'The guiding hand': the progression of Milton's thought towards Samson Agonistes

Van Looy, Mairi H.L.

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The Progression of Milton's thought towards Samson Agonistes

Mairi H. L. Van Looy

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University of Durham, Department of English

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'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,' what should prevent one from resting likewise in the belief that his eyesight lies not in his eyes alone, but enough for all purposes in God's leading and providence? Verily...only He looks out for me and provides for me...leading me and leading me forth as with His hand through my whole life...*

A Little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps, a little further on;
(*SA* 1-2)

* Milton. Letter to Leonard Philaris, 1654. As quoted Milton on Himself: Milton's utterances upon himself and his works. Ed., John S. Diekhoff. London: Cohen & West, 1966.

Abstract

This thesis examines the development of Milton's purpose as his vocation of poetic legislator for his times informed the progress of his vision. In seeing Samson Agonistes as the culmination of a process, it illustrates the narrowing focus of Milton's theological prescription for a godly society. Before any other concern, Milton desired man to repair his relationship with God, and urges his readers to achieve this; it may be observed throughout his polemical writing, reaching a pinnacle of clarity and urgency in the 1671 volume, and in Samson Agonistes in particular. From the assumption that unity with God's purpose was the informing principle of his writing, all of his other concerns may be observed in their rightful setting. As the foundation of Milton's political vision was virtue, the inculcation of virtue in his readership was arguably his primary motivation.

This thesis addresses certain key works in order to assess the progression of this purpose towards Samson Agonistes: Areopagitica as an exemplar of his early brilliance in prose, and as a commentary on the significance of language as a weapon in the battle for truth; Eikonoklastes as a demonstration of the contemporary use of historical narrative for political ends, and as aesthetic as well as political iconoclasm; and the Second Defence as the nexus of poetry and prose in his career, where he rewrites the truth in order to glorify and defend his nation and himself. His theological beliefs are discussed in the light of their importance to his vocation and vision of the regenerative potential of man. This is shown to be the guiding principle of his prose and the main subject of the final poems. The 1671 volume is examined as the immediate context of Samson Agonistes. The intertextual resonances reveal the concentration of Milton's focus upon the paradise within. Samson Agonistes is examined also within the cultural contexts which Milton reworks in order to isolate the potential of man's spirit. Samson Agonistes is finally examined in the light of Milton's perennial concerns as a prescription for specific action. Firmly rooted in the political and theological debates of his life, it is nonetheless a call to inner revolution for his readership.

Declaration and Acknowledgements

The material in this thesis has not been used in any previous degree, although the ideas contained within it are a progression from previous research.

To that end I would like to thank Dr. Richard Maber, Department of Seventeenth-Century Studies, Durham University, Professor Anthony Fletcher, formerly Department of History, Durham University, Dr. Alan Ford, Department of Theology, Durham University, and Mr. David Crane, formerly Department of English, Durham University, for their help and encouragement in my earlier research.

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The Texts

In this thesis I have used the Columbia edition of The Works of John Milton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), as I consider it to be as close as possible to the original source. Moreover, the text is not over-burdened with notes, but is left to speak for itself. It is also still the most complete edition of Milton's works.

All biblical quotations are taken from the Authorised Version of 1611.

All writing conventions are taken from the MLA Handbook, Third Edition, 1988.

Abbreviations Used

SA : Samson Agonistes
PR : Paradise Regained
PL : Paradise Lost

Works: The Prose Works of John Milton (New York: Columbia UP, 1931)
An Apology &c.: An Apology Against a Pamphlet call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus
Animadversions: Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence, Against Smectymnuus
De Doctrina: De Doctrina Christiana
Divorce: The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce
First Defence: Defence of the People of England Against Claudius Anonymous, alias Salmasius his Defence of the King
Of Reformation: Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England: And the Causes that hitherto have hindered it.
Ready and Easy Way: The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth
Second Defence: Second Defence of the People of England Against The Infamous Libel, Entitled, The Cry of the Royal Blood to Heaven, Against the English Parricides
Tenure: The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates
The Reason of Church-Government: The Reason of Church-Government Urg'd Against Prelaty

CQ: Critical Quarterly
ELH: English Literary History
ELR: English Literary Review
HLQ: Huntington Library Quarterly
JEGP: Journal of English and German Philology
MP: Modern Philology
MQ: Milton Quarterly
MS: Milton Studies
PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association
PQ: Philological Quarterly
QJS: Quarterly Journal of Speech
SEL: Studies in English Literature
SP: Studies in Philology
SR: Sewanee Review
TSLL: Texas Studies in Literature and Language
UTQ: University of Toronto Quarterly
YR: Yale Review

Contents

Introduction.

Mary Ann Radzinowicz in the Preface to her work, Toward Samson Agonistes, recalls the friends of Truth as they are described in Areopagitica: "some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedar" and comments that the workers at this spiritual building site work collaboratively, harmoniously accepting differences, much as Milton scholars should: "each bringing up his thoughts cheerfully and confidently to be placed side by side as contributions toward the building of a varied, symmetrical edifice."[1] The idealism of this vision accords well with Milton's own vision for a society where righteous merit would determine office, and each member of the social hierarchy would contribute to the common good to the best of their ability; and as a standard, it encapsulates something of the collaborative efforts of literary criticism. In whatever ways individual critics may have influenced the direction of Milton criticism at a particular time, the overall trajectory of critical response has taken the interpretation of his work to a point of greater interest, perhaps, than at any time in the past. This thesis is rooted in the current critical response to the contribution Milton's polemical writing makes to his final poems, especially I would argue, to the 1671 volume. Radzinowicz claims that Samson Agonistes not only reflects the concerns of the final phase in Milton's life, but also "consistent and overarching principles in his works."[2] It is this theory which has guided the layout of this thesis, which seeks not only to understand the earlier works in order to explore more fully the later works, but also to view the prose in the light of the theological awareness which Samson Agonistes imparts.

This thesis will show that for Milton, language was a pure instrument of the spirit: its divinely appointed use for the communication of truth, and the divine calling of the vocation which used it, inspired the purpose of his life: thus his exalted view of the role of the poetic legislator rendered the authority of his authorship persuasive and enduring. The response which he sought to inspire will also be addressed, and in directing the course of the thesis towards Samson Agonistes, I intend to use the ethic of the poem to highlight the purpose for which he wrote throughout his works. Given the interconnected nature of Milton's concerns, it is arguably informative to follow separate strands of enquiry within the locus which the study of Samson Agonistes affords. The darkness of political disillusion is alleviated by the light of the theological conviction in Samson Agonistes. Before the 1650s, revolutionaries had believed it possible to

[1] Mary Ann Radzinowicz, Toward Samson Agonistes: The Growth of Milton's Mind (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) xi.
[2] Radzinowicz 117.

establish Christ's kingdom on earth by force, but after the Restoration, most turned away from these beliefs, and placed their trust instead in what Derek Wood has termed "the spiritualisation of hope."[3] It is this aspect of trust and faith which Milton harnesses in his portrayal of Samson.[4] He portrays a dimension of dignity and rationality in man which rejects the hints of reprobation which are present in his other major poems.[5] The concept of election is also highlighted in Samson Agonistes, illustrating Milton's perennial concern with the relationship of the individual with his nation, his destiny and his God: as only the individual may be saved, thus only the individual can succeed in his vocation and deliver himself. The importance of the law, emphasised in Paradise Regained, is superseded by the significance of the spirit in Samson Agonistes. This celebration of the spirit is apparent at several levels in the poem: doubt triumphs over blind faith, reason over unthinking obedience, action over passivity, and inner vision over physical sight. Although the God of Samson appears dreadful, universal, and incomprehensible, He is also personal, and concerned with the individual: a Father in whom Samson can trust. This paradox of majesty and approachability lies at the heart of the Reformed faith, and Milton illustrates the fundamental principles of his theology in presenting this impression of the guiding hand.

Before any other concern, Milton first desired man to repair his relationship with God, and this may be seen most clearly in his final work. From this righteousness and firm stance, all other ideas flow, and all of his other concerns can be observed in their rightful setting. The fundamental principle of Milton's political vision was virtue,[6] and thus the inculcation of virtue was arguably Milton's primary concern. Republicanism for Milton was the most likely form of government to promote a godly society, and thus it could be argued that for him the political or social motivation was subject to the theological.[7] In the light of this understanding, it may further be argued that the disillusion of the Restoration for Milton was not so much political as it was theological. The implications of a national reluctance to be liberated were of such religious magnitude to Milton, that this became one of the strongest of the political messages in

[3] Derek N. C. Wood, "Creative Indirection in Intertextual Space: Intertextuality in Milton's Samson Agonistes" Intertextuality: Research in Text Theory Ed. Heinrich Plett (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) 202.
[4] See Chapter 6.
[5] See Chapter 4.
[6] See below, 10-11.
[7] Similarly it was this desire to educate in godliness which lay behind the various approaches to liberty taken in the prose: Areopagitica championed freedom and reason firstly, and the power of language secondly; and similarly, it was not his marriage which prompted the divorce tracts, but rather his belief in the freeedom and dignity of man which rendered his marriage unbearable.

Samson Agonistes.[8] Thus an understanding of the final poems elucidates the earlier works, partly because Milton's concerns are so clearly expressed in the final poems, particularly in Samson Agonistes.[9] This is probably because for Milton, poetry was an end in itself. His admission in the writing of national defence that the temptation to soar led him into realms of inappropriate language demonstrates the extent to which the medium of poetry freed his ability from other concerns. Therefore the clarity of communication which may be found in the final poems is a true expression of Milton's mind, unburdened by the necessity of directing his discourse within particular parameters.

