lack of change makes Milton's masque rather unlike most other masques. Change, transformation, growth, renewal: these concepts are at the very heart of the early modern masque. Stephen Orgel, in "The Poetics of Spectacle," states this idea succinctly: "it is the transformation of both masquer and spectator, of the whole court, that the masque as a form undertakes" (384). While the theme of transformation is absent on the level of character development, representations of transformation are not. Comus offers the traveler Circe's cup, transforming him into a beastly parody of the human form; the mysterious Haemony, which John Ulreich describes as a central symbol of transformation in the text, has a transformative effect within the narrative structure by allowing the Lady to move from a state of captivity to a state of liberty, but it does not seem to significantly transform her spiritual or mental state of being (119). Quite the opposite, in fact: the Lady reveals her virtue and the virtue of her family (and, by extension, her father's virtue and the virtue of the state he represents) by stubbornly resisting transformation, by utterly refusing to be anything other than that which she always already was. Her mind, then, is fixed throughout the text. Ann Baynes Coiro has argued that Milton's masque is in many ways more closely aligned with the "academic environment out of which Milton's early work grows" than it is with the Carolinian masque (620). As he so often does in his writing, Milton sloughs off the traditional expectations of the generic form that circumscribes his work and its horizon of expectation.

Characteristically, and in a clear rejection of the ethos of the Carolinian court, Milton initially appears to replace the moment of transformation with the moment of the trial. Indeed, the Lady specifically describes her situation as a trial, asking "blest providence" to

"square my trial / To my proportion'd strength." (329-30). Milton took particular care with this line in his revisions to the text, changing the phrase "square this trial" to "square my trial," thereby emphasizing that the trial is hers and hers alone and that as such it is particularly suited to her abilities. Similarly, when the children are presented to their parents at the end of the narrative, a moment that symbolically maps the character's spiritual victories onto the masquers who enact those victories, the Spirit also expresses the children's actions as a test that they have apparently passed:

> "Heav'n hath timely *tri'd* their youth,
> Their faith, their patience, and their truth.
> And sent them here through hard assays
> With a crown of deathless Praise,
> To triumph in victorious dance
> O're sensual Folly, and Intemperance. (970-75).

This passage contains an important distinction between that over which the children have triumphed—sensual folly and intemperance—and those qualities that have been tested: their youthfulness, faith, patience, and truth. Yet, at no point in the masque does Milton portray any of the three children as potentially falling prey to folly or intemperance. The Lady is not Eve, and she never appears to be in danger of giving in to Comus' persuasive rhetoric or to the material temptations he presents to her. Similarly, if the brothers are tempted, they are tempted by doubt, which is a test of faith, but not by sensory or worldly temptations.

What role do the various adults in the masque—the Attendant Spirit, Comus, and Sabrina—have in helping the children to navigate the challenges that the text presents? The

first and most apparent teacher-figure in the play is the Attendant Spirit, who "Soveran Jove" has dispatched to the woods for the "defense, and guard" of the three youths (42-43). In his opening monologue, the Attendant Spirit announces that his goal is to provide "safe convoy" to those who are lost in the woods, and this wording reveals him to be a protector and a guide. The spirit enters the woods to provide safe passage for his charges, but the Attendant Spirit is not sent to aid all lost travelers. Indeed, he suggests that he only assists the lost who are not truly lost, those who "by some due steps aspire / To lay their just hands on that Golden Key" (12-13). There is a gentle irony in these lines, in the idea that the Attendant Spirit claims to help those who are "forlorn and wandering," he also claims to be sent only for those who proceed "by some due steps." (40). To travel with due steps is, by definition, to travel with purpose and direction, which is not to be lost. The Attendant Spirit, then, is not in the woods to help just any traveler; indeed, we can assume that he was not sent to help those previous travelers who now constitute Comus' rout, which begs the question of why he is sent at all, if those whom he has been sent to help are not truly in need of his help.

The irony behind the motivation for the Attendant Spirit's presence in the woods is indicative of the ways in which Milton presents an image or a concept to the reader in order then to deconstruct or call into question its outward significance. For example, the opening monologue suggests that, to some degree, all who proceed through the woods of the masque are lost, due steps or not. Indeed, the opening monologue is rife with imagery of wandering and of travelers being led by guides. The Attendant Spirit has come to the aid of the "forlorn and wandring passinger," seemingly to lead him safely from the woods (40). The

true lord of the forest, "A noble Peer of mickle trust," has been charged with guiding the "Old, and haughty Nation." Odysseus and his "Tuscan Mariners," classical figures of travel, wandering, and eventual homecoming, appear as well, and cement the idea that this narrative is less about resisting the temptation that Comus represents than it is about a sub-text of journeying, wandering, and finding a way back home. But, the narrative also draws into question these images. The wandering passenger travels with "due steps," suggesting directional certainty. The notion of wandering with due steps is paradoxical, of course—wandering is, by definition, the act of traveling without direction, while traveling with due steps is the act of traveling with direction. This paradox is, however, a perfect encapsulation of the spiritual condition in which the Lady finds herself. On one hand, she is literally lost, wandering in the woods in search of her brother. However, her literal wandering in the material world is not indicative of her spiritual bearing, which is guided by the "due steps" of her chastity. There is a tension (that is also, from another perspective, a sort of non-tension), then, in the opening monologue between being lost and knowing where one is going, between forgetting one's "native home" like Comus' victims, and remembering it in order to find it, like Odysseus, the youths, and even Comus himself who roved "the Celtick, and Iberian fields" in his youth before finding a home in the "Ominous woods" (59-60).

Other images in the opening monologue also express this kind of semantic tension such as the description of those men who live "confin'd, and pester'd" in a "pin-fold" (8). Milton casts their activity as a "feaverish" striving, generating both "smoak and stir"; there is a frenetic, pointless energy to their labors that contrasts against the confinement of their prison. The image suggests simultaneously both imprisonment and movement, stasis and stir

(9,5). The Attendant Spirit, then, is a guide in a world of travelers, but not a guide to all travelers. Rather, he is a guide to those who may be materially lost, but not spiritually lost. The people whom the Attendant Spirit guides are those who, if we are to believe the elder brother, are in the least need of that help. And it is in this sense that we can begin to think about the Attendant Spirit as a teacher and, more importantly, we can begin to think about Miltonic teachers in general as guides whose role is not to teach by precept or by example, but rather by creating the circumstances and contexts that will allow the students to express and act upon their own resources of reason and will in response to the challenges that confront them. We can also begin to think about the Miltonic teacher as being relatively powerless, relatively incapable of having much of an impact upon students. This powerlessness, I will argue, is an example of the tendency in Milton's works to fluctuate between placing great hope on the possibilities of education while simultaneously expressing doubt about its capacity for bringing about spiritual and mental improvement in its subjects.

If the Attendant Spirit is a teacher, then the two brothers are consummate early modern schoolboys. Milton structures the conversation between the two brothers as a school-room debate, and the elder brother relies heavily on academic proofs in order to make his case. As he tries to convince the younger brother that virginity is fundamentally unassailable, the elder brother relies first on hearsay to make his case—"Some say no evil thing that walks by night […] / Hath hurtful power o're true virginity"—and then, in keeping with the training any Renaissance schoolboy would have received, by an appeal to classical authority: "Do you believe me yet, or shall I call / Antiquity from the old Schools of Greece / To testifie the arms of Chastity?" (432-440). The brother follows this appeal to

authority with a rhetorical antithesis between the ascendant soul, driven by chastity, and the descendant soul, driven by lust. Convincing though his argument may be, it doesn't seem to achieve its intended effect, which is both to comfort the younger brother and to spur the youths to action in order to rescue their sister. The younger brother's response to the elder brother's argument is striking in the degree to which it ignores the dangers in which all three youths find themselves. "How charming is divine philosophy," exclaims the younger brother in response, "Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose, / But musical as is Apollo's lute" (476-477). The elder brother's argument, scholastic in its approach to the problem at hand, is not grounded in the present moment and the younger brother's response confirms this influence. The charm of "divine philosophy" and disputation is a seductive distraction in this context.

Moreover, the metaphor of Apollo's lute that the younger brother chooses recalls a similar line in *Love's Labor's Lost* and the passage containing the line, which is a monologue about the overwhelming power not of chastity but of love. Love is, according to Berowne, "Subtile as Sphinx, as sweet and musical / As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair" (4.3.339-340). Somehow, the elder brother's defense of chastity so confuses the younger brother that he mistakes what kind of story he is in, misconstruing the dangers of these woods for the comedy of *Love's Labor's Lost*. In fact, the younger brother is far closer to the truth of the Lady's situation than he realizes, when he imagines her held "within the direfull grasp / of Savage hunger, or of Savage heat," an image that foreshadows Comus' infamous "gums of glutinous heat" (357-358). Milton's allusion to Shakespeare's play is a revealing moment of intertextuality. In *Love's Labor's Lost*, the king and his attendant lords

have sworn an oath to live for three years without the company of women in order to make "a little academe" of the court. The lord's mock-vow of chastity focuses the play on what Mark Breitenberg in "The Anatomy of Male Desire in 'Love's Labor's Lost'" calls a "structure of desire"(446). This structure, argues Breitenberg, "positions men as desiring subjects and women as inaccessible objects of desire; desire itself is generated by the forms through which it is mediated, by the obstacles it confronts, and by the fact that desire can only glimpse rather than reach its end" (446). The structure of desire, suggest Brietenberg, is an expression of a typical early modern form of patriarchy, in which women derive power over men by withholding their sexuality (in the form of chastity or virginity), or by offering it seemingly without restraint (in the form of cuckoldry). Viewed from this perspective, the play is a particularly inappropriate sub-text for the younger brother's speech. At the culmination of a debate about the efficacy of his sister's chastity in the face of temptation and, worse, the threat of material force, the younger brother inadvertently recalls a narrative in which men comically attempt to uphold their own failed attempts at chastity. In doing so, the brother mistakenly aligns himself with the courtiers of *Love's Labor's Lost*, who are in turn part of the court and the courtship rituals that come to be represented and parodied by Comus throughout the play.

The appearance of Apollo's lute and the Shakespearean subtext it recalls quickly lead into another figurative representation of the joys of "divine philosophy," this time as a "perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets, / where no crude surfet raigns" (479-480). In this metaphor, the younger brother makes concrete the more subtle suggestions that accompany the quiet intertextuality of the lute image. Divine philosophy is an endless feast in which the

student may eat without ever growing too full. Within Milton's works, however, endless feasts tend to have rather negative connotations. As further evidence of Milton's distrust of feasting, we might recall the food set before the son in the desert of *Paradise Regained* or the "popular feast" of the Philistines in *Samson Agonistes* that is the backdrop for their untimely end. Or, more directly to the point, we can consider the feast of philosophy in light of Raphael's words to Adam in book seven of *Paradise Lost*:

> But Knowledge is as food, and needs no less
> Her Temperance over Appetite, to know
> In measure what the mind may well contain,
> Opresses else with Surfet, and soon turns
> Wisdom to Folly, as Nourishment to Winde. (8.120-124)

Raphael's warning is directly applicable to the situation in which the two brothers find themselves. Their debate over the ability of the chaste lady to withstand external threats has become pedantic and, as such, is an example not of wisdom but of folly.

The discussion between the two boys takes the form of disputation, a key component of the early modern school room. Disputation—formal debates between two students—determined the standing of the student in the classroom and, in some cases, seating arrangements within the classroom (Dolven, 49). These debates had clear winners and losers, and winning was the measure of a student's understanding of the subject. Dolven notes that early modern authors often portrayed disputation as a debate between an "authoritative speaker and a neophyte," as in Erasmus's *Colloquiua* (50). In the masque, the elder brother takes the role of the authoritative speaker, and the younger brother is clearly the neophyte.

The subtle clues that Milton provides for his reader—disputation as an excess of appetite, philosophy as a subverting of female power and chastity by way of the Shakespeare allusion —all bely Milton's distrust of disputation as a useful tool for problem solving. Indeed, in his own third prolusion, Milton explicitly condemns the fruitlessness of never-ending disputation, which he argues is joyous and incapable of adding to "true knowledge" (*Riverside Milton*, 853). Scholastic argument, according to Milton, is the stock and trade of "would-be philosophers" who "argue back and forth, one bolstering up his thesis on every side, another laboring hard to cause its downfall, while what one would think firmly established by irrefragable argument is forthwith shattered by an opponent with the greatest ease" (853). The effect of this failure of learning, then, is hesitation and inaction. "The student hesitates," continues Milton, "as at a crossroads, in doubt whither to turn or what direction to choose, and unable to make any decision" (853). Being unable to choose, endless inaction, finding oneself lost in the woods: these are the end-results of academic disputation, which is the only framework for understanding the world that the two brothers appear to possess.

Luckily, they have a teacher-figure and a guide in the Attendant Spirit, who interrupts the brothers before they lose themselves completely in fruitless praise of divine philosophy. Like Comus, the Attendant Spirit appears to the children disguised as a shepherd and offers to guide them through the woods to their sister. There is a parallel in this text between Comus and the Attendant Spirit; both are teachers of a sort, and both offer distinct models of instruction to the youths. It's surprising that Milton would make both Comus and Attendant Spirits shepherds; after all, if both real shepherds and devious wolves can appear to the youths as true shepherds, then perhaps the lambs should adopt a healthy dose of

skepticism when it comes to being shepherded. When the Attendant Spirit enters, the boys question his presence, asking if "hath any ram / Slip't from the fold," and, in doing so, both recognize and mis-recognize the dangerous situation into which their sister has fallen (497-98). Their sister, figured by the ewe in the following lines, is the one who is at risk. However, the brothers, figured by the ram, have also slipped from the fold. They've lost track of their sister and have failed to take decisive action, wasting time instead on disputation. Meanwhile, Comus and his rout, who "howl / Like stable'd wolves," are in search of prey in the dark woods (533-34).