This thesis addresses certain key works in order to assess the development of Milton's purpose towards Samson Agonistes. To that end, Chapter 1 notes the early realisation of his vocation, and the unexpected direction which he took in order to fulfil it. This chapter uses the medium of Areopagitica in particular, as this work is an exemplar of the brilliance of his early prose, and a significant commentary on the vital nature of language as a weapon in his battle for truth. Chapter 2 sets Milton's arguments for the legality of political and civil resistance into the framework of the events with which Eikon Basilike and Eikonoklastes engage, demonstrating the contemporary use of historical narrative for opposing political ends. It also examines the tyranny of the king's image and Milton's literary and aesthetic iconoclasm. The progression from the king's eikon to the Second Defence in Chapter 3 highlights this work as Milton's own eikon, and the nexus of prose and poetry in his career. Milton uses the Defences not only to glorify his nation, but also to rewrite their history as though charting the epic course of a heroic people. This argument illustrates the dichotomy between his vision and political reality. Chapter 4 discusses the theological influences which informed his belief in the regenerative potential of mankind: in itself a fundamental principle of the prose writing, and the main subject of the final poems. His theology is shown to be close to that of Arminius, while still retaining moderate elements of Calvinism. In the light of his hostility to the ceremonialism of the Laudian Church of England, registered in the early prose, the difference between Laudianism and Arminianism is discussed. Progressing from his belief in the dignity of man, Chapter 5 addresses the significance of the 1671

[8] Radzinowicz points out: "In the figure of Samson was the image of failure, the type of one who had thrown away his great opportunity. In *Samson Agonistes* Milton does not set forth a case against the royalists; it was not the royalists who broke faith." Radzinowicz 93.
[9] See Chapter 5.

volume, as the immediate context of Samson Agonistes. The impact which the joint publication of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes has upon their interpretation, and the intertextual resonances of the volume as a whole are examined with a view to highlighting the importance of the paradise within to Milton's purpose. Chapter 6 examines Samson Agonistes within the context of the cultural intertexts which Milton reworks. The classical structure of the poem, the biblical narrative which is its source, and the exegetical tradition which Milton addresses, are all shown to be utilised by Milton in order to isolate the potential of man's spirit, and to contribute to the universality and cultural complexity of Samson Agonistes. Chapter 7 examines Samson Agonistes in the light of Milton's perennial concerns, and as a prescription for specific action. Although firmly rooted in the political and theological debates of his life, the message of the work is for an inner revolution in his readership. This Introduction will relate the thesis to the extensive literature extant in the areas which have immediate bearing on my arguments: the importance of the prose work as aesthetic as well as polemic, the political use of scripture, the figure of Samson in the literary tradition with which Milton would have been familiar, and the critical response to Samson Agonistes; in particular the work of Joseph Wittreich, Mary Ann Radzinowicz, and David Loewenstein.

Although much critical argument has cited the achievements of the left hand in the cool realms of prose as important to the understanding and appreciation of the real poetic achievements, critical opinions are now beginning to agree that such a distinction, although Milton's own,[10] does not sufficiently address the complex aesthetic discourse of the polemical work.[11] David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner have sought to promote awareness of the interconnected purposes of Milton's left- and right-handed achievements in their collection of essays, Politics, poetics and hermeneutics in Milton's prose, claiming in their introduction: "When critics try to isolate the sublime canonical bard from the vehement polemicist, the separated halves cling together again."[12] John A. Via also challenges the traditional device of distinguishing between the left and the right hand of Milton in his article "Milton's Antiprelatical Tracts: The Poet Speaks in Prose",

[10] This quotation is often taken out of context: see Politics, poetics and hermeneutics in Milton's prose: Essays edited by David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) Introduction.
[11] As Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker observe in the introduction to Politics of Discourse, Aristotle believed that poetics should include prose, criticising the tendency to define poets not by their work, but by the metre in which they write. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987) 45-6.
[12] Loewenstein and Turner, Politics, poetics and hermeneutics 1.

emphasising that the same imagination and idealism instructs each hand, but that they are directed towards a different purpose.[13] In his work Lines of Authority, Zwicker disputes the assumption that great literature as art or aesthetic exists independently of its social, political or historical context, and asserts the "traffic between politics and culture" and their "urgent and constitutive relations."[14] In Milton's time, literature itself assumed qualities which exceeded the normal realm of influence for art, as Zwicker has shown: "With the raising of arms in civil combat the verbal stakes had been altered. Literature assumed increasing importance both as a site for and as a way of giving shape and authority to the conduct of polemical argument."[15] The power of the written word to achieve or to direct political action should not be underestimated, for Milton's age was one which distinguished less clearly than our own "the authentic from the fictive, the aesthetic from the political," and "the literary - indeed, the imaginative - could fashion the course of events."[16] This convergence of the aesthetic and the practical, of the contemplative discipline of learning and the active arena of political performance, created the legislative forum of poetic authority, and it was here that Milton took his stance. Annabel Patterson has noted this achievement of Milton in her article, "The Civic Hero in Milton's Prose": "In wrestling with the problematical role of the intellectual in times of crisis, and in trying to define that role as heroic, Milton created a linguistic and metaphoric synthesis of action and contemplation which differs from the passive fortitude of the great poems."[17]

Poetry and Prose

The role of the poet was greatly revered in the seventeenth century,[18] and during the years of civil disruption, all factions in political and religious dispute turned to poetic

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[13] Via, John A. "Milton's Antiprelatical Tracts: The Poet Speaks in Prose." MS 5 (1973): 87-88. He also contends that Milton intended this unity between his prose and poetry.

[14] Steven N. Zwicker, Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture, 1649-1689 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993) 3. He also argues: "It is an irony of literary history that study of the later decades of the seventeenth century - often the circumstance and the subject matter of poetry - critics have been drawn to cooler perspectives on this culture: the discounting of partisan temper, the disengagement of literary culture from the harshness of politics."

[15] Zwicker, 10.

[16] Sharpe and Zwicker, Politics of Discourse 18.

[17] Patterson, Annabel M. "The Civic Hero in Milton's Prose." MS 8 (1975): 71. This is perhaps true of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, but the action of Samson Agonistes could not easily be characterised as "passive fortitude". Moreover, Samson Agonistes is not linguistically passive, as the tortured speeches of Samson, the wordy combat with Harapha, and the barely controlled passion of his dialogue with Dalila clearly show. Patterson continues: "This application of learning to the active life through the political effectiveness of rhetoric provides a genuinely synthetic solution to the action-contemplation dichotomy, and the orator is thereby defined as uniquely qualified to mediate *between* the two *genera vitae*." 73.

[18] See Zwicker 15: "The role of the poet in English political culture between the civil wars and the Glorious Revolution had never been so esteemed."

discourse[19] for justification, defence, guidance and affirmation. Milton also viewed the role of the poet as dignified and responsible; a talent which it was death to hide,[20] as David Morse has observed in his work England's Time of Crisis - From Shakespeare to Milton: "Milton retained his high sense of the role of the poet, as both visionary and prophetic. The poet's task, like that of the Old Testament prophets, was to recall his people to order and to infuse them with an enthusiasm for the heroic tradition of which they are a part. They must be reminded of their destiny even in the face of circumstances that seem to put this in question."[21] Laura Lunger Knoppers also notes Milton's assumption of the prophetic tone in her essay "Milton's *The Readie and Easie Way* and the English jeremiad."[22] Milton's own conviction regarding his purpose or vocation was twofold; the communication of God's purpose to men, or the justifying of God's ways to mankind;[23] and the inspiring of virtue in his readership, a task which he sought to achieve through the promotion of freedom of choice or inner liberty, which he believed to be the precondition of political justice.[24] With regard to he first of these purposes, the exigency with which Milton addressed the task of fulfilling his vocation attests to the peril of the situation in which Milton believed his country to be enmeshed. Morse suggests that "the poet's task of justifying the ways of God to man was an urgent one, since God's unpredictable, unforeseeable and incomprehensible action could undermine the faith of precisely those who were most deeply committed to him."[25] Milton arguably saw history as a collaboration between man and God, and his conviction that the English nation was an elect nation drove him to express the reforming zeal which inspired him, and which he sought to infuse into his readership. His desire to educate and to reform continually informed his political convictions,[26] which were a vehicle for his concern for

[19] By this term I denote prose and poetry. Milton's prose has been widely identified as poetic discourse; for example Keith W. Stavely: "Milton's prose is a medium of imaginative expression," The Politics of Milton's Prose Style. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975) 1 and see also 2; and poetry itself engaged in tasks normally associated with prose: "Not only did poetry take on a full range of political and partisan issues, but it did so in forms that stood fully within the lines of public discourse." Zwicker 13.

[20] Thomas Kranidas also argues that Milton saw his role and purpose clearly, but claims that the talent which it is death to hide refers specifically to Milton's poetry rather than his prose. "Milton's Of Reformation: The Politics of Vision." ELH 49 (1982): 498.

[21] David Morse, England's Time of Crisis - From Shakespeare to Milton: A Cultural History (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1989) 361. Alan Sinfield notes: "The dignity of the poetic vocation is often asserted in Milton's writing." He continues by surmising: "It may be assimilated to Protestantism if it is presented as a divine calling..." Alan Sinfield, Literature in Protestant England 1560-1660 (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983) 32. Milton certainly saw it as such.

[22] She argues that Milton's language is that of the castigating Old Testament prophets, and that he not only justifies the ways of God to man and renders the readership accountable, but also justifies himself in lifting up his voice in admonition and lament. Laura Lunger Knoppers, "Milton's *The Readie and Easie Way* and the English jeremiad." Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 213-216.

[23] The inner light to which Milton frequently and latterly poignantly alludes could be regarded therefore either as what Alan Sinfield has termed the "poet's imaginative insight" or God's guidance. Sinfield 33.

[24] Morse states that poetry should be "at once celebratory and admonitory." 361.

[25] Morse 361.

[26] See Cedric C. Brown, "Great senates and godly education: politics and cultural renewal in some pre- and post-revolutionary texts of Milton." Ideas in Context: Milton and Republicanism Ed. David Armitage, Armand Himy and Quentin Skinner (Gen. Ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 44. Brown contends that in Milton's writing, "matters of statecraft are subordinated to the continuing educational cause of reformation." He continues: "[Although] he concerned himself with systems of government, and

the spiritual well-being of his nation, rather than an ideological system in their own right.[27]

Aspects of this tendency in Milton have been identified in critical interpretation. Some have distinguished his strength as a poet rather than as a politician,[28] and Keith W. Stavely has contended that this aspect of his writing is in itself responsible for his failure as a political writer, claiming that his prose has: "an exalted "poetic" texture [which] limits the political effectiveness of Milton's prose instead of extending and enriching it."[29] He argues that Milton's poetic genius restricted his capacity for rational political debate, as though poetry or rhetoric and meaningful political performance were mutually exclusive:

> Each treatise is...filled with one massive sentence after another battering away at the inertial resistance of custom and received opinion. To suppose that words alone can have such impact, to work so hard and so repetitiously at envisioning daily life in such an imaginatively colored and intensified perspective, is to continue to ignore or misconceive the imperatives of political action and to write not pamphlets but poems.[30]

Another difficulty which critics have endeavoured to address is the issue of Milton's political persuasion, often previously dismissed as republican, or classically republican, and now more often regarded as neither.[31] As Thomas N. Corns has remarked, "Milton's republicanism emerges after the event."[32] The progression of Milton's developing political theory is noted by Corns in this essay, from his initial emergence as a regicide in February 1649[33], where he reveals himself initially as not a republican, as it is "the case for the accountability of monarchs, rather than the case for a republic"[34] which interests Milton. Even in Eikonoklastes, "he expounds the culpability, not of kings

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although he had no wish to contaminate civil with ecclesiastical powers, there remains a sense in which his ideas of the religious spirit of the nation assumed a priority over matters of political organization."

[27] Radzinowicz has noted this aspect of Milton's conviction in Paradise Lost: "Milton's method is not that of the propagandist for this or that institution or program; his method is that of the teacher." Mary Ann Radzinowicz, "The Politics of *Paradise Lost*" Politics of Discourse 206.

[28] See Tony Davies, "Borrowed Language: Milton, Jefferson, Mirabeau." Milton and Republicanism 256. Davies describes Milton as: "a poet and a rhetor, not a professional idealogue or political theorist."

[29] Stavely 2.

[30] Stavely 65.

[31] For a different conclusion see David Armitage "John Milton: poet against empire." Milton and Republicanism 225: "...his most formative sources were classical and republican, and they gave him a coherent reading of the moral narrative played out between 1649 and 1660. Milton remained true to his republicanism even in his anger and his regret. Throughout, he was guided by its historical typology, disillusioning as that was;" and Nicholas von Maltzahn, "The Whig Milton, 1667-1700." Milton and Republicanism 229: "Milton's republicanism had origins both humanist and religious." Martin Dzelzainis argues initially in his essay "Milton's Classical Republicanism" that Milton's acquaintance with Roman and Greek writers had led him into an appreciation of their politics, an admiration for their commonwealths, and an aversion to monarchy, Milton and Republicanism Chapter 1. However he acknowledges that Milton could not be categorised as a republican *per se*, as the Tenure argues that a parliament could also be removed by the people, indeed that all forms of government should be improved or held to account. 19-20.

[32] Thomas N. Corns, "Milton and the characteristics of a free commonwealth." Milton and Republicanism 25.

[33] Corns notes that before this point there had been a four year silence with no identifiable stages of development leading to his emergence in print as a regicide. Milton and Republicanism 26.

[34] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 26.

in general, but of one king, and the justification of the regicide state's conduct towards him."[35] In the Defences, Milton generally avoids personal attacks upon the king, and even in the First Defence, he does not dismiss the rule of one just man, or indeed a monarchy out of hand. It is only in the very late Ready and Easy Way that Milton "articulate[s] a constitutional model for good governmental configuration."[36] Dzelzainis also comments in his essay, "Milton and the Protectorate in 1658" that Milton did not oppose monarchy as such, although he did oppose non-elective or hereditary monarchy,[37] and although he did not object to the aristocracy, he disapproved of the House of Lords.[38]

Blair Worden also tackles the issue of Milton's political limitations when he comments that Milton never tells us what should have been done to secure liberty, losing patience quickly with the intricacies of constitutional reform. He continues: "His republicanism feeds on, but is also confined by, his commitment to 'internal liberty', his certainty that moral or religious reform, reform of the soul or the household or the church, is a necessary and perhaps even sufficient condition of political reform."[39] Corns defines the area of difficulty in his remark: "Republicanism, in Milton's writing, is more an attitude of mind than any particular governmental configuration."[40] I would argue that there are two fields of enquiry issuing from these points. Firstly that Milton, and indeed the whole of polemical discourse, was restricted in the development of requisite political theory by the cultural unease of the situation in which the nation found itself in the immediate aftermath of Charles's execution. As Davies has stated: "social and political revolutions, if they are to succeed, must also be cultural revolutions;"[41] and Corns has observed that the regicides had removed Charles, but not kingship, and had muddled their way into a republic with no other serious alternative. Political theory in England had been suppressed by the claim of the monarchy to rule by divine right. As a

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[35] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 26. Corns also demonstrates that the Tenure praises good kingship as opposed to Charles, and that Eikonoklastes contains no mention of republic, whereas although "commonwealth" is frequently mentioned, it is not in reference to government, but "rather as a collective term for the whole body of people constituting the nation." 32.

[36] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 41. Stavely also comments on the unique nature of this tract, where he claims that Milton: "thoroughly and consciously reflects a political situation controlled by Milton's opponents." Stavely 101.

[37] Hence Milton's portrayal of the divine government as a meritocracy in Paradise Lost. See Radzinowicz, Politics of Discourse 209-11, where she notes that Christ's position according to Milton was merited rather than inherited, and that hierarchy within the heavenly kingdom is based upon an "individualistic, voluntaristic, and meritocratic basis." Corns has also commented upon the importance of merit over inheritance to Milton: "A free commonwealth chooses its servants, not for their blood, but for their godliness and their merit." Milton and Republicanism 39.

[38] Martin Dzelzainis, "Milton and the Protectorate in 1658." Milton and Republicanism 205.

[39] Blair Worden, "Milton and Marchamont Nedham." Milton and Republicanism 170. See also Brown: "Milton's political language was never free from the categories of religious and moral definition, and one scheme of reformation and recovery embraced it all." Milton and Republicanism 60.

[40] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 41.

result the nation had no vocabulary with which to express its new state, and devoid of appropriate language, had no political theory.[42] Moreover, Corns has expressed the fundamental conclusion to this question, in claiming that the Good Old Cause is really a language: "It is an idiom in which a value system and an aesthetic are inscribed, and it is an undeferential posture which utterly subverts the assumptions of Stuart monarchism."[43] This clears Milton of the charge implicit in many critical examinations of his prose, that he was politically immature, disinterested, or even ignorant;[44] and leads to the second field of enquiry: that the establishment of God's kingdom within the individual souls of his readership was more important to Milton than the establishment of any political kingdom in England. Michael Wilding in his work Dragon's Teeth: Literature in the English Revolution, has argued that after the Restoration, most Puritan sects saw the establishment of Christ's kingdom no longer "as a military, political objective of this world, but as a moral objective of the spirit."[45] Milton arguably felt this from the beginning of his career: his conviction that his vocation would be to communicate and to instil God's purpose in man was too great a claim upon his duty to be harnessed for anything less. Radzinowicz has observed that in the later prose Milton used a single vocabulary to describe politics and religion, and that "He made no linguistic distinction between the spheres of spirit and state."[46] Northrop Frye encapsulates this argument when he comments: "Milton's source told him that although heaven is a city and a society, the pattern established for man on earth by God was not social but individual, and not a city but a garden."[47]

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[41] Davies, Milton and Republicanism 256.
[42] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 27.
[43] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 42.
[44] See particularly Stavely, The Politics of Milton's Prose Style. Stavely accuses Milton of being out of touch with human concerns: "Milton is so imbued with principle and so committed to it that, in his political prose, concepts and visions do not emerge from a human context. They substitute for it." 113 Also: "Milton speaks not for other men but for truth," 113, an argument with which I agree in part: it is this which fuels his conviction that he must continue regardless of personal cost, and which informs his discourse to the extent that in fixing his inward eyes upon the establishment of God's kingdom, he relinquishes his grip upon man's political solutions. However, his earnest desire to improve other men argues a greater involvement with humanity in Milton than Stavely admits.
[45] Michael Wilding, Dragon's Teeth: Literature in the English Revolution. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 249. He also argues that the paradise within, promoted so strongly at the close of Paradise Lost is taken up in Paradise Regained where this inner paradise is explored in a "quietist rejection of the world, of earthly kingdoms gained by military means." I would argue that Milton does reject these earthly kingdoms, but more in the line of continuing public and political engagement, as what Worden would describe as "interlinear criticism" of the governments which had successively failed between the reigns of Charles I and Charles II. Moreover, the acerbic dignity of Christ, and the conflict of words and language with which he meets Satan's challenge is hard to define as "quietist". See Worden, Milton and Republicanism 174: "In the Protectorate, as so often in the early modern period, the most telling literary expressions of political opposition are to be found between the lines. Interlinear criticism presents scholars with obvious difficulties and obvious temptations. It may be hard to prove and too easy to imagine. But sometimes it is unmistakable."
[46] Radzinowicz, Politics of Discourse 215.
[47] Northrop Frye, The Return of Eden (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965) 113-14. However Alastair Fowler notes at the close of his edition of Paradise Lost that the reference to Eden is not to the garden, but to the country around it. He recalls psalm cvii 4: "'They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.' But those who heard the echo of this psalm would also remember the continuation: 'Then they cried unto the Lord...And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.'" John Milton, Paradise Lost Ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1986) 642.