One way to see better what sort of lesson the Attendant Spirit offers the brothers in this moment is to compare his description of Comus upon meeting the brothers to his earlier description of Comus from the beginning of the masque. In the opening monologue, the Attendant Spirit describes how "weary" travelers quench their thirst by drinking Comus' "orient liquor in a Crystal Glasse" (65-66). "Most," the Attendant Spirit continues, "do taste through fond intemperate thirst" (67). The Attendant Spirit places the blame for drinking from Comus' cup squarely on the shoulder of the tired, thirsty traveler. Later, after encountering the two brothers, he instead emphasizes Comus' persuasive powers: "And here to every thirsty wanderer, / by sly enticements gives his banefull cup, / With many murmers mixt" (524-526). Furthermore, as though to really drive home the point, the Attendant Spirit notes that Comus and his rout have "many baits and guilefull spells / To inveigle and invite th'unwary sense / Of them that pass unweeting by the way" (537-39). Stephen Orgel raises a good question in response to the spirit's first explanation as to why travelers drink from Comus' cup: "Are we at fault for being thirsty after a long journey in the hot weather? […]

How would one know not to drink?" (38). Modern readers can quickly pass over Comus' offer and read the cup of "orient liquor" as something that sounds tempting and foreign. Milton's readers, however, may have been more familiar with the specific term. It's strange that Comus would offer "orient liquor" as a thirst-quencher, given that it was actually a precise, technical name for a powerful remedy. In his *Thesaurus & Armamentarium Medico-chymicum*, Adrian von Mynsicht describes "Licquor Acidus Perlarum Orientalium" or "liquor of oriental pearls" or, in Sir Kenelm Digby's *A Choice Collection of Rare Secrets and Experiments in Philosophy*, "oriental liquor" as a potent and powerful medicinal drink. Mynsicht describes its virtues in some detail:

> It strengthens the Head, Brain, Stomach, Heart, Liver, and all the other principal Members. It preserves the body from the Apoplexy, Epilepsie, Vertigo, Leprosie, Pox, &c. It raiseth an appetite in recovering Patients. It cleanseth the Eyes of clouds and dimness, resists Putrefiction and Poyson, and is the last refuge in all malignant Feavers and hot Diseases. The dose is from half a scruple to half a dram (Digby, 40; Mynsicht, 250)

The drink that Comus offers the traveller then is literally a form of medicine possessing salutary powers of purification. Modern editions gloss over this, as Carey does in his *Complete Shorter Poems*, where he glosses "orient" as "shining, lustrous" (183). To gloss it as such is to miss the historical significance of the phrase. The drink in Comus' cup contains medicinal properties; more importantly, it is a path to better vision that contains the power to clean the drinker's eyes of clouds. This additional layer of meaning adds a new dimension to the relationship between people and the products of a fallen world that we saw in *Areopagitica*,

whether those products are cups of medicine or pamphlets and books. Good things can be utilized by bad people to serve bad ends, it would seem. This concept reinforces Fish's argument that for Milton the material world has very little fixed value—the value of a thing, in this reading of Milton, is entirely dependent on how that thing is utilized and how it is received. But Fish's argument does not succeed in answering Orgel's critical question: how do we ever know who we're really dealing with?

The answer to this question lies, perhaps, in the part of the narrative that remains unseen. While the brothers have been speaking to one another and to the Attendant Spirit, the Lady has presumably been offered the cup, for when we return to her, she is already in bondage and the cup has been refused. Oddly, the stage direction makes it clear that Comus has already revealed himself to the Lady before offering the cup and that the jig is up; his beastly rout is already present when the cup is offered, and while the Lady may be thirsty, the actual choice that she is faced with—to drink or not to drink—is what we might call a no-brainer, for Comus has already revealed his true self to her. The cup itself is almost meaningless, then, for no matter what is really in the cup, it can never be filled with anything other than Comus himself and the surrender to carnal desire that he represents. In the end, the actual experience of Comus' temptation is very different from the account of that temptation offered by the Attendant Spirit. Thirsty though she may be, she is not the "weary traveler" who is tricked by a disguised enchanter. Nor is she the thirsty wanderer who has been tricked by baits and guileful spells. Orgel's question, then, is purely hypothetical, based on the Attendant Spirit's seemingly inaccurate account of the temptation; the Lady is simply

never tricked or tempted in either of the ways represented by the Attendant Spirit, and Milton seems to sidestep the problem altogether during the temptation scene.

Exaggerating the power that Comus has over his victims allows the Attendant Spirit to downplay the Lady's capacity for resisting his charms and temptations. If Comus had actually offered the cup to the Lady upon encountering her, how could she have resisted? Fortunately for the children (and contrary to the attendant spirit's narrative), this is not the sort of world the youth's of Comus inhabit. Nonetheless, his speech provides scant comfort to the two brothers. The younger brother, in what will be his final spoken lines of the play, is noticeably more worried after hearing the Attendant Spirit's account than prior to hearing it. His already weak faith in the efficacy of the Lady's chastity is shaken further: "O night and shades, / How are ye joyn'd with hell in triple knot / Against th' unarmed weakness of one Virgin / Alone, and helpless!" (580-83). The elder brother responds with characteristic certainty, but even this previously unassailable certainty appears to be shaken as he allows the possibility that "if this fail, / The pillar'd firmament is rot'nness, / And earth's base built on stubble" (597-99). On the one hand, the elder brother stands steadfastly by his claim that Virginity can defend itself; on the other, he's just been told that his sister has fallen into Comus' "deadly snare," and that she is in real, tangible danger.

The function of the Attendant Spirit, as it turns out, is to serve as a corrective to both the younger brother and the elder brother. The younger brother, caught up in rhetorical disputation, has lost sight of his purpose in the play and finds himself under the spell of divine philosophy. The Attendant Spirit remedies this by exaggerating the danger that the Lady is in and, in doing so, guides the younger brother back to the realities of their present

situation. The elder brother, on the other hand, has convinced himself that his sister's virtue is entirely self-sufficient and consequently is wasting time convincing the younger brother instead of rescuing her. He is right, of course—the Lady will never knowingly choose to drink from Comus' cup—but he is also wrong. He is wrong because while the Lady will make the right choices, she is not currently in a position to choose. She is in bondage and is soon to be made to drink from the cup, having refused to choose it of her own free will. The Lady is not, in the end, entirely self-sufficient, for she requires assistance from the brothers to escape from Comus' captivity. The entrance and subsequent exposition of the Attendant Spirit refocus the elder brother on the dangers in the woods and remind him of the need for assistance in the form of knowledge about Comus' powers and history and, more important, in the form of Haemony. The Attendant Spirit is a sort of guide then, pointing his students down the correct path by refocusing their attention away from distractions. Nonetheless, he demands a high level of self-sufficiency from the brothers. He waits until they've had the opportunity to discuss their situation before entering the scene. He passively allowed the Lady's trial to unfold, since he could presumably have intervened when she was initially waylaid by Comus rather than rushing off to tell her brothers, who turn out to be actually somewhat impotent against Comus. He disappears when the brothers confront Comus, entering only after, trying to capture Comus, they fail. These moments in which the Attendant Spirit steps into the narrative to offer guidance or quietly influence the chain of events, only to step out and let the youths of the story manage their troubles on their own, are moments in which we can see the Attendant Spirit as a very Miltonic teacher.

Like other Miltonic teachers that we will see below, he helps his students to understand the choices that face them while leaving them to engage in the trials of choosing.

No one in the masque is left more alone than the Lady, who must face her trials without aid from external forces. If the Attendant Spirit can be seen as a teacher to the brothers, then we can also see Comus as a sort of teacher to the young lady. If good people can learn from bad books, then it stands to reason that good people can learn from bad people as well, especially given the degree to which Milton is inclined to talk about books as though they were people throughout *Areopagitica*. As we have seen, there are similarities between Comus and the Attendant Spirit. Both, for example, possess the ability to ascertain immediately the true nature of those whom they look upon. As the Lady initially approaches Comus, he senses her before he sees her: "Break off, break off, I feel the difference pace / of some chaste footing" (145-146). He immediately recognizes her as a virgin, and tells us that he is able to do so because of his "art" (149). Similarly, the Attendant Spirit is able to immediately see Comus for what he is, "by certain signes," although the precise nature of those signs is left unarticulated (572). Not only do both men possess insight into others, both have disguised themselves as shepherds, as guides to those who are lost in the woods. Indeed, both men offer lost travelers a different sort of relief. The Attendant Spirit offers protection from harm and insight into what's truly taking place in the forest, while Comus offers relief from discomfort and clear vision by way of his medicinal cup. Structurally, the opening monologues of Comus and the Attendant Spirit parallel one another. Both monologues begin with celestial imagery and descend down into terrestrial concerns. Yet, while there are similarities between the two figures, there are also profound differences.

Comus is a degraded version of the Attendant Spirit, and the similarities tend to undermine themselves upon closer inspection.

In illustration of this point, Roger Wilkenfeld notes that the Attendant Spirit hears Comus' "hateful steps" before he enters the stage. "Comus' movements," explains Wilkenfield, "contrast, for all his imitative skill, with the movements of those 'that by due step aspire'" (177). The Attendant Spirit and Comus also both address the children with the goal of inciting them to take action. The Attendant Spirit attempts to clarify, by way of narrative exposition, the true danger that the Lady faces while alone in the woods. Comus, on the other hand, attempts to persuade the Lady to drink from the proffered cup. The predominant mode of persuasion for the Attendant Spirit is factual and expository. In his discussion with the brothers, he focuses on relaying what he saw, when he saw it, and allowing the brothers to draw their own conclusions. Comus' interaction with the Lady, on the other hand, is deeply rhetorical and persuasive. As a result, the language in Comus' exchange with the Lady contains a number of echoes of academic disputation, and contains within it an embedded critique of persuasive rhetoric.

Comus' efforts to persuade the Lady are, of course, completely unnecessary. By the time we see the two of them together, Comus has already seen to it that she is confined, unable to flee physically from him, and he describes how "her nervs are all chain'd up in Alablaster" (620). The Lady has already been physically dominated by Comus; yet he persists in trying to sway her mind and gain her assent. Comus, as a tempter, operates within a specific set of rules. While he could presumably force his cup upon any traveler happening through the woods, or use his powers to otherwise restrain a traveler, it seems that the drink

he offers must always be consumed freely and willingly by his victim. The Lady senses this early in their exchange and immediately dismisses his assertion that he has made a Daphne out of her by claiming that he "canst not touch the freedom" of her mind. In doing so, she points to the first of many misunderstandings that Comus seems to possess about the nature of their situation.

For example, Comus' comparison between the Lady whom he is about to immobilize with his wand and Daphne, who was transformed into a tree to escape rape by Apollo, is a clear and obvious misreading of the classical narrative. Daphne becomes immobilized to escape rape while the Lady has been immobilized by her aggressor to remove the possibility of escape. This misreading serves a dual purpose. First, it immediately positions Comus as the unreliable speaker that Milton reveals him to be in his subsequent arguments against chastity. That is, by beginning his display of "wit, and gay rhetorick" with a misrepresentation of a well-known classical narrative, Comus signals to his audience that Comus is the sort who misrepresents classical authorities in the pursuit of his own selfish ends. Second, Comus' misreading raises another possibility, which is that while it is a misreading on Comus' part, because of his paucity of vision, it can also be a moment of insight for the reader, who does not share Comus' shortcomings. In this moment of the narrative, in which the Lady is most in danger, and is most unable to resist physically Comus' advances, the reader may understand the skewed reference to the Daphne and Apollo narrative as signifying that she has indeed already been delivered from harm by her prayers, much as Daphne was delivered from danger by hers.

We should consider the conflict between Comus and the Lady not so much as a conflict in which the Lady somehow bests Comus. She herself admits at one point in the conversation that Comus is unable to comprehend truly the "sage and serious doctrine of virginity" that she exposits (787). Rather, we should approach the conflict between these two characters as an opportunity for the Lady to display the knowledge that she already possesses. The exchange between the two characters is a test; it is a trial, and the Lady demonstrates that which the elder brother has taught the younger brother by steadfastly resisting Comus' attempts to persuade her and to change her mind.

Comus' goal in his exchange with the Lady is to persuade her to willingly join him in his forest bower. In pursuit of this goal, he marshals a number of common Renaissance arguments against chastity. His first tack in the seduction of the Lady is to ally the enjoyment of sensual excess with the bountiful excess of the natural world. The theme was common in cavalier poetry, and Comus' suggestive description of the "fresh blood" of the new season, and the generative powers of the natural pleasures of what Herrick called "lusty spring," is representative of this school of poetry. Comus portrays the "cordial julep" that he offers the Lady as a natural solution to her problems. The drink is, like spring itself, "to life so friendly," that not to drink it is to engage in a sort of cruelty to oneself, just as the Lady's consistent refusal to give in to Comus' advances is an inversion of the "covnants" of nature's trust. In preaching complete abandonment to the "sensual sty" that is life as Comus understands it, he reveals the degree to which he himself is under the sway of the intemperate life. Comus' desire quietly leaks into his language, revealing him as the pleasure-driven tempter that he is. When Comus asks:

> Why should you be so cruel to your self,
>
> And to those dainty limms which nature lent
>
> For gentle usage, and soft delicacy? (678-680)

It's not difficult to imagine the lust that drives the inclusion of the adjectives "dainty," "gentle," and "soft." Indeed, the meter forces us to pause on these words, as they drip off of Comus' tongue, clear markers of his unchaste desire.

It is significant that in her first retort to Comus' persuasion, the Lady absolutely refuses to address any of the arguments he has made. Comus thinks he is participating in a debate, but he is not. I agree with Rajan's *The Lofty Rhyme* in thinking that this is a conscious decision on Milton's part to refuse to allow the Lady to engage in the sort of back and forth that Comus is seeking, and that the two brothers have just had. Rajan makes the crucial point that "Milton […] decided that his best solution in the circumstances was to have the Lady repudiate Comus rather than debate with him and to provide the 'answer' to Comus in the Epilogue" (35). In her response, this is precisely what she does. The Lady calls Comus a "false traitor" who has "betrai'd" her credulous innocence with his "treasonous offer" (691, 697, 702). By insisting that Comus is a traitor and a liar, the Lady steadfastly refuses to engage him in argument. In keeping with what we've seen in *Areopagitica*, the Lady does not see her function as persuasive so much as to identify properly and name that which she sees. This is, of course, the challenge for all of the youths throughout *A Masque*: their job is not to persuade, but rather to identify, to see clearly. The brothers must identify the danger inherent in their sister's situation; their sister must identify the temptation that Comus represents, unlike those travelers who came before her. Her victory, in this crucial moment in

the play, should not be located in her resistance against Comus. Indeed, this was never in doubt, and it continues to be not in doubt during their exchange. Instead, her victory is in immediately identifying Comus for that which he is. Milton has already shown us the failure of disputation and debate in the exchange between the two brothers – that discussion led nowhere and served to distract the brothers from taking action and from accurately identifying the situation in which they found themselves. The Lady, however, is now able to identify Comus as a tempter and a traitor. Furthermore, in rejecting his ability to offer her anything "good," insofar as he is not a good man, there is also the implication that in refusing to engage him as a debate partner, she is further cementing the idea that he is a bad man, unable to receive insight from her.

Comus is, in his response, unable to address that which the Lady actually says, further solidifying the experience of this exchange as two people who are profoundly speaking past each other rather than to each other. He rejects her arguments as scholastic, accusing her of listening to "those budge doctors of the stoick furr" and of having praised "lean and sallow abstinence" (707,709). Of course, she hasn't argued for abstinence in the slightest, at least not yet. No, the Lady has made her biting accusation against Comus, and she has used that accusation to make the point that only good men can give good things, and that which is not good is not to be received. But, these are not points about abstinence. They are points about how to understand properly the world. It is Comus who brings the argument back to abstinence, just as it is Comus who initially raises the idea of chastity by referring to the Lady as a "fair virgin" (690). Again, Comus gives himself away by accidentally pointing his argument directly at himself:

Wherefore did Nature power her bounties forth,
With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
Covering the earth with odours and fruits, and flocks,
Thronging at the Seas with spawn innumerable,
But all to please, and sate the curious taste? (710-714)

The lines leading up to the question come across as sincere, powerful representations of the marvelous excess of the natural world, a world rife with tastes, and sounds, and smells and, of course, with life. But for Comus, this bounty is nothing more than a wealth of things that exist only to be used and consumed. For Comus, the entire world is his cup writ large, a temptation to be readily accepted in order to sate his haunting curiosity.

Again, we do well to look to Rajan in order to see how Comus descends in this passage, a fall that can be summed up by the progression from a view that sees natural beauty as currency, as "natures coyn" to a view that sees it as "natures brag," a meaningless and indulgent expression of an empty world built on mere desire (34). Once again, the Lady's response is a scathing repudiation of Comus. This time, however, she does attempt to engage his argument by defending nature. But, she does this only after dismissing his argument as "false rules pranckt in reason's garb," and by dismissing him as a "jugler" (757, 759). Her dismissal here also further solidifies the idea that the Lady is able to see clearly through Comus' disguise at this point. Her choice of words strongly echoes the very words Comus used to describe his methods in his private monologue, wherein he described his reliance on "well-plac't words of glozing courtesie / Baited with reasons not unplausible" (161-162). Comus disguises error as argument by wrapping it in seemingly

reasonable arguments. He conceals his true motivations using courteous language "baited" with seemingly convincing reasons. The Lady continues to briefly dispute Comus' claims, but she quickly falls back into repudiation, again questioning the utility of engaging with him at all. "Fain would I something say, yet to what end?" asks the Lady, recalling her early doubt about the efficacy directing good arguments at bad men. As she goes on, she repeats herself, lost in the uselessness of the entire exchange. She accuses Comus of not possessing a soul that is capable of comprehending the "sage and serious doctrine of virginity" (786-787). She declares him unworthy of anything but his present state of being, lost in the emptiness of "deer wit, and gay rhetorick" (790). Finally, she exclaims that he is fundamentally "not fit" to be convinced of his error. Not content to stop with repudiation, the Lady considers changing tack and engaging in full-blown condemnation, not to convince, but to eradicate and to destroy. As she ends her portion of the exchange, the Lady moves into apocalyptic, violent imagery, in which she imagines herself completely empowered, caught up in "a flame of sacred vehemence" that is powered by the earth itself, ready to tear down Comus' "magick structures rear'd so high" around his head, in a distinctly Samson-like moment of violent, vindictive, vengeance.

The education that takes place in the masque is an education that is, at its core, both experiential and communal. It is founded in the choice that, for Milton, always accompanies and is inherent in the moment of trial, in which the individual chooses which part to play in the situation in which she finds herself. The Lady, for her part, refuses to engage Comus, choosing instead to dismiss, repudiate, and ultimately condemn him. She is successful not because she is pure, but rather because she is self-reliant, and her crowning moment in the

text is when she realizes that she is entirely sufficient to stand against the threat that Comus represents. In other words, the Lady is an ideal student because she needs no teacher or, put a bit differently, she is a good student because she can find a teacher in Comus just as easily as she might find one in the Attendant Spirit, for she knows how to see the world for what it is.

Nonetheless, the masque's ending is cryptic and inscrutable. Each of the youths ends the masque in silence, and we leave the play with the sense that there is much that has been left unsaid and unresolved. The Lady's last spoken words, as we have seen, make up a cry of righteous vengeance against Comus, at which point the cup is brought to her lips and she is silenced along with her brothers who will have no more spoken lines for the remainder of the play, as the adults proceed through the process of making everything right once again. The younger brother's last spoken part is his desperate declaration of doubt directed at his brother: "is this the confidence you gave me Brother?" (584). The elder brother's last words are simply to say that he will follow the Attendant Spirit and hope for angelic protection (658). Both brothers end their part in uncertainty. The Lady, on the other hand, arrives at a place of striking certainty; yet she is silenced and frozen in place. Perhaps Milton silences the youths because at this point their trials have all been completed. The Lady has been tested; she has seen Comus for what he is and, rather than engage in the back and forth of public discourse, which is one Miltonic way of acquiring knowledge, she chooses another. That is, she chooses to trust in her innate, pre-existing character and let that serve as her moral compass.

A Maske offers an education that is like and unlike the education of *Areopagitica*. Like *Areopagitica*, the objects of trial are external to the student. In *Areopagitica*, externalities—books, the ideas they contain, and the public discourse that they establish—are the grounds in which individuals make trial. Similarly, the trials of *A Maske* are predicated on worldly externalities such as the threat that Comus represents to the Lady as well as the fear and doubt that spawns forth from the play's dark, woodland setting. However, unlike *Areopagitica,* the externalities of *A Maske* are less the subject of trial than the spark that sets it off. Whether Comus' offers should be accepted is never a real question worth considering in the context of the play. As a result, the Lady's choices do little to reveal the nature of those externalities, for we know what those things are from the beginning of the text, and nothing the brothers or the Lady can say or do will amplify or complicate our knowledge of them. In *Areopagitica* texts battle each other for rational and ethical dominance in the mind of the reader, and out of that struggle truth becomes incrementally more visible. In *A Maske* the Lady's trial takes place within, and it is her silence in the face of an external challenge, and her faithful reliance on her own virtue, that ultimately lead her to triumph, not over external forces, but rather over her own doubt and fear. Inherent in the visions of these texts are two central strains of Miltonic pedagogy. The former is dialogic, collaborative, and social, and its primary vehicles are reason and the will. The latter is individual, internal, and private. This mode of teaching and learning, the mode of the masque, is compelled by the more mysterious forces of faith and prophecy. The two pedagogies that these works represent are at the core of the Miltonic education, and Milton's works repeatedly return to the tensions that are born of their confluence.

4. Modes of Instruction in *Paradise Lost*

Paradise Lost continues *Of Education's* search for a means of repairing the ruins of our first parents by attempting to make teachers—not students—of its readers. Rather than comprising a series of "gotcha" moments constituting a pedagogy of deception, the poem presents the postlapsarian reader with three models of pedagogy. These models, all of which seem to register both hope and failure, do not make Milton's epic, as Fish argues in *Surprised by Sin,* a "knotty riddle" designed to be untied and solved, leading the reader to its "one true interpretation" (272). Instead, they offer the reader of *Paradise Lost* an interrogation of the efficacy of the available modes of teaching and learning, and an exploration of the degree to which those modes can produce religious and political reformation in a fallen world.

There is critical consensus that *Paradise Lost* positions readers as students. Fish argues that one of Milton's principle goals in the poem is to "educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man" in order to spur him to "moral action" (1). Lewalski asserts in *The Life of John Milton* that *Paradise Lost* is "preeminently a poem about knowing and choosing—for the Miltonic Bard, for his characters, and for the reader" and that it "foregrounds education" (460). Likewise, Achinstein has argued that Milton fills his

works with vexing images and paradoxes in order to "portray his process of educating readers to become virtuous, to become revolutionary readers" and that Milton "presents scenes that challenge his readers to work" (210). Even John Rumrich, who rejects a good deal of *Surprised by Sin,* admits that the poem is didactic (as, he claims, all poetry is to some degree): "With his experience as a teacher and sense of prophetic mission, Milton was conditioned for and eager to perform a didactic role" (21). But if Rumrich agrees with Fish' view that *Paradise Lost* is a teaching poem, he disagrees about the lesson that the poem proffers to its students. "I object," writes Rumrich, "to the image of Milton as a redundant pendant who already knows the truth of things, humiliates and berates his charges for their errors, and with obnoxious superiority requires conformity to traditional beliefs" (21). His disagreement with Fish notwithstanding, Rumrich follows the lead of generations of Miltonists in viewing the poem's narrator as a teacher and its readers as students.

Readings of the poem that fall into this teacher/student dichotomy run the risk of seeing the poem as imparting a unified lesson to its captive audience. Instead *Paradise Lost*—unlike *Comus*, which sidelines its teachers in order to highlight a process of individualized learning—presents a model of teaching to the reader, not to instruct her, but to show her how she might instruct others.

Each of the poem's major sections centers on a form of education, and each offers the reader not so much the opportunity to discover his or her own failings as the chance to explore the efficacy of a pedagogical model. Satan in Hell and on his journey to Eden shows us what it's like to navigate and understand his own solitary, fallen state without a teacher-figure to guide him. The poem's central books revolve around Raphael's extended education

of Adam and Eve (and the education that Adam and Eve give to one another), which provides the reader with the poem's first example of a pedagogical method that is discursive and communal. In the final books, Michael offers Adam an entirely different form of education, one that both departs from and comments on the education Adam received from Raphael. Rather than asking ourselves as we watch Satan explore his new universe "how am I, like Satan, failing to understand my fallen nature," we are given to ask "why, unlike Adam and Eve, is Satan unable to learn from his fall; why does he misunderstand so many of the signs that mark him as fallen?" Likewise, instead of asking "why do I, like Adam in his conversations with Raphael, keep mapping my postlapsarian understanding of the world on a prelapsarian description of things like sex, appetite, and intellectual exploration" we find ourselves asking "in what ways, despite his careful instruction, does Raphael fail to prepare Adam and Eve to resist their respective temptations?" Why do the modes of instruction in the poem fail to prevent Adam and Eve's fall as well as the future falls of prophecy?

To begin to answer these questions, we must reject the idea that in justifying the ways of God to men, Milton's poem necessarily places the entire burden of the fall on Adam and Eve (and, by extension, on us). Certainly, from the standpoint of Christian doctrine, Milton believed that no blame could accrue to God or to the angels for Adam and Eve's fall. However, the poem is not simply a restatement of doctrine; like Milton's prose, it is a rhetorical text that aims to produce meaningful change in its reader. Rather than warning the reader, *Paradise Lost* engages the reader. As we've seen, Milton believed that texts could have profound effects on individuals. "Books promiscuously read," Milton writes in *Areopagitica*, force readers to exercise and train their virtue by compelling them to "apprehend and

consider vice" (1006). Books also fulfill a political purpose. In *Of Education* poetry makes men into statesmen and careful study of the likes of Tasso and Mazzoni leads to honorable speech in Parliament or in the pulpit (982). Producing individuals who can fulfill these civic duties is a crucial step on the road to repairing the ruins, and *Paradise Lost,* with its focus on instruction, is for Milton another effort in this regard. Milton was not, of course, alone in his sense that what the nation needed were new teachers. In the *Seasonable Discourse*, Dury envisions new schools that will produce "reformed schoolmasters," rather than reformed students, who will become the "cornerstone" of civil and religious reformation (9). Beyond identifying with Adam as a fallen subject, we identify with Adam and Eve as they teach each other how to fulfill their respective duties, with Raphael as he instructs Adam on how to fulfill man's earliest civic duties, and with Michael as he shows Adam the way forward in a fallen world.

Not a pedant—says Rumrich—the poet in *Paradise Lost* is an experimenter, seeking a means with which to create a reader who is capable of going forth like Adam and Eve and of recreating a world free from the markers of fallen society that populate the visions Michael shows Adam: war, tyranny, vanity, faithlessness, fratricide, idolatry, etc. He explores three modes of learning (and the pedagogies that they imply): the first mode is sensory and solitary, which Milton aligns with Satan and the fallen angels—a surprising decision given *Of Education's* emphasis on learning by observing "sensible things" (980). For large swaths of the poem, Satan is our eyes and ears, and in pushing us to reach the point where we question Satan's reliability, the poem rejects solitary learning through observation as a reliable method for discovering truth. Even the moment of trial, which often takes place in solitude—be it in

the garden of Eden or in Comus' woodland bower—posits the learning it produces as taking place in civil society.

The second mode of learning, then, is discursive and communal. Where Satan and the fallen angels tend to solve their problems alone (we see signs of this tendency in Satan's penchant for monologue), the human and angelic occupants of Eden tend to learn in groups through discussion. Adam and Eve engage in social learning in a public space. Following the fall, discourse is no longer a sufficient means for understanding the world, and it quickly devolves into debate and then argument.

In a return to interiority through prayer, Adam and Eve are introduced to the poem's third mode of learning, that of books eleven and twelve, which is visionary and prophetic. The visions that Michael shows Adam, and the dreams that Eve receives as she sleeps, are just as educative as Raphael's discourse with Adam. Michael is a seer and not as "sociably mild" as Raphael: his model of pedagogy builds on Raphael's discursive model by folding in prophecy and revelation.

In the initial books, the mode of solitary learning is also self-directed. Without a teacher to guide his learning, Satan relies on his sense of the world around him and his own ability to draw conclusions. A student without a teacher, forced to rely on his own interpretations of the "sensible" world, Satan—as other critics have noted—takes on a number of roles. Among these roles—monarch, politician, military general, inventor of engines of war, scientist, revolutionary—he is also a discoverer. Indeed, Satan literally covers more ground in space, in Hell, and on earth than any other characters in the poem. John Steadman has called him a "space explorer" (269). Similarly, Neil Forsyth notes the ways in

which the poem shifts from an Iliadic mode to an Odyssean mode at the end of the second book as Satan adopts the roles of both cosmic adventurer and explorer of new worlds (115).

As Satan travels throughout the poem, he watches and surveys the universe as it unfolds to him and to the reader. Indeed, the poem's first representation of Satan as the subject of an action rather than its object—excluding laying, which is after-all a non-action—is when he throws his gaze around him on the burning lake. Satan lays still and silent on the burning lake, when suddenly "round he throws his baleful eyes" (1.56). From the beginning, Satan's response to his fall is to look and to interpret what he sees. Along these same lines, Eve claims that she can see more clearly after eating the fruit and that her eyes are "opener" than before (9.875). In the third book's description of Satan's journey from Hell to Earth, Milton again portrays Satan as a watcher. Satan "descries" the coming of dawn (3.501). He "surveys" earth as he approaches it (3.555). Satan "views in breadth" and on arriving in Eden, the sun "allured his eye" (3.561, 3.573).

Milton positions Satan-the-watcher in sharp contrast to God, who, in his omnipotence, has no need for sight or observation. In *Paradise Lost*, when God watches, he watches in order to lavish his gaze on his subject, not to take in a sight. For God, watching is an outward gesture—a bestowing—whereas for Satan it is always an inward gesture, a taking in of knowledge. We see this distinction clearly in the interplay between the bard's invocation in book three and our introduction to God in his Heavenly palace. Following the invocation, the narrator describes to the reader how the Father "bent down his eye, his own works and their works at once to view" (3.58). In the context of the invocation that precedes these lines, the emphasis on the Father's vision (and the physicality implied by bending down) is

surprising. The Miltonic narrator has just explicitly rejected sight and, more generally, sensory perception as a means of comprehending celestial matters, recounting to his reader how he is "Presented with a universal blank / Of nature's works to me expunged and razed / And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out" (3.48-50). In the terrestrial setting that the narrator occupies, blindness is a barrier to understanding.

In the celestial context of book three, however, the poem deconstructs the dichotomy of vision and blindness, privileging celestial blindness over earthly sight. The invocation continues by calling for God, "thou celestial light" to "shine inward, and the mind through all her powers irradiate" (53). As we read through this passage, we see first the rejection of sight, followed by God's deliberate use of sight and his eyes. What seems like an inconsistency—why should the Father rely on the frail sense that the mortal narrator rejects in this moment of prophetic inspiration—is soon understood when Milton goes on to describe the effects of God's vision: "About him all the sanctities of heaven / Stood thick as stars, and from his sight received / Beatitude past utterance" (3.60-62). In other words, God does not rely on sight to take in knowledge from the external world; God uses his sight to imbue its object with his own beatitude. Early on, then, in the scenes in Heaven, Milton is reminding us of the lesson of *Areopagitica:* things take on different meanings in different contexts. Earthly sight is limited and in many cases an impediment to the truth. Milton himself was wont to display his blindness as a virtue, as he did in his 1657 letter to Emeric Bigot: "Why, in truth, should I not bear gently the deprivation of sight, when I may hope that it is not so much lost as revoked and retraced inwards, for the sharpening rather than the blunting of my mental edge" (Diekhoff, 271). In a celestial context, sight has an entirely

different function, acting as a lantern that emanates truth rather than a gateway through which it might enter the mind. There is a further echo here of the fallen angels in book two who admire and praise Mulciber's creations. The descriptions of the towers of Hell, in contrast to those of Heaven, are baroque and lush with detailed imagery. The early books are much more outwardly visual, for Hell is visually stunning, and the language that Milton uses to describe it is evocative of things seen. As we progress into Heaven, we leave behind visual forms of understanding and see a general degradation of sight as a mode of knowledge acquisition.