Milton's ascent to the province of poetry has inspired a varied critical response. Christopher Hill has emphasised the importance of censorship to any political reading of the final poems,[48] a point with which Wilding has also engaged: "Rather than looking for overall political allegory or structure at a time of censorship, repression, and ready reprisal, it can sometimes be more profitable to assemble a network of allusions, to establish a field of potentially political reference, a texture of allusion, than to try to discover a sustained political critique."[49] The modern reader however should guard against inverting the order of Milton's concerns, as many critics appear to have done; assuming that the personal glory of a literary task well executed represented a greater achievement to Milton than that of communicating his vital convictions, or performing his ultimate duty. The beauty and expertise of his discourse should be regarded more in the light of being entirely fitting to his real purpose than of being an end in itself. No architect of a cathedral would raise his own creation above the creator for whom it was designed. As Earl Miner suggests in his essay "Milton and the Histories": although Milton "assumed typology, analogy, and perhaps allegory, he essentially held to a single final sense that may be termed historical in a secular sense and a matter of faith inspired by the Holy Spirit in a religious sense."[50]

Many have traditionally argued that political disappointment became the guiding principle of Milton's work at this time.[51] Zwicker asserts that "After 1660, the political had become deeply, perhaps exclusively personal for Milton; the poet took on the spiritual character of godly politics in his suffering and humiliation."[52] Patterson even suggests that Milton retreated from the scene of active engagement before the Restoration, claiming that the passive fortitude displayed in Of Civil Power, Means to Remove Hirelings, and Ready and Easy Way demonstrates Milton's abandoning of the persona of the civic hero for personal reasons.[53] Stavely's assumption that Milton retreated into his paradise within, in self-imposed exile, is linked to his view that poetry for Milton represented the achievement of the ideals frustrated in prose, and that in

[48] "Under censorship men restrained themselves from telling the whole truth as they saw it, proceeding by analogy, implication and innuendo." He continues: "From Spenser to Bunyan those with something original to say found it safer to make use of allegory or pastoral; others cited the Bible or the classics to convey unorthodox views without actual commitment." Christopher Hill, The Experience of Defeat (London: Faber and Faber, 1984) 21 and 22 respectively. Such is the level of Milton's communication that he has to alter the genres which he uses to carry his convictions. See later discussion of Milton's alteration of genre, Chapter 3 note 77.

[49] Wilding 2.

[50] Earl Miner, "Milton and the Histories," Politics of Discourse 193.

[51] I do not intend to deny that political disappointment is present in the final poems, but rather dispute the notion that Milton retired in despondency or merely retreated to a genre wherein he felt less exposed.

[52] Zwicker, Politics of Discourse 254-5.

turning to epic poetry he could use "the amplifying and universalising tendencies he had nurtured through twenty years of pamphleteering."[54] Knoppers questions the theory that Milton retires into poetry in her study Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power and Poetry in Restoration England: "The dominant model of rejection and defeat fails to account...for the complexities of Milton's poetic discourse and its multivalent responses to contemporary politics."[55] She continues: "...it is precisely in his unique conjunction of "Puritan" and "humanist," iconoclastic reformer and erudite literary artist, that Milton responds to his Restoration milieu, and in particular to the ongoing spectacles of state."[56] This successfully addresses the prevalent interpretation of the final poems as backward looking, or as another rewriting of the Revolution,[57] as though for Milton, history had stopped at the Restoration. This is an interpretation which assumes that after a lifetime of responding immediately to the political demands of the situation around him, Milton would suddenly, with a change of metre, alter course, and lock himself away from the passage of time and the realities of existence.

Politics and the Bible

To argue that Milton retreated to some extent from reality in the final poems is to deny that he continues to engage with reality in these works, and more importantly, that he continues to engage with the spiritual reality which he believed to be more real than any historical moment, political disillusion, ecclesiastical policy or domestic discomfort. In the final poems it is perhaps more evident that the focus of Milton's concern is narrower than society, the church, or the household; it is the soul, or the individual which is of paramount importance to him, and it is to the individual that he directs his energy.[58] Thus the reader can see the identification of Milton with Samson, in his discovery that faith and action are still possible. Gary D. Hamilton recognises the

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[53] Patterson, "The Civic Hero in Milton's Prose." MS 8 (1975): 98. See Chapter 1 for my discussion of Milton's assumption of persona and self-fashioning.

[54] Stavely 114. One senses that Stavely feels these tendencies to have been entirely misplaced in the field of political discourse. However his remark that the political weakness of Milton's prose had always been "its inability to resolve the tension between regenerate principle and fallen circumstance," (111) does direct the reader to consider the resolution of this tension within the final poems.

[55] Laura Lunger Knoppers, Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power and Poetry in Restoration England (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1994) 6.

[56] Knoppers 7.

[57] In her article, "Milton and the Ancients on Writing History." MS 2 (1970): 146, Irene Samuel notes that Paradise Lost, for example, does not record the troubles in heaven, so much as commend Christ who brings them to an end. From this it may be seen that it was the solution which interested Milton, rather than the problem. Hill also addresses this point, claiming that although the human history in books 11 and 12 of Paradise Lost may look like a series of defeats, they are in fact "a series of examples which challenge us in the present." Hill, The Experience of Defeat 313.

[58] Armand Himy also asserts the importance of the single character to Milton, reasoning that for Milton, all men were not equal, but all have equality in freedom. Armand Himy, "Paradise Lost as a republican 'tractatus theologico-politicus'." Milton and Republicanism 125.

fundamental connection between Milton and his Samson: "For all of the complicated things that Milton may be trying to convey through this story and this character, few would refuse to acknowledge that the blind and haughty Samson is there to project and reject and modify various images of Milton himself."[59] Moreover, the remark of Louis Martz that "Samson's greatness lies in his rational choice of a God-given opportunity,"[60] could apply equally to Milton himself. Samson Agonistes embodies all of Milton's dearest concerns, and inspired him to encode those concerns in the most edifying form which he could devise.[61] Morse remarks that: "Samson Agonistes is thick with intimations of public responsibility,"[62] and it is in Samson Agonistes that Milton most clearly "reaffirms his commitment to a public role,"[63] and to the general welfare of his nation, even if his countrymen backslide, preferring bondage with ease to strenuous inner liberty. Michael Lieb asserts this aspect of the poem in his work Milton and the Culture of Violence: "Milton does not hesitate to reconceptualize the Samson narrative in political terms. That narrative serves to focus the political circumstances surrounding the work in question." He continues: "the figure of Samson, his history, his activities, and his fate, underscores Milton's polemical posture at every turn."[64] Accordingly, this thesis addresses the importance of Samson Agonistes, within the immediate context of the 1671 volume, as a conclusion to the poetic discourse of the polemical writings. The widespread use of typology in the seventeenth century derived much of its significance from the tensions evident in society at that time, and given the political and theological climate of the seventeenth century, it is clear that the questions of leadership, election, godly obedience and rebellion would be of paramount interest in scriptural investigation. It is not hard, therefore to see the immediate appeal of the Samson legend for Milton. Indeed throughout his controversial prose, there are references to Samson, suggesting, as David Loewenstein does in his work Milton and the Drama of History, that Milton

[59] Gary D. Hamilton, "*The History of Britain* and its Restoration audience." Politics, poetics and hermeneutics 253.
[60] Louis L. Martz, Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980) 287.
[61] As Wittreich has observed in the Preface to his work Interpreting Samson Agonistes: "In Samson Agonistes a great work of biblical history and an important philosophy of history, lest either become outdated, are reborn as art." Joseph Wittreich, Interpreting Samson Agonistes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), xiii. Even T.S. Eliot admits grudgingly that Milton chose the form and subject of Samson Agonistes wisely, using "a knowledge, conscious or unconscious, of what were his own gifts. He chose, in Samson, the one subject most suitable for him; and he took the Greek model because he was a poet, and not a dramatist, and in this form he could best exhibit his mastery and conceal his weaknesses." T.S. Eliot, "Johnson as Critic and Poet." On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) 176. Radzinowicz argues positively for Milton's choice of the Greek form in his writing, claiming that this structure echoes the processes of the human mind, and that he has not retreated to an earlier scholarly mode, but has rather revised and improved upon the form.
[62] Morse 375. He demonstrates the link between the public festivals of the Philistines and the public entertainments of the royalists and the values of the Restoration. The case for the monarchy, he observes, was no longer about divine right, but about the public good and the nation at large.
[63] Morse 374-5.
[64] Michael Lieb, Milton and the Culture of Violence (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994) 236.

consistently identified the biblical hero with "the drama of England's national historic destiny."[65]