The reader is both like and unlike Satan. We are like him in the sense that we approach the towers of Heaven and the hills of Eden with wonder and a sense of profound discovery. Milton invites us—at times, compels us—to see the vibrant, brilliant worlds of Heaven and Eden through Satan's eyes, as spaces that are inaccessible both to us and to Satan. However, it is the difference between us and Satan that Milton stresses; never to be restored to Satan, these spaces will one day be made available to man again. Our response to paradise lost is not meant to be envy, but rather an abiding sense of loss.

Inasmuch as Satan is a discoverer of material worlds, his counterparts in Hell make every effort to become discoverers of metaphysical and philosophical worlds. Following the council in Hell, the fallen angels engage in actions intended to help them find a way out of their unimaginably dire predicament. These angels engage in "discourse more sweet" and "in thoughts more elevate" as they "reason high / Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate" (2.555, 2.558-559). Their discourse and thinking find no end, "in wandering mazes lost," and degrade from discourse into argument (2.561-562). Later, after eating the apple,

Adam and Eve will mimic the angels, by arguing in "vain contest" with "no end," which Milton describes—in a moment of bitter irony—as "fruitless" (9.1187-1188). This is not, however, a condemnation of discourse as a mode of discovery for, as we shall see in the later books, social discourse plays an important role in the Miltonic education. In a condemnation of the fallen angels, the narrator dismisses their discussions as "vain wisdom all, and false philosophy" that is only capable of momentarily relieving the suffering of those who participate (2.565). Where Adam and Raphael discuss the means for producing civil society—man's duties to God, the boundaries of fit knowledge, the nature of appetite, Adam and Eve's duties to one another—the fallen angels engage in false debates about good and evil, free will and providence, and other "wandering mazes" (137). Those angels who are not discussing providence are instead celebrating their own heroic battles. The discourse of the fallen angels is, then, ultimately aimless and without direction. Like Satan, they lack a teacher. Adam, on the other hand, will broach some of the same subjects with Raphael, who will use such occasions to teach him about proper and improper forms of learning.

For centuries, Milton's critics have done their best to wrest orthodoxy from Milton's portrayal of a heroic Satan. Even today, Miltonists are reluctant to embrace Blake's declaration that Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it, and for too many in the field the concept that the great Christian poet could genuinely ascribe any sort of heroism or sympathetic qualities to the devil in his theodicy is simply unimaginable. However, the current critical response to Milton questions this orthodoxy; a good deal of current work being done on Milton takes a serious approach to the Romantic insight into *Paradise Lost*. Forsyth declares in the opening lines to his history of Milton's Satan, *The Satanic Epic*, that

"*Paradise Lost* is not an orthodox poem and it needs to be rescued from its orthodox critics," a belief that I share (1). Milton writes at liberty when he writes of the devil, not because he believes that Satan's actions are heroic—there can be little doubt that *Paradise Lost* contains within it a steady, pounding deconstruction of the classical concept of martial heroism—but because the striving and the failures that Satan and the fallen angels represent are a crucial aspect of Milton's understanding of the poem's audience. Forsyth poses a question, the answer to which is a resounding yes on all counts: "Are we to identify with Satan, who himself presents the case against tyranny but who takes on a tyrant's role, or read against his impact? Or both?" (3). We are indeed to identify with the devil, for all that is present in Satan is present in Milton's audience, and the poem makes this connection explicit. When we see the fallen angels on the hills debating providence, what we ought to see is ourselves, reading *Paradise Lost*, for the questions that the Angels ask are the very same questions that the poem, as theodicy, promises to engage.

Unfortunately, for an entire generation of Miltonists, Fish's totalizing interpretation of *Paradise Lost* in *Surprised by Sin* has made it nearly impossible to approach the fallen angels' "wandering mazes" as anything but a marker of our own fallibility as readers. For Fish, the poem's language lacks fixed meaning, so meaning can only be created by way of context (either through the reader's response or through the context in which a word or a phrase is used); mazes can be wandering mazes of satanic error, or they can be the "mazy error" of a wandering brook in Eden (4.239). Fish's reading has had the effect, however, of forcing readers to fix the meaning rather than to acknowledge the interchange and free play of

multiple meanings. The interplay of meanings is not so much a test, but a warning that our sensory perception of the fallen world is, without proper guides, suspect.

The early books of *Paradise Lost* contain within them an unsettling, an inversion, of what we've come to see as a hallmark of Milton's larger pedagogical project. In these books, Milton associates the Satanic elements of the poem with categories at the very heart of the reforms of progressive seventeenth-century educators. Observation of the material world, so central to Dury's educational thinking and an important part of Milton's program, too, is made secondary to prophecy through the narrator's privileging of blindness over sight. In the council scene and as they sit apart, lost in thought on the hills of Hell, the fallen angels parody debate and discourse as a means of intellectual and moral discovery. Milton's famous allusions to Galileo also figure into this list for, as Amy Boesky has argued, Galileo can be seen to represent "the powers of mortal vision and its fallibility" and as such appear to represent another rejection of Milton's earlier thinking on education (23). We hear further echoes of Milton's skepticism toward the new science when Eve bows to the tree of knowledge, recognizing the "sciential sap" that she now values over God (9.837).

There is a clear, ongoing critique of learning by way of sensory perception throughout the early and middle books of the poem. However, the poem's exploration of the limits of "sensible education" does not indicate a rejection of science *per se* anymore than the construction of Pandemonium indicates a rejection of architecture. We know from reading *Of Education* that Milton favored sensible knowledge over abstract knowledge and that he frequently associated academic abstractions with scholasticism and his bad days at Cambridge. Milton doesn't reject science—he rejects unguided science. The visible world is,

for Milton, simply a thing that doesn't signify very reliably, which is why signifiers in Milton's poetry (mazes, wandering, savoriness, appetites, etc.) tend to be so unstable. In Milton's hands, Hell and its occupants become a teachable moment. They teach us that what we need are teachers who can serve as guides by helping us to affix meaning to the sensible world. The rest of the poem struggles to create just these sorts of teachers.

As the scene shifts from Hell to Eden, the poem begins to explore approaches to learning that constitute an alternative to the epistemological failures of the early books. In Eden, things signify clearly and, as a result, learning through sensory input is reliable and effective. In book four, before we are introduced to Raphael, Milton provides us with an example of cohesion between the visible and the doctrinal world when the world Eve sees reveals itself to be just what it is, the not-yet-fallen product of God. Eve's question to Adam in the bower, "but wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / this glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?" is framed by her preceding assertion that she has no need of independent knowledge: "to know no more / Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise" (4.657, 4.637-638). Here Milton is a poet of echoes, as he is so often throughout the poem, drawing his reader back to similar phrases in order to force the reader to contrast one context against another. In this case, Eve's question to Adam recalls the earlier passage on God's vision. Eve wants to know why the stars shine, a question that has already been answered. The Father's vision, we learned earlier, bestows "beatitude past utterance" on the holy places of Heaven which are "thick as stars" (3.61-62).

Like the Father's literal sight, the metaphorical "glorious sight" that is the star-filled night sky shines down on earth, bestowing its glory on the recipients of its light. But Eve's

question also looks forward to a moment later in the poem when Adam prods Raphael to disclose the nature of celestial motion, a request that earns him a gentle rebuke. Eve's question parallels Adam's not-yet-asked question, but it parallels it as a sort of corrective, in which Eve asks not "how do the heavens work" but rather "for whom do the heavens shine," which leads to the understanding that the terrestrial and celestial worlds shine, of course, on Adam and Eve, just as the Father's sight bestows its beatitude on all that lies beneath it. Eve's question is not just the right question where Adam's is the wrong question, it's also framed by her explicit rejection of knowledge. Eve asks questions not because she yearns to discover, a repeated marker of the Satanic mode of learning in the poem, but because she yearns to understand the uses of the world in order that it may be used properly and with fit devotion to its maker.

Richard Baxter, a contemporary of Milton's and the master of a free grammar school at Dudley, was well aware of the perceived dangers of disputation. In *The Arrogancy of Reason Against Divine Revelations*, Baxter describes how questioning and disputation without end leads to a breakdown of worldly and spiritual authority:

> When we should be submissively enquiring, we are incredulously disputing; and we will needs be wiser then our Master, and question, whether he teach us right or wrong. It is a wonder of mercy, that he should pardon so great dulness, and unprofitableness in us; and shall we after this be so insensible of that sin of ours, and of that grace of his, as to fall a questioning him, and his truth, and lay the blame on him from our selves? (45)

In her reluctance to engage in active questioning, Eve is an idealized enactment of Baxter's "submissive inquiry." She eschews direct investigation of the world, but is able to ask pertinent, guided questions. She is not uncurious, but neither is she like Adam adventurous in her discourse. Milton's careful use of allusions throughout this episode constitute the suggestion that perhaps in Eve we have a competing, and potentially much more successful, model for learning than the modes of knowledge acquisition represented by Satan. Eve's reluctance to engage actively in probing questions about the universe, which we see in this passage and later in her decision to excuse herself from the conversations between Raphael and Adam, suggests not an inferiority on her part but virtue—she is a model of submissive inquiry and a learner who has come to recognize the limits of active inquiry.

The parallels between Eve's attempt to understand the world she has recently entered and the fallen angels' attempts to understand their world in books one and two are echoed in Adam's answer to Eve's question about the stars. Adam describes the evening activities of angels in Eden, and they both recall and compare these to what happens in Hell:

> ...how often from the steep
> Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
> Celestial voices to the midnight air,
> Sole or responsive each to other's note
> Singing their great creator: oft in band
> While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk
> With heavenly touch of instrumental sounds
> In full harmonic number joined, their songs

Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to heaven. (4.680-688)

Like the fallen angels at the end of book two, the angels of Eden spend their evenings on hilltops engaged in song. Here, they sing of their creator, where the fallen angels sing of their own "heroic deeds" (2.549). Both groups sing in harmony, and the fallen angels' harmony has "suspended hell" (2.551-553). But the fallen angels' song is "partial," which Fowler glosses to mean that their song is biased (2.552). The literal meaning signifies as well; their song is partial in the sense that it is incomplete, in contrast to the "full" harmony of song in Eden. In addition, the angels of Hell are separated from one another, unlike the angels of Eden who may sometimes sing alone but are more often to be found in "bands," "responsive" to one another's notes. Again, the poem embraces the social while rejecting solitude. The songs of the fallen angels lead to solitude, vain philosophy, and societal separation. The songs of the Edenic angels, in contrast, seem to reach out, sending the thoughts of their audience not down, but up, and bringing the listener closer.

When God sends Raphael to Eden, it is to "converse" with Adam "as friend with friend," in order to "advise him of his happy state" (5.230-234). The pedagogical model that emerges between Adam and Raphael is at once discursive and communal, and Adam intuitively frames his conversations with Raphael in the context of a student/teacher relationship, referring to the angel as his "divine instructor" (5.546). God tells Raphael that after he explains to Adam how fortunate he is, Raphael is to "warn" him not to swerve, to "tell" him of the danger he is in and from whom, and finally to "let him know" that should he fall, he will have fallen with a prior warning. This passage in the poem, while both a warning of danger and an affirmation of Adam's freedom to choose, troubles us, for God's

instructions to Raphael appear to be more concerned with exonerating God from blame than actually providing useful information to Adam and Eve. In *The Unfolding God of Jung and Milton*, James P. Driscoll complains that instead of giving Adam and Eve knowledge about Satan's strategy, which will be to divide them from one another, Raphael "is instructed to give them philosophical generalizations that they lack the experience to appreciate and the training to apply" (69). Raphael goes to Adam, then, with a stated pedagogical goal: to remind Adam of his happiness, to relate to him that he possesses free will, and to warn him of the dangers that surround him. Raphael doesn't, however, necessarily provide Adam with specific guidance as to how he might integrate and embody that information. Raphael's approach exhibits a key quality of Milton's educators. Like the Attendant Spirit, Raphael's primary function is to push his student in the right direction. While teachers are necessary, self-sufficiency is an important component of the Miltonic education.

Adam's education, in contrast to Eve's, is interrogatory. From the moment Adam is created, he is marked by an inquisitive nature, and his first spoken words form a striking question about the history that preceded him: "how came I thus, how here?" (8.277). Indeed, Adam's first question to Raphael—the first of many speculative questions to come—is expressed as a statement, almost as though he were unaware that speculation is a form of interrogation. Thinking aloud, he wonders is food "unsavoury to spiritual natures" (5.402)? As Fowler notes, Adam's speculation about whether angels find food to be savory or not is "verging on forbidden knowledge" (306). Milton will later describe the apple from the tree of knowledge as "savoury," and questions about what angels eat and do not eat suggest a risky association with what Adam and Eve should and should not eat (9.740). When the

conversation turns back to him, Adam pursues the subject of food with more enthusiasm, although he does so with "wary speech," suggesting that he is aware of the fine line he is walking between allowed and forbidden knowledge (5.459). Adam's question, innocent on the surface, acknowledges Raphael's choice to eat "earthly fruits," but goes on to ask what sorts of foods are served at the feasts of Heaven and how they compare to Edenic food (5.464). Raphael pushes the conversation back to more appropriate subjects, describing to Adam how humans understand the world through discourse and discursive reasoning, while angels simply know by way of intuition. Adam's third question hones in again on the edges of fit knowledge, asking Raphael to clarify what he means by "If ye be found obedient" and to explain how Adam could be wanting in obedience. Adam's hunger for knowledge is even more pronounced in book seven, after Raphael has finished describing the war in Heaven. After hearing of the war, Adam is filled with doubts, although the poem does not tell us the nature of those doubts. He is "led on," we are told, with the "desire to know," a desire that as of book seven is "yet sinless" (7.60-61).

But Adam's desire for knowledge is unquenchable. He is as "one whose drouth / Yet scarce allayed still eyes the current stream, / Whose liquid murmur heard new thirst excites" (7. 66-68). Milton's simile compels his reader to hold a contradiction in her mind. Adam, we are explicitly told, is sinless. However, the language used to describe his desire for knowledge is the language not of moderation but of excess. Adam is sated, yet desires more. Is Adam's thirst an example of the "true appetite" (5.305) that governs prelapsarian eating, or is it an example of the hunger and thirst that serve as "powerful persuaders" to Eve when she chooses to eat the apple from the tree of knowledge?

One way to respond to the poem's shifting signifiers is to acknowledge that they shift and then proceed to prioritize one signification over another. This is Fish's response. Clearly, Milton did privilege some meanings over others. Milton understood, of course, that thirst can belong to a weary but chaste traveller in the woods, or it can belong to an intemperate traveller who is spiritually lost. It can belong to Adam who both thirsts for knowledge about the god-created world and is thirsty after a day's work. It can belong to Eve, thirsty for the knowledge offered by the forbidden fruit. Or it can stand on its own, a "zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding that God hath stirr'd up," as it does in *Areopagitica*. Thirst can be many things for Milton, some good, some bad. And it's clear that Milton privileges some of these significations over others as more meaningful guides to recovering truth on Earth. But to privilege one meaning over another is not to deny that multiple meanings exist; in fact, it is precisely the opposite. If Milton privileges some significations over others, the other significations remain, forming not a test but a suggestion to the reader. That is, rather than reading Milton's evocative description of Adam's intemperate thirst for knowledge as a sign that intemperance is actually temperance in a prelapsarian environment, we find ourselves reading it as exactly what it is: the beginnings of the same intemperance that leads Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge.