As Hill points out in his definitive study, The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution, the Bible was "central to all intellectual as well as moral life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."[66] He continues by demonstrating that the Civil War, and the revolution of ideas which flourished during the Interregnum years, were not so much a product of religious conviction, as an integral phenomenon: "To say that the English Revolution was about religion is tautologous; it took place in the seventeenth century."[67] Zwicker remarks of the Bible: "This was a book central to English culture across religious divisions and political factions, and it was not simply read but minutely examined for traffic between the past and present. (...) English politics was experienced as sacred history."[68] At least part of the reason for the centrality of the Bible to seventeenth-century thought is to be found in the historical context: Hill suggests that the times were out of joint, and people looked to the Bible in order to understand what God wanted from them.[69] With the knowledge and interest in the Bible which abounded in all walks of life at this time, it would be curious indeed if the writers in this era were not to display a comparable understanding of and reliance upon Scriptural source material. Therefore, the modern scholar should always be aware of what Hill describes as "Biblical shorthand and codes."[70] Metaphors were frequently hidden in biblical allusion, for example, a reference to the Pharisees would often point to the clergy of the Church of England, and the idolatrous powers of Egypt, Babylon and Sodom were sometimes used to denote the Laudian movement towards the Church of Rome. However, many different political persuasions used the example of "choosing a captain back for Egypt" to attack their enemies; as Hill observes, "The advantage of such words lay in their imprecision. Everyone was against Egypt and Babylon in general; but what did such words signify in particular?"[71] Milton's own use of the "Philistian yoke" in Samson Agonistes was meant to echo the popular "Norman yoke" theory, and

[65] David Loewenstein, Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 127.
[66] Hill, The English Bible 20.
[67] Hill, The English Bible 34.
[68] Zwicker 3-4.
[69] Hill, The English Bible, 41.
[70] Hill, The English Bible 54-5. As Zwicker contends: "Allegory and application were temperamental and intellectual impulses, trained and cultivated by the deep convictions of Protestant exegesis, yet honored far beyond the reach of sacred narrative." Lines of Authority 4.
[71] Hill, The English Bible 110.

would have signified that clearly to the contemporary reader.[72] Similarly, references to wicked kings who countenanced idolatry and persecuted God's people were often made in order to undermine the theory of divine right, such as Nimrod, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod.[73] In Eikonoklastes, Milton claims that Charles I is no better than Ahaz, Nimrod, Balak or Agag, and worse than Ahab, Jeroboam, Rehoboam and Saul. He does mention some good kings in his work, particularly David, but his greatest praise is reserved for Gideon, who refused a crown: the obvious parallel to Oliver Cromwell needs no explanation. Among republican writers, the Judges were considered to have been better than the Kings, of whom there are few praiseworthy examples in the Old Testament. Milton often avoids many of the traditional myths, and Cain and Abel, or Esau and Jacob, popularly used in connection with issues of birthright, receive little attention in his works. However, he gives Noah serious consideration in Paradise Lost. Hill suggests that the concept of one just man, who is ignored by his compatriots, but favoured by God, was one which particularly appealed to Milton, and Zwicker supports this view, comparing Noah to Enoch and to Christ: "we read simultaneously of sacred history and of Milton among the Gentiles; the mode is neither allegory nor parallel...but the steady directing of sacred and secular histories towards Milton's own enactment of these eternal truths."[74]

Milton believed that the root of all faith in God was Scripture alone, but he also believed that it required to be interpreted, and in this process of interpretation, the individual conscience was the supreme authority. He also believed the Bible to be textually corrupt, especially the New Testament, but believed that the Spirit would guide man to a right understanding of the message it contained. Milton also believed in the supremacy of Hebrew poetry, revering the Psalms, and using their bloodthirsty intolerance of tyrannical or hostile powers to great political effect in his work. However, political use of the Psalms was widespread, and not exclusively Parliamentarian. Hill observes this prevalent interest in Hebrew poetry and suggests that its appeal may be largely explained through its novelty value. "The great literary resources of the Bible had

[72] See Chapter 7, "Harapha". The possibilities for multiple interpretation afforded by such terms is pointed out also by Hill in The Experience of Defeat where he observes that as everyone hated the Antichrist, "his name could be extended from Pope to bishops, to the whole hierarchy of the state church, to the King and royalists who defended them; similarly the Norman Yoke could be extended from obsolete laws which Parliament could reform to the whole body of the law itself, and to the Norman gentry and freeholders." 22

[73] See Elizabeth Tuttle "Biblical reference in the political pamphlets of the Levellers and Milton, 1638-1654" Milton and Republicanism on the use of Old Testament kings in polemical literature 66-7, and in Milton in particular 73-5.

[74] Zwicker, Politics of Discourse 256. See also 258 where Zwicker claims that biography of the one just man is written through the whole poem. Radzinowicz also proposes a political reading of the importance of Noah in Paradise Lost, arguing that the appeal of Noah

suddenly become available to the English laity from the 1530s onwards, opening up a world hitherto known only to a few, and those few more interested in theology than in literary expression."[75] However, not all literary treatments of the Scriptures met with undivided approval, and the Puritan elements in society were uncomfortable with any dramatic representation of God's word. It was less controversial to use the Bible within epic form, and it is worth noting here that Milton's insistence that Samson Agonistes was not intended for the stage may have had something to do with the breadth of the audience which he was attempting to reach.[76] Hill suggests that there were two different ways of using the Bible in order to create political controversy: firstly as "a code", much as Milton does under censorship after the Restoration, when he urges holding fast and maintaining faith, a message of passive resistance, but resistance nonetheless; and secondly by using "symbols of myth", that is by citing a figure such as Samson who could be interpreted according to taste, and who incorporated many angles of opinion, from his interpretation as a type of Christ, to a freedom fighter, or even a terrorist. Thus different points on the political spectrum could evoke the same biblical subject, and communicate an entirely different set of beliefs to their readership. The use of biblical allusion could clarify the writer's position, identify their ideology, and communicate directly to the reader through the medium of a common area of knowledge. More general, secular codes could also be used to enhance this message, and references to an eclipse of the sun, or the hewing down of a tall tree, were widely recognised as threats to the monarchy.[77]

Throughout all of his final poems, one strong message comes through clearly: the importance of serving by standing and waiting, but most importantly by "standing". Adam and Eve, Christ and Samson are all free to stand or fall, and although Samson

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for Milton lay in the "pure, brotherly, simple historical commonwealth of Noah's stock 'dwelling/ Long time in peace by Families and Tribes" in "fair equalitie, fraternal state.'" Radzinowicz, Politics of Discourse 213.

[75] Hill, The English Bible 351.

[76] Milton wrote Samson Agonistes primarily as a poem, this being the only way to concentrate the reader's attention upon the detail of the work. See John T. Shawcross, "The Genres of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes: The Wisdom of their Joint Publication." MS 17 (1983): 238, where he argues that Samson Agonistes is not a drama but a poem. As such, it is clear that Milton intended to achieve reader internalisation of the substance of the poem. He continues by suggesting that Milton did not wish it to be merely viewed as "an imitation of human action." Moreover, Milton held an elevated view of the written word, despising the visual image by comparison. See later discussion Chapter . Zwicker explains: "The association of visual imagery with superstition was long-standing in a country where religious reform had more than once inspired iconoclastic violence." Zwicker 50.

[77] This is illustrated in Paradise Lost Book 1, where his contempt for the monarchy is clearly visible in this excerpt which caused trouble when it was published: "Thir dread commander: he above the rest/ In shape and gesture proudly eminent/ Stood like a Towr; his form had yet not lost/ All her Original brightness, nor appear'd/ Less than Arch Angel ruind, and th' excess/ Of Glory obscur'd: As when the Sun new ris'n/ Looks through the Horizontal misty Air/ Shorn of his Beams, or from behind the Moon/ In dim Eclips disastrous twilight sheds/ On half the Nations, and with fear of change/ Perplexes Monarchs. (*PL* 1: 589-99) Joan Bennett confirms that the censors for Charles II saw these lines: "as a threat to the new king, veiled in the traditional interpretation of an eclipse by monarchs who think of themselves as ruling on earth as the sun rules the heavens." Joan S. Bennett, Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U.P., 1989) 37.

falls, he is able to redeem the situation through repentance, and by remaining true to God's cause. As Hill observes, for the dissenters after 1660, "standing fast became an end in itself."[78] Notably, the line from Paradise Regained: "Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood"[79] could be interpreted in more than one way,[80] and almost certainly argues an action in itself, rather than passive resistance.[81] Hill contends that "From Comus to Samson Agonistes Milton depicted characters capable of standing alone in discouraging circumstances against the power of evil. We later refer to this ancient phenomenon as the nonconformist conscience, though it antedates the emergence of dissent."[82]

The figure of Samson

Wittreich traces the development of the interpretation and understanding of the Samson legend fully and persuasively in his study Interpreting Samson Agonistes, and it would be inappropriate to attempt a summary of his work here; however, there are some points which are worth reiterating specifically with reference to the argument of this thesis. Wittreich notes that by the time Milton treated the Samson story with his own particular formula, the story itself was already undergoing contemporary scrutiny, which called into question the assumptions made in previous centuries. He acknowledges, as Hill does, that the Samson story in the seventeenth century had no particular function, but was used in different ways by different factions for differing ends, as Wittreich puts it, "...here to reflect and there to supplement the existing reality, here to uphold and there to topple reigning ideologies, now to burden us with our mortality and now to provide us with intimations of our immortality."[83] The Samson story was familiar currency in the seventeenth century, both in highbrow and lowbrow contexts, and as such, the text resonates with what for the contemporary reader would have been familiar contexts. However, the medieval concept of Samson as the pattern of a saint, and the orthodox exegetical tradition which had turned him from a self-willed warrior, unsanctified in motive, and unsuccessful in spirit, into a shadowy type of Christ, were