The initial critical response to Raphael's repeated chastisements of Adam assumed Milton was anti-learning, which is a simplification of Milton's views on education. At the midpoint of the twentieth century, Samuel responded to this criticism by arguing that Milton was devoted to a certain kind of pragmatic learning and against speculative studies. Samuel

summarizes Milton's view of learning in a series of points derived primarily from a careful examination of Adam's conversations with Raphael:

> (1) Learning is desirable, but only as it is useful. (2) Learning becomes useful only when absorbed into the way of life. (3) The capacity for such absorbing and transmuting can be expanded, not added to. (4) The branches of learning that can best expand that capacity are theology and ethics. (5) Studies therefore must be kept in their due place. (6) Ethics (including theology) is therefore the first (preliminary) and last (consummating) study. (713)

Samuel's answer to Milton's question is along the same lines as Trapnel's, cited in the first chapter of this study: learning is best kept "within its true bound." According to Samuel, Milton believed that education should be concerned with what is fundamentally knowable, and should avoid that which is not knowable. Samuel's insight helps us to understand that Milton was not against education or even against scientific exploration *per se*.

However, the argument that Milton was not against learning and that he was simply against some kinds of learning fails to take into account the fact that the poem stresses just how difficult it is for Adam (and, in the temptation scene, for Eve) to know in any final way exactly which subjects of knowledge are useful and which are not. Certainly, Milton agrees that only useful subjects should be studied; he was virulently opposed to scholasticism, pedantry, and empty academic debates. However, in *Paradise Lost* he breathes life into the concept, presented in *Areopagitica* and elsewhere, that because texts mean different things to different individuals, their meanings are unstable, which makes it very difficult for individuals (like Adam) to distinguish between the right and the wrong questions. *Paradise Lost* is not, in

the end, against learning; rather, it questions our ability to determine proper objects and paths of study. Indeed, the poem struggles between valorizing rationality as the principle guide to the Christian subject's will and its own foreknowledge that rationality will inevitably fail in that mission.

Milton's challenge in the poem is profound. In order to fulfill the promise of theodicy, he must show Adam and Eve to receive the very best education possible—they must be shown the true path clearly so when they fail to choose it, blame does not accrue to their teachers. At the same time, the demands of narrative compel them to fall, and as a result their education must necessarily be insufficient. Caught within this contradiction, the poem looks forward, seeking ways of creating new teachers equipped with new approaches to rediscovering the lost garden.

In prelapsarian Eden, Adam and Eve can, at times, rely on their innate knowledge as a guide toward fit courses of study. However, more often than not, Milton portrays speech and language as a necessary but unwelcome intermediary between a thing and the understanding of that thing. The acts of God, Raphael explains to Adam, are instant and immediate, but must be expressed in terms of human epistemological and linguistic concepts like time or motion. Angels, after all, are not the only creatures who seem to know things intuitively. Adam is able to name the animals without being taught what those names are, for he intuitively "understood their nature" (8.353). The ease with which he names the animals suggests that in Eden there is less distance between signifier and signified than there is after the fall. Adam and Eve both possess self-mastery, intuitive knowledge of how to speak and communicate with one another: "to speak I tried," says Adam, "and forthwith

spake" (8.271). Similarly, before Adam's discussion with Raphael, he intuits that there exist "nations yet unborn" (4.663), a piece of information that isn't explicitly given to him until much later in the poem.

In *Paradise Lost*, then, two Adams inhabit the poem. The first Adam is the all-too-human questioning figure. This is the Adam who is born to the sun, only to ask from whence he came and to inquire eagerly into the history that led to his creation. This is the same Adam who cannot resist pushing and probing at the bounds of knowledge that Raphael tries to reassert. Side-by-side with this Adam is another Adam: the spiritual, intuitive figure. This Adam names the animals; he intuits the future history of humankind and is created complete with some degree of self-knowledge.

Likewise, we see two sides of Eve in the poem, both in the form of the intuitive Eve who seems to know exactly when to excuse herself from the conversation and who interacts so effortlessly with the material world she occupies, asking of it the appropriate questions that seem to elude Adam. But also Eve as one who displays the greatest desire for knowledge of anyone in the poem as she exhibits her own intemperate hunger and thirst before eating the apple.

The solution that the poem offers in response to the problem of distinguishing between fit and unfit objects of knowledge is guided discourse in a social setting. Raphael repeatedly exhibits concern about whether the subjects of his conversation with Adam are appropriate or not. Before describing the war in heaven, Raphael wonders aloud how to "unfold / The secrets of another world, perhaps / Not lawful to reveal?" (5.569). Raphael's deliberation here sharply contrasts with the lack of deliberation in Satan's pitch to his fellow

rebels in Heaven, which Raphael describes as "bold discourse without control" (5.803). Unlike Satan, Raphael is measured and careful in his speech.

Later, as Adam and Raphael discuss astronomy, Raphael tells Adam that wondering about the rotations of the earth "imports not" and that some of God's secrets were not meant to be divulged. Raphael repeats this warning, telling Adam to "solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid" (8.167). Later, when Adam becomes narcissistic in his description of Eve, Raphael once again rebukes him, telling him to accuse not nature, but himself for his shortcomings. Taken as a whole, Raphael's rebukes and reminders to Adam represent a way of teaching that focuses the student on himself, forcing him to look inward in his search for virtue.

Without a reliable guide, the poem suggests, our innate desire to exceed the bounds of fit knowledge can roam unchecked. In the exchange between Eve and the serpent that precedes her decision to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the serpent repeatedly emphasizes the new knowledge that will come from the tree's fruit. Indeed, the apple is the most striking material symbol of knowledge acquisition in the poem. It refers to the tree as a "Wisdom-giving Plant / Mother of Science" and to the apple as "intellectual food" (9.679-80, 9.768). The serpent exclaims, rather cryptically, that "it gives you life / To knowledge" (9.686-87). Furthermore, it tells Eve that "he knows that in the day / Ye Eate thereof, your Eyes that seem so cleere, / Yet are but dim, shall perfetly be then / Op'nd and cleerd" (9.706-709). For the reader, this line fits into the larger interplay of meaning that runs through the text in relation to vision and blindness, discussed above. Of course, instead of opening their eyes, the opposite is true; the fruit dims Adam and Eve's vision, so much so

that when Michael descends to the garden he must "purge" Adam's "visual nerve" in order to allow him to see again. Like Michael, the Serpent offers clarity of vision to Adam and Eve, only his is false where Michael's is true. Furthermore, Milton is careful to note that the Serpent's words were, to Eve's mind, "impregn'd / With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth" (9.737-738). Raphael has already explained to Adam that reason is the essential being of the soul of man and angel, and has specifically stated that discursive reasoning, the same kind that Eve and the serpent engage in, is at the heart of the human learning process. All this is not to say that Eve falls unjustly; rather, it is to note that the trappings of Satan's persuasion and of Eve's temptation are entirely reasonable. That which drives Adam to exceed the fit bounds of his conversation with Raphael also drives Eve to eat from the tree. The language that the serpent uses to persuade Eve to eat is the language of logic, of rhetoric, and of reason. What is striking here is just how unteachable they are, what poor students both Adam and Eve have turned out to be despite multiple warnings about the dangers lurking in the Garden, despite Adam's warnings to Eve before she leaves the bower, and despite Raphael's careful explanations of divine providence.

The poem's final books introduce prophecy as a new mode of postlapsarian instruction. However, Milton does not replace discursive learning with the revelatory learning of prophecy. Rather, he grafts the two together by carefully mixing vision with interpretation and discussion. The beginning of book eleven is marked by a transition from rhetoric, the communicative mode of discourse and debate, to prayer, the mode of prophecy and revelation. Elizabeth Sauer has shown how Adam and Eve's dialogue in book nine leads to the moment of prayer that opens the tenth book; "If the violation of the interdiction

results in the Fall," writes Sauer, "then the remembering of the Word through the restoration of dialogue leads to moral and social healing" (*Barbarous Dissonances and Images of Voice in Milton's Epics,*123). But, if the restoration of dialogue leads to the prayer that opens the eleventh book, it is accompanied by the rejection of rhetoric. Instead of questioning their fate or trying to find a response to it, Adam resolves to give in to God, who he is confident "will instruct us praying" (10.1081). Adam and Eve's prayer flies more quickly "than loudest oratory," and the Son stresses to God the artlessness of the prayer by describing how Adam and Eve are "unskillful with what words to pray" (11.8, 11.32). These prayers, however unskillful, represent humanity's new promise; for they are "fruits of more pleasing savour" than that which man's labor could have produced before the fall from innocence (11.26-29). The concept of the *Felix Culpa*, which Milton flirts with throughout the final books, is present in these lines, given the proximity between savoring the fruit of prayer and the "savory" fruit of the tree of knowledge. Prayer is the means by which humanity can recover from the fall for prayer leads to prophecy. Indeed, when we return to Adam and Eve in the garden, about a hundred lines later, Milton again ties prayer to rhetoric by way of persuasion:

> ...For since I sought
> By prayer the offended Deity to appease,
> Kneeled and before him humbled all my heart,
> Methought I saw him placable and mild,
> Bending his ear, persuasion in me grew
> That I was heard with favour... (10.148-153)

Persuasion, the ostensible goal of the rhetorical debate that prayer supersedes, is in these lines a side-product of prayer. However, unlike rhetorical speech which seeks to persuade its audience, prayer is portrayed by Milton as persuasion turned inward, persuasion that seeks to persuade the speaker. Instead of persuading Eve to act according to his will, Adam's prayer persuades Adam that there is now cause for hope.

The movement from outward persuasion to inward persuasion involves a shutting down of human discourse. Adam and Eve both receive a vision of future events, but they receive it separately. Michael tells Adam he has "drenched" Eve's eyes and then proceeds to do the opposite to Adam by removing the "film" that covers Adam's eyes so that he might see clearly once again (11.367). While Adam climbs to the mountain top, Eve sleeps below. Although it is tempting to compare Eve's exclusion from Adam's "foresight" to her self-excusal during Adam's discourses with Raphael in book five, to do so is a mistake, for we later discover that Eve underwent visions of her own, "for God is also in sleep, and dreams advise" (12.611). Revelation, it seems, is personal rather than social, and Eve must receive her vision directly from above, not from the mouth of Adam. Adam senses this when he notes that Michael is "not terrible, / That I should fear, nor sociably mild, / As Raphael, that I should much confide, / But solemn and sublime" (11.233-36). As with many other Miltonic trials, the education that Adam receives from Michael must necessarily be undertaken alone.

Just as prophecy requires solitude and respite from social discourse, it also requires separation from the material world. For Adam to see he must first shut down his sense of sight so that sensible learning may be replaced with prophetic learning. Michael purges his

"visual nerve" with euphrasy and rue, which penetrate to "the inmost seat of mental sight," forcing Adam to close his eyes (11.414-418). With Adam literally unable to see, Michael takes his hand; in a word, Milton upends his previous portrayal of Michael by referring to him as "gentle angel" (11.421). Previously, Adam sees Michael as a "great potentate" (11.231) and "kingly from his state" (11.249). Milton describes Michael through Adam's eyes and dwells on his accoutrements of heroism—"a military vest of purple," his "lucid arms," his "stary helm unbuckled"—and the physical strength of a being "prime in manhood" (11.240-245, 11.646). Moreover, Adam dwells on Michael's rank, exclaiming that he seems a "Prince above princes" (11.298). As long as Adam relies on outward appearances, he cannot help but map onto Michael himself the very images of political tyranny that Michael will soon reveal to him. Adam's adulation of physical and material grandeur replaces his earlier wholeness and self-perfection that Milton describes as "more solemn than the tedious pomp that waits / on princes" (5.354). Prior to the fall, Adam's state of self-possession is itself a man's dominance over man; after the fall, Adam eagerly sees the signs of this dominance in Michael. Milton, however, undoes Adam's martial perception of Michael in the subsequent line with the descriptor "gently," which servers to soften and undermine Adam's initial perception. In turn, this softening serves to undermine Adam's visual response to the world, thereby pushing the reader to reject the visible markers of status as we've been pushed to reject social discourse as the sole means for repairing the ruins at this late stage in the narrative.

Prophecy is a supplement, not a replacement for the pedagogies of hell and of the garden. Indeed, the dialogue between Adam and Michael is structured around Adam's mistaken response to the visions and Michael's subsequent correction. On seeing the vision

of Cain and Abel, Adam's response is to question God's justice: "is piety thus and pure devotion paid?" (11.452).

Adam's mistake is not to feel sadness at Abel's death, and Milton makes a specific point of telling us that Michael, too, is moved, for being moved is the correct response to tragedy.[11] Rather, the problem is that Adam does not yet have faith that the guilty will be punished and the righteous will ultimately be saved. On learning about the realities of death and the horrors of illness, Adam loses his sense of self, always a sign of a fall for Milton, and gives "him up to tears" until he manages to get a hold of himself (11.497). Michael's response, in which he describes illness as a symptom of excess, serves further to correct Adam's failings by implying that his excessive tears and his loss of control are another example of an "ungoverned appetite" (11.517). Adam's conclusion, that he should neither seek death nor prolong life, earns him another correction, in which Michael stresses that he should, instead, focus on living well (11.554). In his response to the third vision, Adam mistakes lustful pleasure for material and spiritual fulfillment, which earns him another correction from Michael. Indeed, not until the final vision of the flood does Adam manage to respond to the vision in such a way that he does not require a corrective from the angel. And, in this case, his response is a question; instead of providing interpretation, Adam asks for the meaning of the rainbow, and learns of Noah and the "one just man." (890).

Nonetheless, by the poem's final book, Adam shows signs of improving, having been transformed from inquisitor to interpreter who can successfully read the visions back to Michael. Initially, in book eleven, Adam responds to his visions with questions, as he does

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[11] See Dennis Burden, *The Logical Epic*, 191.

after seeing his sons, the sick and diseased, and Enoch. As his visions progress, however, Adam grows more confident and offers up interpretations of the visions for Michael. Initially, these interpretations require correction, such as the moment in which Adam tries to blame the fall on Eve. However, by the time we arrive at the more hopeful visions of book twelve, Adam is prepared to draw the correct conclusions. After witnessing Nimrod and the Tower of Babel, Adam confidently articulates Milton's vision of Christian liberty: "but man over men / He made not lord; such title to himself / Reserving, human left from human free" (12. 70-71). At last, Adam earns not rebuke but praise from Michael, who acknowledges the justness of his response. In the subsequent vision, Michael interrupts his narrative to ask Adam a direct question: "oh that men / (Canst thou believe?) should be so stupid grown," which indicates further acknowledgement on Michael's part that Adam has matured and can be addressed as a more equal partner in the discourse (12.116). As the book progresses, Adam begins to notice his own transformation, exclaiming that "now first I find / Mine eyes true opening" (12.274). Taken next to his increasingly correct responses to Michael's visions, Adam's burgeoning self-awareness suggests that the poem is at last offering us a vision of a successful education. Freed from its contradictory goals of theodicy and the narrative of the fall, Milton is at last able to show us a successful education that effects noticeable change in its student.

Indeed, the education that Michael has given to Adam combines each of the modes of instruction that run throughout the poem. Adam's sight, which was shut-down for book eleven, has been reawakened for the final book, which is signaled by a return to discourse and narrative. By returning to narrative, Milton not only fulfills the generic expectations of

prophecy. He also fulfills the educative vision of the entire poem. Compare the way in which the revelations of the final two books are presented to the way in which Raphael narrates the war in hell, the poem's other extended revelatory sequence. In the middle books, discourse is present as a book-end around prophecy, whereas in the final books it is fully integrated into Adam's prophetic vision. The integration of prophecy, discourse, and vision in the final books, and Michael's insistence that Adam repeatedly focus his interpretation inward, on that which is knowable in his own nature, presents a final model of education within the poem. It is this model of integrated education in which sensual vision is combined with spiritual revelation and tempered by discourse and the testing of ideas in a social setting that Milton offers to his reader at the poem's end, as a restorative model of education.

5. Samson Agonistes: The Pedagogy of Uncertainty

Milton's early works, particularly *Areopagitica* and *A Maske*, present models of education that are largely predicated on the self-sufficiency of the student. Driven perhaps by Milton's frustration with his formal education at Cambridge and inspired by the success with which he had undertaken his own education, these earlier works tend to downplay the capacity of external sources of instruction—whether attendant spirits or pamphlets—to effect change in individuals. Students are clearly emphasized over teachers, and nowhere does the role of the student bear more significance in this body of literature than when Milton speaks of himself. In the *Reason of Church Government*, Milton stresses his own motivation to study—the "inward prompting" that compelled him—while quickly passing over the "sundry masters and teachers" under whom his father had placed him (*CPW*, I: 809). Later, in the *Second Defense,* Milton describes his "keen appetite" for study as the cause, not the consequence, of his father's decision to provide him with an education (*CPW* , IV: 612). Similarly, in *An Apology for Smectymnuus*, Milton values earnestness and "a fervent desire to know good things" over rhetorical skill (Diekhoff, 267). Learning is depicted as the natural by-product of motivated students. Teachers may guide the man, but they do not make him. In this respect, Milton's discomfort with the Hartlib circle is representative of his

general reluctance to locate the crux of education within the teacher—or within any uniform system of pedagogy.

It follows that sources of instruction in these early works can not tell students what to choose so much as provide them with the tools needed to arrive at good choices. This is an important lesson in both *Areopagitica* and *A Maske*. In *Areopagitica* good books do not unambiguously offer up truths as objects for imitation; didactic instruction by definition contains little room for interpretive choice. Instead, good books are those that force the sorts of interpretative gestures that lead to good and these ultimately help a reader to define and know herself. *A Maske* is exemplary of this interpretative process, as well, although not because it forces choice upon the reader but because it provides the reader with a chance to witness the choosing that takes place in and around the Lady's trial. Unlike the types of choices that take place in Milton's later works, the choices we see in *A Maske* tend to be expressive, such that the Lady's choice to resist Comus is essentially an expression of the chastity she already possesses. The choices of Milton's later works tend to be constructive; Adam and Eve are produced by their choice to transgress, undergoing a radical transformation to fit the nature of the path they choose. Similarly, in *Paradise Regained,* the human Son reconstructs himself as the Son of God through his trials in the wilderness.[12] With interpretative choosing at the heart of the Miltonic education, the older pedagogical tools of imitation and repetition are not only obsolete, but contrary.

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[12] See *Milton's Brief Epic*, where Lewalski argues forcefully for a dramatic reading of the poem, in which the Son undergoes a notable change: "It is in Christ's consciousness, not Satan's, that real development and change take place: the challenges of the temptations provide the occasion for Christ's progress through somewhat uneven stages to a full comprehension and definition of himself, and the various aspects of his role" (162).

Within this framework of learning that emphasizes the student's engagement in interpretation and judgement (both of which are expressions of the trial that is central to all of Milton's work), *Samson Agonistes* is unrelenting. When a wise man can "gather gold out of the drossiest volume" and a "fool will be a fool with the best book," what is being read is surely less important than *who* is doing the reading and *how* they are reading (*Areopagitica*, 1008). Milton's early works focus on the "who," of education and in this context educators are less central than when Milton comes to focus on the "how" in *Paradise Lost*. One of the inevitable lessons of the restoration and the failures of the commonwealth that preceded it is that the subjects of the commonwealth ultimately must be seen as insufficient to have stood. Milton understood that any pedagogy, which could address those failings, would have to focus not only on the student, but also on the source of instruction, the teacher. The shift from a student-centered approach to instruction to one that placed greater emphasis on the source of instruction is an important component of Milton's late views on education evident in his poetry. By exploring different instructional models, *Paradise Lost* attempts to create a pedagogy in a world in which the self-sufficiency of the poem's students clearly is not enough to prevent multiple falls. Unlike the Lady of *Comus*, who stands without assistance, Adam and Eve fall—despite the numerous supports that the narrative provides to prevent just that. The pedagogy of *Paradise Lost*, because of the narrative demand of Genesis, cannot be effective, and Milton utilizes this inescapable fact to explore the failings of each model. In doing so, Milton makes the book a teaching text, one that engages the student in an experience of reading, as Fish has taught a generation of critics.

Samson Agonistes represents the conclusion and fulfillment of Milton's experiential vision of poetic education. The central problem of recent criticism of *Samson Agonistes* is posed by John Carey in his essay in the *Times Literary Supplement:* "A work in praise of terrorism? September 11 and *Samson Agonistes."* Carey's text is a response to Fish's reading of the poem in *How Milton Works*, in which Fish declares that "no other standard for evaluating it [Samson's actions] exists" beyond Samson's certainty that his actions are divinely inspired. In the aftermath of September 11, Carey asks whether or not Fish's justification of Samson's act of mass murder is equivalent to a terrorist's claim to divine sanction. By accepting Samson's faith as sufficient justification for his action, Fish is making explicit that which is implicit in most earlier readings of the poem going back to F. Michael Krouse, who argues that Samson's inclusion among the elect in Hebrews was a powerful precedent for Milton's decision to highlight his regeneration and future sainthood in the poem (30). Krouse's reading of the poem in *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition* is profoundly influenced by his historiography of Samson, in which he portrays him as "a model of virtue, as a hero, as a champion of God, as a saint, a martyr, and a counterpart of Christ" (124). Mary Ann Radzinowicz's subsequent study of the poem, *Toward Samson Agonistes*, extends Krouse's reading by arguing that Milton intended Samson to be an educative model for Samson's countrymen as well as for Milton's countrymen:

> Samson lives to learn and dies to educate. Milton's ethics of process in *Samson Agonistes* is an ethics of works of faith deriving from a covenant theology in which man's pilgrimage toward truth invests his drama with elucidatory value (265).

Samson, in Radzinowicz's view, is a model to be emulated. For Radzinowicz, Krouse and Anthony Low, who perceives Samson as embodying a "process of conversion and regeneration," the problems that Carey presents can be solved by falling back to claims of divine inspiration, which are in turn supported by the assumption that Samson is a true christian hero, unburdened by the more dubious history outlined by Wittreich in *Interpreting Samson Agonistes*. The central moment of uncertainty in the poem for Carey is the moment when Samson contemplates his act of violence "as one who pray'd / Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd," a moment that raises the possibility of inspiration, only to replace it with Samson's personal agency in the following line (1637-38). Does Samson pray or does he not? His strength has already returned, so for what does Samson pray if he prays at all? Leading up to this moment, the reader has seen Samson fluctuate between blaming himself and blaming God for his misfortune. We've seen him yearn for the destruction of his oppressors as he simultaneously hopes for his own destruction at their hands (cf. 1262-1267). Reading in the context of Samson's instability and questionable motives, revisionist critics have found it difficult to find certainty in Samson's prayer. Yet, in the traditional reading of the poem, the prayer signifies Samson's unambiguous redemption. In accordance with this view, Radzinowicz describes the prayer as the moment in which divine will and individual agency are in accordance, in which prayer and thought are made indifferent and act as one (357). Far from signifying an uncertain division between God and Samson, Radzinowicz sees this moment as a moment of unified connectedness between God and his martyr.

This critical debate, however, can be avoided if instead of approaching Samson as a model to be imitated or rejected we accept Radzinowicz's claim that the text is intentionally educative, yet shift our attention to questions about what kinds of effects the text intends upon its reader. That is, we ought to acknowledge that it is educative, *and* acknowledge that its educational mode is not imitative. When we approach the work in terms of how it teaches the reader instead of what it says to or models for the reader, we escape the either/or trap of a regenerate/unregenerate Samson, thereby opening ourselves to the possibility that the poem, like the textual history of the Samson episode from which it draws, contains multiple Samsons. These multiple Samsons, in turn, compel the reader to choose between them. Not content to let the reader witness trial, Milton compels the reader to participate in the self-constructive trial that we only watch in *Paradise Lost*. In *Shifting Contexts,* Wittreich describes this interpretative shift as choosing not to choose, suggesting that "we must abandon (if in fact we hold to them) ideas of definitive context and definitive interpretation" and instead accept that multiple traditions and multiple interpretations are made possible by the text (282). Instead of one Samson, then, Milton gives us multiple Samsons, which taken together constitute a riddle that can't be critically solved, although it may be personally solved by the reader who chooses to privilege one Samson over another. By wrapping the riddle in the unexpected form of the closet drama, which forecloses upon the possibility of the text containing an authoritative narratorial voice, and by refusing to include a single character who is outside of the drama, Milton injects further ambiguity, leaving the reader to sort through the puzzle on his own. The end result is a text that forcefully thrusts the job of interpretation upon the reader.

Unlike all of Milton's previous major works, *Samson Agonistes* is a text lacking in authoritative voices. Compared to *Paradise Lost* or *A Maske*, for example, which contain multiple authorities (the Attendant Spirit, God, the Son, each of the angels, the poem's narrator, and even prelapsarian Adam and Eve), *Samson Agonistes* instead contains a notable absence of authority. None of the characters within the poem can be relied upon to provide unbiased accounts of narrative events, for all are in one way or another directly interested in the poem's political and interpersonal struggles. Not only is there no Attendant Spirit or Sabrina to enter the stage *deus ex machina* and comment on the narrative action, there exists no individual who has not taken sides in the political struggle between the Philistines and the Danites featured at the text's political center. In this regard, both the Chorus and Manoa have been shown to be unreliable and often misguided. [13] In addition, Milton's decision both to add to and omit from the scriptural account of the Samson narrative effectively de-authorizes scripture as an authoritative external source from which to read his text. Milton's Samson is his own, and Milton readily complicates key components of the scriptural account in order to make Samson's actions more ambiguous than they might be otherwise. Refusing to disambiguate Samson's character and his acts is the conclusion of Milton's educational vision. Here, the text provides the reader with a framework for choosing, only to leave the reader to choose alone. Devoid of teachers, the text itself becomes a teacher, relentlessly presenting competing narratives and compelling the reader to choose between them.

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[13] In *Delirious Milton,* Gordon Teskey aptly describes the reader's experience of the poem's various unreliable speakers: "Everything every character says in *Samson Agonistes* is easily intelligible with respect to that character's intentions; yet almost nothing any character says is unambiguously intelligible to us: their statements are non-mysteries wrapped in an enigma" (185).

In this respect, *Samson Agonistes*, more than any other work of Milton's, does what Fish taught a generation of Milton critics to look for: it forces the reader to participate in the trial, and in this instructs the reader in a brilliant process of self-revelation. Arguably, *Paradise Lost* is less effective in this regard for its conclusions are less debatable. Satan may be heroic, but he lacks the ambiguity of motives and morals that Samson possesses. Other critics have seen that in refusing to provide the reader with clear insights, *Samson Agonistes* thrusts interpretive choice on the reader. Susanne Woods, for example, argues in "Choice and Election in *Samson Agonistes"* that the competing readings of the poem are proof that Milton accomplished what he intended in creating a poem that is "preeminently about choice," a poem that "invites readers to make choices as part of their own calling to understand and enact God's word" (175). I agree with Woods. Further, I suggest the choices *Samson Agonistes* demands of its reader are meant less as a vehicle for the expression of Christian liberty and more as the engine that drives self knowledge, representing the final maturation of Milton's poetic pedagogy. In *Samson Agonistes* Milton's pedagogy crystalizes into an experience that engages rather than an instruction that teaches.

The framework in which the poem's experiential education unfolds is built around the challenges of theodicy, of justifying the ways of God to man. In his opening monologue, Samson questions the justness of his fate. First, in light of his suffering, he challenges God's justness in favoring him: "O wherefore was my birth from Heaven foretold / Twice by an angel" (23-24). Milton emphasizes the question by having Samson repeat it a second time, asking "Why was my breeding order'd and prescrib'd / As of a person separate to God" (30-31). Samson's doubts concerning the justness of providence are soon replaced by

doubts about himself as he wonders "what if all foretold / Had been fulfill'd but through mine own default" (44-45). His lack of faith is twofold, aimed at his deity and at himself, and his subsequent interrogations fluctuate frenetically between divine accusation and self-accusation. For a moment, Samson admits that his fate is the result of his decision to divulge the source of his strength to Dalila. He quickly moves beyond this admission, as though facing the reality of his own failings is not yet possible, and uses it as an opportunity to challenge God further. "But what is strength," Samson asks his maker, "without a double share / Of wisdom, vast, unwieldy, burdensome, / Proudly secure, yet liable to fall" (53-55). Not only the causes of his fall but also its symptoms become an occasion for Samson to question God's providence. Accordingly, his blindness prompts him to question further and he demands to know of God: "why am I thus bereav'd thy prime decree" (85). In a similar vein of questioning, Samson wonders whether the human form is fundamentally flawed, asking "why was the sight / to such a tender ball as th' eye confin'd" (93-94). Later in his speech his doubt becomes more pronounced as he continues to address God directly: "this [wisdom] with the other should, at least, have paird, / These two proportion'd ill drove me transverse" (208-209).

The ease with which Samson uses his fall as an occasion to question providence, and the forcefulness with which he does so, is an early signal of Samson's deeply flawed nature. Milton invites us to compare the fallen Samson to the fallen Adam and Eve by way of his simile in Book Nine of *Paradise Lost*:

> ...So rose the Danite strong
> Herculean Samson from the harlot-lap
> Of Philistean Dalilah, and waked
> Shorn of his strength, they destitute and bare
> Of all their virtue: silent, and in face (9.1059-63)

Where Samson's fall leads to the loss of strength, the fall of Adam and Eve leads to the loss of virtue, suggesting that their fall is even greater than that of Samson. Yet, read next to *Paradise Lost*, Samson's early questioning of providence is stunningly bold, for it goes well beyond Adam and Eve's response to their greater fall. For instance, while Adam and Eve do question the justice of their punishment, that questioning unequivocally leads them to a position of greater faith at the end of Book Ten, when they fall to their knees and beg divine pardon. Moreover, their recriminations are largely directed toward each other, as Samson's might be directed toward Dalila, although Milton even brings into question the justness of that possibility by stressing the political relativism of the struggle between the Danites and the Philistines. When God descends to the garden, Adam and Eve's impulse is to hide, not to cast blame on God. When Adam tries to cast blame on Eve, God's rebuke—"Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey"—affirms that Adam and Eve are individually responsible for their respective falls (10.145).