[78] Hill, The English Bible 391.
[79] Paradise Regained IV 561.
[80] See discussion of the significance of this line in Paradise Regained in chapter 5.
[81] However, for a contradictory reading see Sinfield's argument: "This is Satan's final defeat and it implies very little scope for human initiative. Puritan notions of divine power and human impotence were always at odds in Milton's thought with his humanistic estimate of humankind. Finally...he was forced to admit the impotence in his society of even the Protestant hero." Sinfield 43-4.
[82] Hill, The Experience of Defeat 327.
[83] Wittreich Preface, xv.

already at least partially disregarded in the seventeenth century.[84] Milton's Samson enlists aspects of the biblical figure from literature, but as Wittreich argues, he does not necessarily espouse them. Milton's Samson pushes away from the orthodox interpretation and towards the revisionist interpretation of the story:

> ...whatever its ties with classical tragedy, Samson Agonistes is wrought as a Christian poem out of the Protestant tradition of Reformation and Renaissance England. Implicit in that proposition is another: that we must desist from representing medieval importations as clichés of Renaissance - and certainly of Milton's - thought.[85]

Wittreich also argues that the Samson story had been "fettered" by time, and that the layers of interpretation and typology which had built up over the centuries had obscured the original scriptural account, which Milton restores. This element of restoration expresses Milton's attitude to scripture. Although Milton has, in the words of Wittreich, interrogated the received interpretation of the story, Samson Agonistes does not represent a radical new ideology at the expense of an old and long-established narrative, but rather, as Wittreich would have it, presents "an ideological conflict that persists in time and that, less obtrusive in the biblical story, is magnified by Milton's poem."[86] Milton's own Samson, therefore, is more like the Samson of Judges than he is like Christ, as Milton rejects the simplistic and distorting effects of typological reading.[87] Wittreich suggests that Milton is more concerned with the functions of the Samson story than he is with its origins, as the popularity and diversity of interpretation current in the seventeenth century demonstrate the ambiguity which was present within the narrative, a quality which appealed naturally to Milton.[88]

While the Renaissance had endeavoured to make the Samson story ambiguous, through the tendency of exegesis to twist Scripture in order to reinterpret it, and to accommodate emerging beliefs and new historical realities, Milton's restoration of the legend argues his belief that the biblical source itself contained all of the integral parts

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[84] Wittreich argues, "the harsh political rhetoric of the age" had mutilated the Samson legend, and started to question the saintliness of this very irreligious biblical hero. Indeed, as the seventeenth century progressed, commentators tended to gravitate towards the more negative view of Samson as at best an unusual judge over Israel.

[85] Wittreich 24.

[86] Wittreich xiii.

[87] Some of these readings are examined in Chapter 6, and it is apparent that direct comparisons between Samson and Christ, made by such critics as Krouse, may reasonably be refuted. Loewenstein adds his voice to the objectors to typological readings, 182.

[88] He argues that through Samson Agonistes, Milton is saying that "the versions of the Samson legend current in his century are not the whole story, or even the only story; the real story, confused rather than clarified in its long evolution through time, has far too long remained unsung." Wittreich xv.

which were necessary for understanding.[89] This point relates directly to one of the central premises of this thesis; that Milton wrote in order to change the course of history. Radzinowicz suggests that Milton's work shows that "men can present in art what they learn from life in such a way as to affect life itself," and argues that Milton undertakes to be a prophet and a historian to his people, going "beyond the reflection of public tragedy to the diagnosis of national failure and the prophecy of the conditions necessary for a successful republic."[90] Loewenstein claims that he believes Milton to be "an imaginative writer who often saw himself, especially during the revolutionary years, as actively engaged in shaping and representing the drama of history."[91] This thesis agrees with both of these points of view, and proposes further that Milton actively sought to change history through his writing.

When Milton wrote Samson Agonistes, Samson had generally come to be perceived as an image of mistaken and suffering humanity. This was particularly apposite for Milton's thinking at this time, and for his understanding of mankind and its errors, as although Milton's political work exhorts man to achievement and to brilliance, by this stage in his life he had realised that the reality of the times was completely different from his dreams. Radzinowicz also argues along these lines in her section on dialectic in Toward Samson Agonistes. She claims that the discrepancy between the desired solution and the actual result in reality links Milton, Samson and the English people after the Restoration.[92] Perhaps it is dangerous for critical debate to assert too close a connection between Milton, Samson and the political situation of the time. Milton certainly wrote, as most writers do, from personal experience, but more than most writers, he sought to broaden out from that experience in order to reach a wider audience, and to ensure that his work lasted to posterity by addressing more than the immediate situation. The irony of this is that he wrote to change the individual soul of the reader, at once a single goal and a mighty endeavour. It was this state of mind which resulted in the creation of his three final poems, and although there is a clear argument

[89] Wittreich delineates these as "social and psychological, religious, ethical, and political," Wittreich 169. He claims that Milton has contributed to "the deconstruction of the Samson legend of his own time, with the intention apparently of restoring that legend to what it was in the Book of Judges - with the intention of reconstituting it and of then using it to reconstruct history." Wittreich 170.

[90] Radzinowicz 56. Sharpe and Zwicker argue in their introduction that "Literature...not only divines the important changes in history but can mold, accelerate, and even enact them." 18.

[91] Loewenstein 2.

[92] She argues that In each of these cases the discrepancy has come about by some type of fall or failure, through the experience of conflict, giving rise to the emotion of misery in failure, and the struggle to resolve the situation. Loewenstein also notes the element of tension in the work, but in his interpretation, this arises from the conflict between the past and the present: "Recollections of the heroic past, with its associations of a special vocation, glorious deeds, and national deliverance, constantly impinge upon the impoverished present, with its associations of failure, humiliation, and national crisis:" 129.

for disillusion in these works, it is evident that Milton used his faith in God to attempt to justify the failure of the times. Paradise Lost shows God and man in the early stages of their relationship, Paradise Regained shows God in man, or man in God, and what may be achieved in this perfect union, and Samson Agonistes shows God working in man, and man working with God. In this sense there is a coherent and logical progression through these works, with the three poems forming an arch of progressive understanding, and Paradise Regained being the keystone of that arch.[93]

While the image of Samson as a type of Christ, a hero of faith, and an icon of regeneration survived within the consciousness of the seventeenth century, Wittreich claims that in tandem with this was the realisation that Samson's character is a riddle. Two of the greatest theological authorities of the time, Luther and Calvin, do not speak uniformly throughout their works about Samson, nor do they speak as one. Luther praised Samson's strength and bravery, his acting at the prompting of the Spirit, and his trusting in God. However, he acknowledged that the actions of Abraham, for example, which are neither on rash impulse, nor employing extraordinary means, are far more glorious. Luther also argued, in relation to Samson, that violence is not the Christian answer; but Samson was not a Christian warrior, he was a Jew, and the Old Testament is frequently firm in adjuring the people to put the enemies of God to the sword. Moreover, Luther was concerned that Proverbs urges against exacting a like punishment for a crime, and yet Samson boasts openly of returning evil for Philistine evil. Hill suggests that the hatred apparent everywhere in the Old Testament for idolatrous nations, and the enemies of the true God, is responsible for Samson's actions, and claims that Milton's own emphasis upon the duty of hating God's enemies is biblically based, being founded directly in the Old Testament. Keeble argues that: "The so-called 'Hebraic' spirit of this Classical tragedy on a Christian theme has troubled many commentators,[94] who find it distressingly vengeful, a celebration of Jehovah's triumph over Dagon, through the wanton destruction wrought by his barbarous champion

[93] For a discussion of these works in relation to each other see Chapter 5.

[94] Belsey has commented upon this rather more bluntly than most: "The problem of Samson Agonistes is that the ethics of the play are extraordinarily bloodthirsty. (...) The effect of the divine imperative is violence, destruction and lamentation. Manoa assures us that this is a fitting end to Samson's heroic life (lines 1079-11), that God was with his champion to the end (lines 1719-20), and that there is no cause for tears...(lines 1723-4). But it is hard, since the issue is not debated in the text, to quell a lingering anxiety about whether Samson's action is not perhaps rather in excess of justice.[94]

Samson."[95] Hill suggests that critics "who find Samson's blood-thirstiness shocking must be very ignorant of Old Testament history, where God repeatedly calls for the extirpation of whole tribes and peoples, women and children included, who have incurred his enmity."[96] He argues, "It is impossible to over-emphasise the importance given in the Old Testament to rejection of idolatry. God's covenant with the Israelites insisted on an end to idol worship (Leviticus X. 1-3, Deuteronomy XXIX).[97] Hill also points out, "The prohibition of idolatry was not a separate commandment before the Reformation. It seems to have stirred strong feelings. Idolatry was associated with popery - with images, with the miracle of the mass."[98] It is this commandment against idolatry which Hill claims Milton has used as the subject for his tragedy. Certainly, the iconoclastic power of Samson Agonistes has much in common with Milton's shattering of the king's image in Eikonoklastes, and is arguably rooted in the same political and social determination.[99]

It is crucial in understanding Luther's view of Samson, to recall that Luther believed Samson to be unfit or unworthy of imitation, and on no account to be held up as an example. This was because of his predilection for the sword, which Luther believed was inappropriate for the Christian. It was precisely because of his reliance upon the sword to deal justice upon the enemies of God, that many Puritans in the 1640s restored Samson to heroism, making him the patron saint of the Revolutionary cause.[100] There can be little doubt that the early Milton, and indeed perhaps the later Milton, agreed with the theory of hating God's enemies, and although his Sonnet XII bemoans the "loss of blood" sustained during the evil of civil war, it is hard to imagine that he did not espouse the sentiment behind the violence. Certainly, in the 1640s the sword and the spear were regarded as being as important in establishing God's will on earth as the pulpit and the pen. By the 1650s, however, this view had changed somewhat, and violence was regarded as part of the fallen nature of man, as the country grew sickened and weary of war.[101] During the first four decades of the seventeenth century, the sense

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[95] N.H. Keeble, The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England. (Leicester: Leicester University .Press, 1987) 194.
[96] Hill, The English Bible 384.
[97] Hill, The English Bible 255.
[98] Hill, The English Bible 257.
[99] Loewenstein also makes this point, and claims that critics have often failed to take adequate notice of similarities between the works. Loewenstein 5.
[100] Wittreich argues: "Luther's condemnation is the Puritans' (perhaps even the early Milton's) commendation." Wittreich 33.
[101] Through the seventeenth century, Wittreich notes that the third Angel of the Apocalypse, the one who embraces error, was regarded as representing war, and Samson was identified as such by some Revelation commentators. Commentary claimed that this angel symbolised "those great men of history who abandon 'the care of heavenly things, to pursue and cleave to those of the Earth'." Wittreich

of Samson's heroism diminished, and he began to be seen as an image of failure, ultimately as a liability to his people, rather than as a deliverer.[102] This aspect of Samson's character came to be regarded not just as the failure of a human being whose vices and weaknesses cost him his life, and made him false to God's cause, but also as the failures of a nation, too prone to associate with those whom they ought to shun, and with the pattern of backsliding and defeat. As Wittreich says, "In Milton's time the Samson story, regarded as a mirror of current history, acquired a political aspect and eventually became a lens through which to glimpse the Revolution's failure."[103] Concurrent with this interpretation came the comparison of Samson with Cromwell in the imagination of those who had watched the demise of the Commonwealth with despair. During the 1650s and 1660s, the attitude towards Samson could well be summarised in Marvell's famous lines, "So *Sampson* groap'd the Temples Posts in spight,/ The World o'erwhelming to revenge his Sight."[104] It also encapsulated much of the literary tradition of the previous century, which had frequently seen Samson interpreted as a figure of vengeance. Secular literature often portrayed a degenerate Samson, and his weakness for women, often the subject of humorous treatment, was frequently compared to that of Solomon, also a character who was close to God, but who persisted in idolatry through his sexual weakness. It is this type of sexual weakness, found also in Comus, leading man to forget his duty to God, which Milton highlights in his treatment of Adam and Samson.

The heroic virtue which some scriptural commentators had attributed to Samson came under challenge by such disparate writers as Donne and Bunyan. Donne conceded that Samson died with the same zeal as Christ, but contrasted the murder of the latter with the self-killing of the former. He acknowledged that some argue Samson's principal desire to be the death of the Philistines, and also held that the only sanction for Samson's spirit of revenge is the claim of divine prompting. Bunyan, writing in the realm of the religious lyric rather than the secular arena, emphasised not the heroic feats of Samson's life, but the problems of the times. Samson's heroism came under attack also from the epic poets, who believed, in the words of Wittreich, that as none of the heroes

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42. Even Calvin, who saw Samson as a type of Christ, admitted that he is governed by "passionate wrath and vengeance", and stated that while praying, his heart is not peaceful and composed as it should be. He also suggested that Samson betrays the safety of his people, and that his faith is "halting and imperfect". Calvin, Commentaries, as quoted Wittreich 28-9.

[102] Wittreich argues this point in his chapter on the Renaissance Samsons and Samson typologies: "Once regarded as a plague to the uncircumcised, Samson now appears to be a plague to his own people. His story, previously cast as a saint's life, continues to figure in such literature, but now to mark the fall and mortification of various saints, not their recovery and exaltation." Wittreich 183.

[103] Wittreich 183.

is faultless, they should be represented "in their various and contradictory aspects". He suggests that this is true of Virgil, Homer and Spenser, and was done in such a way as to exalt present history over the past, thus earlier heroism was diminished in favour of the modern age, in which true heroism was being more fully realised.

Irreverent references to Samson were by no means unknown, [105] and in Milton's own time Samuel Butler's Hudibras and John Dryden's The Medal both portrayed Samson as the betrayer and destroyer of a nation, and it is in this tradition that Marvell's flattering remarks upon Paradise Lost became unflattering to Samson. Marvell compared Milton to Samson, supposedly expressing concern that Milton might ruin sacred truths by reducing them to fable and old song, a concern which was genuinely shared by H.L. Benthem, who related that many of Milton's friends were concerned at his motives in the writing of Paradise Lost, suspecting that he was using the Fall as a veil for his political views about the Restoration.[106] Marvell attempted to insist that these doubts were groundless, but his invocation of Samson frustrated interpretative efforts. Marvell's Samson is clearly not the regenerative Samson of Samson Agonistes, but rather the spiteful degenerate of Judges, although his differentiation between Samson and Milton, and also between Marvell's Samson and Milton's Samson actually highlights the similarities between and among them in the mind of the reader. In attempting to defend Milton from his critics, notably Samuel Parker and Richard Leigh, both of whom had "belittled Milton's theological radicalism, Samson-like tactics, and blindness,"[107] Marvell actually reminded the reader that in his own time, Milton had come to be regarded as an enemy of orthodoxy, and had already been correlated with Samson in the minds of some of his contemporaries. Marvell himself referred to Samson within his own poetry, most notably in "The Last Instructions to a Painter", where he compared Samson bound to England in a state of decline, emphasising the glory of former times against the folly of current times. This reveals not only the late despair and uncertainty

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[104] Andrew Marvell, On Mr Milton's *Paradise Lost*: Poems and Letters vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1971) 138.

[105] Of his faults, it is Samson's weakness for women which most often provided humour or satire in secular literature. For example, Shakespeare numbered Samson among love's fools in Love's Labour's Lost, and linked him with Hercules, both being "great men" who had been in love. The tenor of the references to Samson in this play, however, is of ridicule, and shows the dull-witted lover who betrays himself and is himself betrayed. Milton reacted against this type of treatment of Samson, terming his story "no matter for Christmas comedy," but rather he stuff of tragedy. Spenser would appear to have agreed with Milton, and linked his character Artegall with Samson, Hercules and Anthony, all of whom were beguiled by women. However, Artegall's inner strength and newly-acquired wisdom are demonstrated with reference to the Hercules rather than the Samson legend. As Wittreich comments, "Those who judge others, Spenser seems to be saying, must themselves be just; and their justice stands in marked contrast to such injustices as cruelty, barbarity, and savagery." Wittreich 258.

[106] Hill, Milton and the English Revolution 191-2.

[107] Wittreich 267.

felt by the poet after the Restoration, but also the extent to which Samson, once a figure of fun and satire in popular literature, was becoming a figure whose tragic stance in the drama of history induced serious reflection. The iconoclastic portrayal of Samson as an apocalyptic figure of destruction only became current after the failure of the Revolution, when he became an image of the horror of failure. As Milton overwhelms and remakes all genres, so he has altered this interpretation of Samson current at the time of his writing. Instead of merely the anatomy of failure, Milton presents a prescription for fallen man, and a remedy for his damaged relationship with God.

The political implications of Milton's writing at this time, the development of the Samson figure both in literature and in the popular imagination, and Milton's choice of that figure for his final drama, may now be seen not as separate strands of argument, but as converging ideas within the same field of inquiry.[108] In Samson Agonistes Milton carefully avoids an obvious exoneration of Samson, and such vexed questions as his motives and his death are left deliberately clouded, thus opening up areas of moral question.[109] There is no absolute morality in Samson Agonistes, no didactic authorial voice, and therefore no place where the reader can stand firmly and point to right and wrong. In this, Milton has captured an important part of his theology, delineating the nature of God's relationship with man, and also the essence of his political distress, as in the 1660s the political scene was such that Milton himself could not stand firmly and indicate where wrong had ceased or right had begun. The collapse of the Commonwealth had left many unanswerable questions for the supporters of the Good Old Cause. T.S. Eliot has argued that "The world of a great poetic dramatist is a world in which the creator is everywhere present, and everywhere hidden,"[110] and in Samson Agonistes there is an overwhelming instinct for right in the form of a developing relationship with God, and a growing awareness of his purpose, as Samson thinks and prays his way from darkness to light. Loewenstein cautions against assuming an even course of regeneration throughout the course of the drama, reminding readers that outbursts of bitterness resurface later in the play as Samson's moods oscillate: "Critics

[108] The element of duality in Samson's character is captured by Wittreich, in such a way that the appeal of the character to Milton may clearly be seen: Wittreich 183-4.
[109] The assumption that Milton has forgiven or excused Samson for his sins in Samson Agonistes is "the conclusion on which so much criticism of Milton's tragedy has foundered" Wittreich Preface xii.
[110] Eliot The Three Voices of Poetry, 102. See also Zwicker who remarks of the three final poems: "the force of his continuous presence can be felt in the shaping of these stories to their self-justifying and self-authorizing ends." Politics of Discourse 256.

who argue that Samson Agonistes charts the linear course of its hero's regeneration or reveals the tempering of his passions, tend to smooth over the jagged edges of Milton's tragedy, not to mention the disturbing implications of Samson's vehement iconoclasm."[111] Radzinowicz argues that the poem shows the power of human intellect to control tragedy and failure, claiming that Samson thinks and reasons his way from despair to triumph,[112] but surely Milton is addressing himself more to the issues of the soul than the mind? Samson's regeneration is spiritual, not merely mental, and his growth is in faith as well as in understanding. Much of Radzinowicz's argument describing Samson's inner conflict[113] is very persuasive, and vividly portrays his agony, in summary: "Until he reintegrates the divisions in his own soul, Samson will be the objective, tormented fallen hero who reveals a split subjective self, half contemptuously rigorous and half remorsefully self-pitying, and he will be unable to act."[114] Her argument that Samson Agonistes shows a mind struggling to make sense of tragic experience is clearly reasonable, but is there not also an argument for a soul struggling to make sense of God's will?