Alone in his heresy, Samson is not alone in his doubt. While the Chorus voices an orthodox view of theodicy, confidently proclaiming early in the text that "Just are the ways of God /And justifiable to Men," it also raises the counter-position: "Unless there be who think not God at all, / If any be, they walk obscure" (293-96). Herman notes that the

counter-argument dismissed by the Chorus—atheism—is not a compelling challenge to theodicy, since it speaks to the question of whether God exists, not to the question of whether God is a god of mercy and justice or a god of random pain and suffering (*Destabilizing Milton, 165)*. In short, the Chorus dodges the question; it asserts, but does not convincingly argue the orthodox position. As the passage continues, the Chorus undermines its assertion that God's ways are both "just" and "justifiable" by dismissing those who would:

> ...confine th'interminable
> And tie him to his own prescript,
> Who made our Laws to bind us, not himself
> And hath full right to exempt
> Whom so it pleases him by choice
> From national obstriction, without taint
> Of sin, or legal debt;
> For with his own laws he can best dispence. (307-314)

God is just, then, but his justness depends on an antinomian argument that allows him to break the laws he has laid out and to exempt certain individuals from following those laws, as is done in Samson's case.

The Chorus' choice of words—"to exempt / Whom so it *pleases*"—in describing God's law-breaking recalls the language Samson uses to describe his own law-breaking when he weds the woman of Timna because she "pleased" him. The Chorus attempts to support a rather flat assertion of God's justness with the same "above the law" argument that

Samson uses to defend his choices. In echoing Samson's justifications back to him, the Chorus appears biased and in the sway of Samson's own self-serving argument. This passage is also illustrative of the larger riddle about Samson's character at the pedagogical core of the poem. Milton raises two distinct possibilities that are at odds with each other. The first possibility is that God, as is his right, ignores Mosaic law and compels Samson to marry the woman of Timna. The second possibility, the one that Samson presents, is that Samson married her because she pleased him, and the divine sanction was secondary. By linguistically linking God's act of producing a potential savior for the Danites in the form of Samson and Samson's act of choosing the woman of Timnah against the wishes of his parents, Milton makes visible the moral gulf that separates the two acts.

We have further evidence of the Chorus' susceptibility and the shallowness of its conviction in its speech prior to Dalila's arrival, when it notes the presence of "causeless suffering / The punishment of dissolute days, in fine, / Just or unjust, alike seem miserable, / For oft alike, both come to evil end" (701-704). In the past, critics have downplayed the significance of these lines by arguing that the Chorus can't possibly believe them. Steadman injects orthodoxy into the passage through a semantic argument, claiming that "These lines are rather a complaint to Providence than a protest against it" and that "they question, rather than challenge the ways of God to men" (110). But, insofar as the words of the Chorus echo Samson's similar, confrontational questions, they are indeed a challenge to providence, even if one concedes there exists such a thing as innocent questioning. In his *Variorum Commentary on Samson Agonistes*, Dobranski echoes Hurd's declaration that "we are not to consider the sentiment [of the chorus] simply in itself, but as

adapted to present circumstances," a view that is repeated by numerous subsequent critics (Dobranski, 262). It's not difficult to see why critics have insisted upon the orthodoxy of the Chorus in this instance, and of the play in general. After all, *Samson Agonistes* must inevitably be read in light of Milton's other works, especially *Paradise Regained*, its companion piece, and *Paradise Lost*, which contains a much stronger and less ambiguous treatment of divine providence. Instead of finding orthodoxy in a text that, if not embracing of the heterodox elements of the Samson narrative, at the very least repeatedly draws attention to them, we ought to instead engage the question of what motivates Milton in *Samson Agonistes* to undermine the providential argument that he promotes with such vigor in his other texts.

By resisting the temptation to map the more orthodox theodicy of *Paradise Lost* onto *Samson Agonistes,* we allow ourselves to recognize the poem's hesitancy to solve the riddle of providence. *Paradise Lost* contains clear articulations of God's justness, spoken by authoritative voices, including Raphael, God, and the poem's narrator. Jane Melbourne has argued that the narrator of *Paradise Lost* has much in common with the classical chorus, and that the epic Narrator is not objective, for he has "an overwhelmingly important stake in the outcome of the action" (157). Milton's epic narrator may lack utter objectivity, but he is fundamentally reliable, and he serves as a trustworthy guide throughout the poem's narrative. The same cannot be said without reservation for the Chorus of *Samson Agonistes*. While the Chorus may not always agree with Samson, it is easily swayed by him, and its interests are closely aligned with his. We see the affinity between the two, for example, when Dalila departs and the Chorus announces that "She's gone, a manifest Serpent by her sting / Discover'd in the end, till now conceal'd" (997-98). In this response, the Chorus refuses to

engage, and in fact attempts to erase, Dalila's reasonable assertion that fame is "double-mouthed," and that to be a villain to one tribe is to be a hero to its enemy. Dalila's interpretation of her betrayal, in which she casts herself as having to make the difficult choice between her national allegiance and her personal allegiance to Samson may not win us over, but it does allow her to voice a strong argument in her defense. By ignoring this argument completely and finding only hypocrisy in Dalila, the Chorus reveals its bias and its unwillingness to consider competing interpretations. Their response is flat and hollow, over-confident next to Dalila's sympathetic speech, as is Samson's dismissal of her and his shallow certainty that "God sent her to debase me" rather than to instruct him (999). If the Chorus is easily persuaded by Samson, it may be because the Chorus sees itself in Samson's fate, at one point describing Samson's blindness as the "mirror of our fickle state, / Since man on earth unparallel'd!" (164-65).

Manoa, too, is a reliable, self-interested voice in the play. After hearing Samson's account of his marriages, he responds skeptically, refusing to praise his son's "marriage-choices" (420). In response to Samson's claim to divine inspiration, Manoa adopts a pragmatic position, arguing that the question of inspiration is unknowable, but that the lack of political results from Samson's actions is telling. However, just a few hundred lines later, Manoa seems to undergo an about face, having somehow been convinced by Samson's rather unconvincing optimism. Critics have taken Samson's claim, that "Dagon must stoop, and shall ere long receive / Such a discomfit, as shall quite despoil him" as evidence of Samson's regeneration, and Manoa's response that there is "nothing more certain" than God's eventual retribution as an expression of faith. However, to read Samson as

unambiguously regenerate (at this point) is to ignore the context of these lines in a larger conversation. Manoa is persuading Samson not to take his own life. Samson, for his part, is lamenting his inability to walk the streets "like a petty god," and as a result hopes to be consumed by vermin (529, 574). Samson's certainty, in other words, is not an expression of faith so much as an expression of his drive for vengeance. The ease with which Manoa adopts Samson's optimism early in the play reveals Manoa to be an unreliable narrator and casts a shadow of suspicion on his final pronouncements about Samson's heroism at the play's end.

Just as there are no authoritative voices within the poem for the reader to grab hold of to form an understanding of Samson's character and spiritual bearing, the play shrouds Samson in contradiction and ambiguity. In this regard, the play's opening lines set the stage for what is to come: "A little onward lend thy guiding hand / To these dark steps, a little further on; / For yonder bank hath choice of sun or shade, / There I am wont to sit" (1-4). Samson's words present the choice between sun and shade, a choice that is so clearly a symbolic choice between his two selves—a self-serving warrior and an inspired soldier of God—yet he withholds the results of his choice from the reader. The "there" that begins the fourth line is without antecedent. Where does he sit? Does he choose sun or shade? Samson returns to this intermixing of light and dark in subsequent lines, in which he describes himself as "dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon" (80), and he continues to contrast his physical blindness with the light of creation and of God's word. Milton sets up this interplay between light and dark, between the reprobate and regenerate Samson from the beginning of the text, and it continues throughout.

A lack of conclusive information about Samson's choices, however, is just one of the devices that Milton employs to keep us guessing about Samson's spiritual bearing. The play also contains ample instances of narrative contradiction. In the space of five lines, Samson refers to himself as both a "private person" engaged in "single rebellion" and "hostile acts" as well as "no private person but a person rais'd / With strength sufficient and command from Heav'n" (1208-1210). Similarly, although Samson claims to have chosen the woman of Timna because she "pleased" him, he also notes his motions were "of God" (219, 222). Samson acts out of pleasure, out of divine motions, and also out of "intimate impulses" (223): three ways to say the same thing, none of them quite the same. Another telling moment of contradiction is when Samson declares that he ought to be grouped with the heroes of the Old Testament: "Of such examples add me to the roll" (290). Yet, later, Samson declares that he is not "in the list of them that hope," suggesting that he has not regained God's favor as he earlier suggests (647). Similarly, just before his final act of violence, Samson stands "as one who prayed / Or some great matter in his mind revolved" (1637-38). Milton's choice of figurative language here and his stark refusal to decide whether Samson prays or merely thinks, while not a decisive indictment of Samson, is a deliberate decision to favor ambiguity where he might instead have offered certainty. Moreover, as many readers have noted, it is a clear departure from the scriptural account in Judges 16:28-30, in which Samson is unequivocally depicted at prayer. Rather than stress Samson's heroism and his inspiration, Milton chooses to stress just how hidden and opaque Samson's motives are. Intentional or not—and I believe that in light of Milton's larger pedagogical project it is indeed intentional—*Samson Agonistes* works against itself on a

number of key points regarding Samson's choices and his actions. The gestures of ambiguity and contradiction are often subtle, but their presence is undeniable and pervasive. Milton was a careful author, and regardless of where one stands on the question of Samson's regeneration, one must acknowledge that he injects uncertainty where there need be none.

The contradictions of Samson could have been resolved by a more thorough allegiance to its scriptural sources, yet this allegiance and its attendant resolution are carefully withheld from the text. In this regard, Carey has called *Samson Agonistes* a "drastic rewriting of the Samson story" in Judges, and indeed it is. Those readers who insist upon Milton's allegiance to scripture, such as Tobias Gregory, take issue with Carey's claim by arguing that the source modification is not all that significant. In his recent article, "The Political Messages of *Samson Agonistes*," Gregory refutes Carey's arguments against Samson's heroism by relying on three principal counter arguments:

> First, the Miltonic changes that allegedly cast doubt on Samson's heroism amount to nothing more than inference from silence. Second, the argument would require us to suppose that Milton concluded that the Bible had gotten it wrong, which is inconsistent with both his scripture-centered theology and his compositional practice in all three late poems. Third, Milton makes a series of much more clearly discernible modifications that point the opposite way: his Samson is not less but more heroic than the strongman of Judges. (181)

Gregory's first point is two-fold, and wrong on both counts. On one hand, Gregory argues that the source modification is not all that significant because Carey only provides a single example of the poem diverging from scripture. Carey is, however, working off a strong

foundation of source analysis, and Gregory need only look to Wittreich's earlier work on the poem, which demonstrates the ways in which the poem engages in a variety of "fiction-making operations" in relation to the Book of Judges, operations that condense, displace, and encode aspects of the scriptural account (61). Milton foregrounds some episodes—Samson's relationship with Dalila and the slaughter at the temple—while excluding others, in particular the foxes episode, which is Samson's one violent act that is not tied to a claim of divine inspiration (Wittreich, 66). The silence about Samson's prayer that Gregory shrugs off is not, of course, a silence at all, but rather a deliberate modification. Far from excluding the prayer from the narrative, Milton includes it so he can then make it ambiguous and uncertain. Only by treating Samson's act of standing "as one who prays" as an omission rather than as an ambiguation can Gregory argue that the omission is there because Milton assumes that his audience already knows about the prayer (180).

Gregory's second point, that it is uncharacteristic of Milton to depart from scriptural authority, ignores a large part of Milton's work. Certainly, there are places, such as in the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, where Milton argues from scripture. However, there are also places in Milton's texts where he intentionally disregards it. In *De Doctrina Christiana,* a text that is structured around scriptural authority, Milton is explicit on this point: "on the evidence of scripture itself, all things are eventually to be referred to the Spirit and the unwritten word" (*CPW* VI:590). William Poole calls Milton's assertion "an explosive idea" that "suggests that biblical texts, if found repugnant to the inner conscience, may be safely ignored" (Poole in *Milton in Context*, 483). Christopher Hill has also observed Milton's conflicted views of scriptural authority in the context of social institutions: "his insistence

on the authority of the Bible was necessary to protect the institutions of society against the anarchy of individual consciences; though his equal insistence on the right of properly qualified Christians to interpret the Bible for themselves allowed at least men like Milton to follow their own consciences" (*Milton and the English Revolution*, 316). The ample body of analysis on Milton's Arianism and his affinities to Socinian heresies further argues this fundamental point that while Milton placed great stock in scripture, he placed greater stock in the individual conscience properly guided by faith and reason.

Accepting Gregory's third point, that Milton "cleans up" Samson in the poem, also requires that we overlook much of the poem's ambiguity. Gregory claims that Milton makes Samson's motives "more nationalistic and less personal" than they are in *Judges*, as though Milton's views on nationalism following the restoration could have been straightforward. Again, Wittreich helps us to understand that following the failures of the republic, Milton found "some of that brutalizing enemy in his own nation and among his own people," and saw that the tragedy of Judges "was not so much that of the Philistines as of the Israelites" (*Shifting Contexts*, 198). Critics have for too long been eager to map the heroic Samson onto Milton's wishful vision of a heroic republic. To do so is to ignore the fact that Samson is a fundamentally tragic story that contains two competing narratives, in which Samson is both strong and blind, inspired and self-interested, a hero to his people and a traitor in his repeated marriages to their enemies. Moreover, to read Samson's violence as an unequivocal example of heroism is to disregard the model of ego-driven, martial heroism that Milton rejects in *Paradise Lost*.

Leaving aside the question of whether Samson is redeemed at the poem's conclusion, it is clear at this point that the poem, on multiple occasions, raises the possibility that he is not. Indeed, decades of critical discussion on the issue with no clear conclusion argues strongly for the idea that the text contains within it competing versions of Samson. As I have argued above, the poem is rife with ambiguity for a number of reasons. First, the poem lacks authoritative speakers who are outside the poem's narrative action. Second, the poem highlights historical relativism by way of Dalila's defense of her actions and the self-interest with which the Chorus assigns value to the poem's various personas. Third, in its attempts at theodicy, the poem returns to antinomian arguments on more than one occasion, arguments that signify a refusal to justify the ways of god to man. The poem's conclusion, that "all is best, though we oft doubt," does little to bring peace or closure after the holocaust at the temple. It is an abdication, a refusal to answer the poem's riddle, not a solution. Fourth, Milton does not allow the poem to state conclusively whether Samson's acts are divinely inspired or not. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Samson's prayer. Given the choice between depicting Samson as actually praying or leaving the depiction of the prayer out entirely, Milton chooses neither, and instead raises the possibility of prayer while refusing to depict its actuality. Fifth, as other critics have shown, Milton engages in source modification in order to downplay the possibility of scriptural authority. Had Milton presented the scriptural account with complete faithfulness, then many of the poem's uncertainties would no longer be present.

These points have all been made by others, most often in order to draw conclusions about the justness of Samson's actions and the degree to which the narrative contains his

regeneration. Ultimately, arguments about Samson's regeneration rely heavily on external sources, for to pass judgement on Samson, we must look outside the poem, as the poem itself is inconclusive and intentionally so. Wittreich, for example, bases much of his argument on the depictions of Samson in other early modern texts. Krouse, too, attempts to understand Milton's poem by placing Samson within a larger, external tradition, albeit a different tradition than that identified by Wittreich. Gregory seeks interpretative authority within the Judges narrative, which leads him to downplay Milton's willingness to modify and at times disregard biblical authority.

Most compelling as a contextual note, of course, is *Paradise Regained,* calling to us by virtue of its proximity to *Samson Agonistes.* Critics have long recognized the importance of Milton's decision to publish the tragedy with the brief epic, yet they have disagreed about its significance. Rajan, in *The Prison and the Pinnacle,* sees the coupling of the two poems as indicative of their related themes, and he argues that the climaxes of the two poems are "carefully complementary" and that both poems embody Milton's final "redemptive promise" (108-109). However, Rajan's parallel reading of the two texts requires more certainty around Samson's regeneration than many critics are now willing to grant. In *Shifting Contexts,* Wittreich suggests that the initial title page in the 1671 volume downplays the significance of *Samson Agonistes* giving it "the appearance of a mere afterthought, as if it were a footnote to (or an episode in) history, but not a decisive or climactic moment therein" (22). Rajan's more recent work on the tragedy contains a movement away from the certainty of his earlier, influential essay. In 2007, Rajan concludes his essay "Samson hath quit himself / like Samson" with the observation that "Samson Agonistes [...] invites us to

join in its drum-beating" while Paradise Regained "asks us to distance ourselves from the triumphalists elation" (8).

These two texts, bound together in a single volume, are in conversation with one another. Milton's textual privileging of *Paradise Regained* on the title page may suggest that it can serve as an external authority, as the interpretative guide to *Samson Agonistes* that is otherwise lacking. One fruitful point of comparison is the the private nature of the Son's acts in *Paradise Regained* and the public nature of Samson's in *Samson Agonistes*. The invocation to *Paradise Regained* stresses that the poem will tell us of "deeds above heroic, though in secret done," setting the stage for the poem's redefinition of public heroism in a private sphere (1.15). When the Son comes to John to be baptized, he does so "obscure / Unmarkt, unkown" (1.24-25). His trial in the desert is, of course, a trial of solitude, and he leaves his mother and his disciples to wonder at his fate. God's description of the trial's purpose, "to shew him worthy of his birth divine / and high prediction" is surprising, then, since his trial is seen by no one. The motivation behind the private trial—to show the Son's worth—only makes sense if we read "him" to be both the subject and the object of the verb. That is, the trial in the desert reveals the Son to himself, providing him with the internal insight needed to fulfill his destiny. In this regard, the Son succeeds in his trial by growing increasingly more internal, and he consequently begins his second day of trial by descending "into himself" (2.111). On the final day, when Satan tempts the Son with knowledge, the Son responds with a model of reading that emphasizes the trial as the process by which one knows oneself:

> ...who reads

> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgement equal or superior
> (And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek)
> Uncertain and unsettl'd still remains,
> Deep verst in books and shallow in himself,
> Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys,
> And trifles for choice matters, worth a spunge;
> As Children gathering pibles on the shore. (4.322-330)

The Son does not reject learning. Instead, he redefines it by shifting its focus inward. Learning that does not lead to knowledge of self leaves the reader "shallow in himself," despite being well read in the world. To emphasize this point, the poem repeatedly portrays the Son as engaged in thought. Indeed, for the Son, thought and action are as one, and he moves "step by step" with "thought following thought" (1.192). The Son is a man of calmness who repeatedly thinks before he acts, "musing and much revolving in his breast" (1.185). *Paradise Regained* redefines heroism as self-knowledge and self-discovery, exactly the sort of unsung heroism that is beyond heroic.

In contrast to this careful private being are Samson's public displays and turbulent mind. At points, Milton makes this comparison very clear, inviting his reader to make explicit comparison between the Son and Samson. As he begins his meditations in the Desert, the Son notes his own turbulence of mind: "O what a multitude of thoughts at once / Awakn'd in me swarm, while I consider / What from within I feel my self, and hear / What from without comes often to my ears" (1.196-199). The balance accomplished through repetition

in these last few lines suggests the ease with which the Son is able to reconcile input from within and without. The syntactical similarity of the Son's mental turbulence to Samson's "restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm / of hornets armed, no sooner found alone, / But rush upon me thronging" is unmistakable (19-21). Both men are lost in thought, but only Samson's thoughts are "restless." Both experience a "swarm" of thoughts, but only Samson's swarm is "deadly." In both cases, the end result is a subsequent contemplation of childhood. For the Son, this contemplation leads to his remembrance that his goal was always toward the "publick good" and to follow the "Law of God" (1.204, 206). For Samson, however, the contemplation is animated by a recollection of what he once was, and subsequently leads him to challenge God's decision to mark him among the chosen. On numerous levels, then, Milton compels his reader to make a clear comparison between the Son's calmness of mind and Samson's mental anguish. This comparison, in turn, leads the reader to the realization that Samson is not a type of Christ, for Samson falls short of the ideal represented by the Son. Where the Son bases his heroism on obedience to the law—represented by his youthful study of the law and by his later citation of the ten commandments as a justification of his refusal to call Satan his lord—Samson repeatedly claims—through his words and actions—to be above the law, particularly in his marriage choices.

Nonetheless, the pairing of texts does not make *Samson Agonistes* unambiguous, although it does, as Teskey has observed, make it impossible for us to see Samson as a prefiguration of Christ (181). Teskey's great insight into the poem, like Woods', is to see that it puts forward an idea that can be neither accepted nor denied. "It may be," writes Teskey,

"that out of an ironic delight in the contrast between the majesty of what is signified and the contemptibleness of what signifies, the poet intended to evoke a connection between Christ and Samson." (183). To refuse to see this connection, Teskey argues, "is to run as great a risk of seeming naive as one does in promoting such a reading without acknowledging the opposite risk" (183). The irony that Teskey demonstrates to be pervasive in the poem eventually moves into delerium and, in Teskey's reading, becomes a kind of teaching. Teskey reminds us that Milton saw Christ's teaching as an *entangling* and argues that *Samson Agonistes* requires the same sort of engagement from its reader:

> To strive to understand Milton's tragic poem *Samson Agonistes* on the most radical level means becoming entangled with more than the play. [...] We are entangled with the concept of the heap of the dead as a thing made, as a work of art, and not just as any work of art but as the vision of the desire out of which works of art arise. (194)

The ironies of the play collapse on themselves and find expression in the lasting image of a heap of entangled corpses. For Teskey, who accepts a late date for the poem, as for earlier readers like Rajan and Hill, the violence of the poem's close is a final resurgence of Milton's revolutionary zeal, in which the heap of dead represents Milton's enemy, the "political other" (195). While I agree with Teskey that the poem is deeply ironic and that Samson is both a type and an anti-type of Christ, to accept the poem's violence as Milton's own is to misunderstand Milton's deeper pedagogy as well as to misunderstand the work's generic goals.

Milton's prefatory note to *Samson Agonistes*, in which he addresses "that sort of dramatic poem which is called tragedy," provides the reader with a framework for understanding the ways in which the poem is meant to have an effect upon its reader. The first part of the preface focuses on explaining the function of tragedy, and Milton begins by delineating its key characteristics: "Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems" (1-2). He goes on to focus on catharsis, as defined by Aristotle, as the most important component of tragedy. Accordingly, the primary function of tragedy is, for Milton, "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, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated (341). The preface stresses the definition of tragedy in which the characters on the stage represent, by way of imitation, the passions that the play will purge from the minds of the audience. The title page, however, stresses another facet of Aristotelean tragedy in its repeated assertion (in Greek and in Latin) that tragedy is the imitation of an action. Read by itself, the title page suggests that Milton's play will provide the reader with a model for imitation, suggesting that we read Samson's acts as heroic. However, read in light of the preface, in which Milton clearly reminds the reader that the passions represented on stage are the very passions that must be purged, the title page takes on a new meaning in which the quotation is an explanation for the violence the poem will depict, not a call for readers to imitate it. The title page tells us that *Samson Agonistes* will represent the violent, vengeful passions that Milton and many of his readers could have themselves possessed. But, the preface tells us that those passions are represented so that their destructive energy may be washed away.

Milton's neoclassical articulation of Aristotelean tragedy was in keeping with similar views put forward in the sixteenth century by Minturno and Guarini (Butcher, 247). In sticking closely to the Aristotelean view, Milton eschews the more common Horatian model, expressed in the previous century by Philip Sidney, that the goal of tragedy was more fundamentally to teach and instruct than to purge and correct. In Horace, for example, the point of tragedy is not so much what it does to the audience, but what it shows them, or the instruction it provides by way of example. Certainly, in both Horace and Sidney it is important that plays provide pleasure, that they adhere to reality enough to be believable, but the pleasurable effect of a work is always presented as a means to an end, not an end in itself. "He who combines the useful and the pleasing," writes Horace, "wins out by both instructing and delighting the reader" (Adams, 72). Similarly, for Sidney it is important that the poet moves the reader for "moving is of a higher degree than teaching" (ibid, 150). Yet, the moving qualities of poetry are really just a means for conveying its didactic message, for the melliferous pleasure of poetry helps the medicine go down, so to speak.

Yet, Milton rejects this conception of tragedy, choosing instead to highlight its purgative powers. Annette Flowers' study of the preface to *Samson Agonistes* has further sharpened our understanding of Milton's view by differentiating it from Aristotle's, insofar as Milton saw tragic catharsis as a dampening and tempering of potentially harmful emotions rather than their elimination. Milton's preface raises a series of questions about the poem. If we take Milton at his word, then we must ask what are the passions, on the part of the reader, that the poem attempts to reduce? Because catharsis is, for Milton and for Aristotle, essentially homeopathic in its operation, it stands to reason that *Samson Agonistes* attempts to

cure that which it reveals to the reader. To take Samson as an unambiguous model of post-restoration heroism, as a righteous hero against a philistine monarchy, is to ignore the work's stated, generic intentions. Read as proper tragedy, Samson's revenge on his enemies is meant to placate, not to arouse, the reader's corresponding desire for revenge.

The poem's conclusion contains within it the catharsis described in the prologue. First, we see Manoa rewriting Samson's history, declaring without ambuigity that "Samson hath quit himself / Like Samson, and heroically has finished / A life heroic, on his enemies / Fully revenged" (1709). The tautology of these lines makes them immediately suspect, as Manoa defines heroism as revenge on one's enemies. Inevitably, read next to *Paradise Regained* with its claim of describing deeds "above heroic," Manoa's redefinition of Samson comes off as rhetorical and unconvincing. Manoa's speech is marked by that which he pronounces—Samson's undeniable heroism—and that which he so noticeably leaves out. In Manoa's mind, Samson's body "lies / Soaked in his enemie's blood," for Manoa is unable to envision the reality of his son's body soaked in its own blood (1726). Indeed, Manoa is barely able to accept Samson's death, as he insists that "nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail / or knock the breast" (1721-22). In Samson's death, Manoa finds an end to suffering and a new beginning, which informs his fantasy of Samson's body as monument, surrounded by verdant growth and further signs of his heroism. As Manoa concludes, he excises Samson's weakness in the face of Dalila's questioning from the narrative by attributing Samson's fall only to "his lot unfortunate in nuptial choice" (1743). As we've seen elsewhere in the poem, Manoa's last words are yet another attempt to reduce the competing Samsons of the poem into a single Samson. It is tempting, no doubt, to succumb to the

impulse to make order out of disorder, to quiet terrible violence. However, to say that Milton intends for his reader to follow Manoa along these lines of thought is to ignore the parts of the narrative that Manoa excludes.

More moderate than Manoa, the Chorus finds peace at the end of the poem yet their words keep returning to the uncertainty that surrounds Samson's actions and the eventual effects of those actions. In this regard, the Chorus' final lines, almost a sonnet in structure, admit peace as well as doubt:

> All is best, though we oft doubt,
> What the unsearchable dispose
> Of highest wisdom brings about,
> And ever best found in the close. (1745-48)

The symmetry of this quatrain, brought about by the repetition of "best," bookends the Chorus' doubt between assertions of faith. Twice the chorus must reassure itself that all is for the best as it attempts to find meaning in Samson's destruction, while simultaneously acknowledging that God's will is ultimately inscrutable and unknowable.

The second quatrain is parallel to the first, and again the chorus seeks confidence in spite of the world's pervasive uncertainty:

> Oft he seems to hide his face,
> But unexpectedly returns
> And to his faithful champion hath in place
> Bore witness gloriously; (1749-52)

The syntactic movement from that which is hidden—God's face—to that which is made visible—God's glorious witness—again shows the chorus trying to master their doubts with assertions of their faith. As Samson did in the play's opening scene, the Chorus fluctuates between dwelling on that which is dark and hidden—God's face, his unsearchable dispose—and that which is visible—the "glorious" nature of Samson's act of destruction. Nonetheless, a calm progression builds in the poem's closing lines, and the three couplets that end the poem show the Chorus reaffirming their preexisting beliefs:

> ...whence Gaza mourns
> And all that band them to resist
> His uncontrollable intent,
> His servants he with new acquist
> Of true experience from this great event
> With peace and consolation hath dismissed,
> And calm of mind all passion spent. (1752-58)

Yet these final lines also exhibit the doubleness of the preceding lines. The opening image of Gaza in mourning recalls the terrible destruction brought about by Samson, but the Chorus moves past this, finding "peace and consolation" in Gaza's mourning. In doubt, the chorus finds faith. Surrounded by violence, the chorus discovers peace. Ostensibly, the conclusion reconciles these opposites, yet the way in which the verse keeps returning to doubt suggests that the Chorus is not as secure in their certainty as they appear.

Approaching Milton as an instructional poet reveals the centrality of *Samson Agonistes* within his body of work as the fulfillment of his instructional model. Samson, like Milton's

earlier works, is very much concerned with the reader's experience of the text. Fish's insight that *Paradise Lost* is intentionally focused on the reader, and that Milton manages the reader's experience of the text in order to accomplish certain instructional goals is also true of *Samson Agonistes*. However, *Samson Agonistes* also shows us that as Milton matured, he came to see the instructional goals of his poems as less didactic and more experiential. Classical tragedy, as articulated by Aristotle, fits closely with Milton's experiential model of education insofar as it, more than any other classical genre, teaches by way of what it *does* to rather than what it *says* to the reader. Moreover, tragedy allowed Milton to exclude the authoritative voices to which readers of epic had grown accustomed. Lacking figures of authority, *Samson Agonistes* weaves a web of uncertainty that encourages the reader to choose between the text's competing versions of Samson. To further compel the reader to choose, Milton imbues the text with further uncertainties by way of narrative inconsistencies and marked diversions from his scriptural sources. Milton excludes his own choice from the poem, for to include it would be to risk depriving his reader of an opportunity to exercise his own faculty of reason, which Milton repeatedly equates with choosing. *Samson Agonistes*, then, is an enactment of the model of strenuous learning that Milton promotes in *Areopagitica*: "well knows he who uses to consider, that our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion" (Riverside, 1015). In making the reader work, as it were, to choose between the competing interpretations of Samson, Milton fully realizes the instructional vision of *Areopagitica* and offers the reader a final path for repairing the ruins of our first parents.

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