Judges does not study the failures of Israel's enemies, which are obvious, and not at issue, but is directed instead at revealing the character of Israel, which God tests through their enemies. This is reflected in Samson Agonistes, where Samson is revealed and informed by the other characters, and where he is defined to the reader through his interaction with the other characters. Radzinowicz comments that she interprets Samson's encounters with the external characters in the drama as encounters with his own cast of inner personalities, claiming that in the Chorus he faces "his own self-doubt", in Manoa "his own self-tenderness", in Dalila "his own appetency", and in Harapha "his own aggression".[115] Certainly the other characters are seemingly sent to try Samson, but it is perhaps more circumspect to regard the other characters as elements in his life which Samson has already left, or still needs to leave behind him as he journeys mentally and spiritually towards God. Interestingly, Milton connects Samson deliberately to the Philistines with his use of imagery, so the pattern of correlation continues at every level.[116] Furthermore, the judges of Israel, unlike the kings, were empowered to uphold

[111] Loewenstein 133.
[112] Radzinowicz Preface xx.
[113] Radzinowicz 15-19.
[114] Radzinowicz 19.
[115] Radzinowicz 52.
[116] See Chapter 6 on imagery in Samson Agonistes.

the existing laws only, not to make new laws, and in the words of Wittreich, were "The swordbearers of His Word...charged with executing His judgements, not their own."[117] As such, Samson's judgeship has an ironic inclination, with overtones of frustrated leadership, and the notion, through his impetuous acts of vengeance, that here is a would-be messiah, a self-made deliverer. Ultimately his life does uphold God's will, but as is argued later, God uses Samson in spite of his weakness, arguably, in spite of himself. Taken in conjunction, these elements all help to clarify Milton's motives for writing, his choice of the Samson legend, and also perhaps the message which he sought to convey in this work. Not only did he inherit a richly allusive story, but he sought also to change that source better to fit his purpose.

The issue of undue violence and bloodthirstiness has been mentioned above, and arguably linked to this unease is the issue of whether Samson is truly led and prompted by the Spirit of God, or merely acting of his own accord. In Paradise Regained, the prophetic narrator claims that Jesus is led by the Spirit: "One day forth walk'd alone, the Spirit leading;/ ...and step by step led on,/ He entred now the bordering Desert wild," (*PR* I, 189-193). However, the prophetic poet who wrote the argument for Samson Agonistes claims only that Samson is "persuaded inwardly that this was from God," and although the other characters hope and believe that he is guided by God, their testimony is suspect, given that they each have a personal agenda, and are used as foils to Samson by the author.[118] Wittreich argues that the "high exploits" which Samson claims were divinely inspired are actually unlawful under the Old Dispensation, and adds that Samson as a judge is meant to uphold the law, not to subjugate it to his own interpretation, placing his individual conscience above the will of God.[119] Closely linked to the issues of violence and the divine impulsion is the double query regarding the end of the drama: is Samson's killing of the Philistines justifiable, and is his killing of himself therefore

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[117] Wittreich 67.

[118] Samson himself says at lines 222-23 that he knew from "intimate impulse" that what he motioned, that is his first marriage to the woman of Timna, was from God, and at 231, with regard to his second marriage, he claims "I thought it lawful from my former act" There is an interesting distinction here, as his assumption regarding Dalila appears to originate from his own sense of what is right and fitting, rather than from any divine prompting. Manoa later voices his own doubts that Samson's marriages were founded upon divine inspiration: "I cannot praise thy Marriage choises, Son,/ Rather approv'd them not; but thou didst plead/ Divine impulsion...I state not that;" (*SA* 420-424). The reasons for Dalila being portrayed as Samson's wife are addressed in Chapter 6, but Radzinowicz summarises them well when she suggests that the relationship of marriage was one which Milton had studied particularly in connection with the balance of reason and passion, and with the paradox of freedom and responsibility. Dalila defines marriage as intercourse of the body, Milton and Samson define it as companionship of the mind. Radzinowicz 37. Loewenstein believes that Dalila's purpose is to symbolise the Reformation in conjunction with Samson, as it too was brought about by "the fierce encounter of truth and falsehood together". Loewenstein 133.

[119] This is clearly a reference to the high-handed legislative tactics of Charles I, whose attempts to rule above the law are discussed in Chapter 2. John Knott takes this point a stage further when he argues that the main thrust of Milton's attack in Samson Agonistes is "directed against those who appropriate to themselves 'the Spirit of God'" thereby curtailing the freedom of others. The range and scope

suicide? Harapha describes Samson's actions earlier in the drama in terms of gratuitous violence, and here the reader can see the other explanation for those deeds which Samson's champions counted as miraculous:

> ...for hadst thou not committed
> Notorious murder on those thirty men
> At *Askalon*, who never did thee harm,
> Then like a Robber stripdst them of thir robes?
> The *Philistines*, when thou hadst broke the league,
> Went up with armed powers thee only seeking,
> To others did no violence nor spoil.
> (*SA* 1185-91)

Notably, the Judges narrator is silent about divine intervention with regard to the slaughter at the temple. Milton breaks that silence, but stays true to the spirit of the Judges narrative. It seems as though heaven is prompting Samson: "I begin to feel/ Some rouzing motions in me which dispose/ To something extraordinary my thoughts." (*SA* 1381-3) but Samson's defiant speech to the Philistines argues another possibility: "Now of my own accord such other tryal/ I mean to shew you of my strength," (*SA* 1643-4). Wittreich represents an accepted critical view when he comments that Samson does not therefore act in his public persona at the temple, but carries out an act of vengeance as a private person, and is therefore unsanctioned by God. He also points out that in this respect Milton has departed from what had become the reigning interpretation of Samson's final act. Naturally the Civil War years had fostered a certain interpretation of Samson's actions, and Wittreich assumes that in taking Samson's words "of my own accord" to mean "a private, extra-judicial arrangement", Milton is overturning that interpretation. Christopher Hill also questions Samson's divine sanction in his actions at the end of his life: "In marrying Dalila Samson assumed he was right to dispense with God's law (278). Was he mistaken...If so, we must ask how certain we can be that the destruction of the Philistines at the end of the play was really inspired by God."[120] Radzinowicz describes his suicide as a deed of faith, and argues it excusable on the premise that he willed the glory of God rather than his own death. His violence at the temple causes her no unease, indeed she describes it as "mindlessness conquered by reason."[121] Loewenstein suggests that the ending of the drama shows the successful

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of Samson Agonistes is surely too wide to be focused as narrowly as this, and Milton's message too heterogeneous to be classified as an attack upon Cromwell or the Puritans.

[120] Hill, Milton and the English Revolution 433.

[121] Radzinowicz 363.

application of power through weakness, a favourite biblical theme of Milton's, and candidly comments that "Samson's terrifying destruction represents nothing less than the power of God's iconoclastic intervention in the drama of history."[122]

Samson's violence may be dramatic, but it is hardly unusual in the context of Judges, as there are some shocking and repellent murders in this part of the Old Testament; Ehud's killing of King Eglon, Jael's famous murder of Sisera, and especially the Levite's dismembering of his concubine at 19:29, recalled perhaps in Samson's words to Dalila in Samson Agonistes, 952-3: "Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake/ My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint." Similarly, there are many other instances of thousands being massacred; Judah's massacre of ten thousand Canaanites and Perizzites, Ehud's killing of ten thousand Moabites, Shamgar's massacre of six hundred Philistines with an ox goad, Gideon's slaughter of fifteen thousand at Karkor, Abimelech's burning of a thousand at Shechem, and the slaughter of twenty five thousand Benjamites at Gibeah. It is not Samson's final deeds, therefore, which cause disquiet, but rather the parading of such a figure as a hero, an example, a godly man who was led by God, inspired by God and favoured by God, which arouses unease in the mind of the reader. Much of this is due to the Christian framework of our society, and the inescapable influence of the New Testament upon our thinking. However, it is worth recalling the violence and mass murder which has afflicted every century and every civilisation since the time of Christ, and in particular within this context, the type of violence experienced during the Civil War and the punishments exacted in its aftermath. The revenge exacted by Charles II, through the agents of Parliament, against known living regicides was vicious, as they were publicly hanged, drawn, quartered and beheaded, in spectacles of punishment which reinforced the image of monarchical power over the people. Similarly, the bodies of Cromwell, Ireton and Fairfax were exhumed, hanged at Tyburn, and after Cromwell had been posthumously beheaded, a particularly gruesome concept, his head was placed on a spike on London Bridge.[123] The overpowering impression which these actions suggest is one of revenge, and it is this emotion which is so powerfully present at the end of Samson's life. It is equally forcefully reflected in the Psalms, many of which express either the desire for revenge, as in Psalm 137: 8-9, or the assumption that God will take revenge himself upon his

[122] Loewenstein 6.

enemies.

In Milton's time, the Samson story was regarded as a mirror of current history, and Samson Agonistes takes up this theme, as Wittreich describes it, "an unsettling poem, not meant to put us at ease with the world, and Samson himself, who for so long seemed to be the glory of Israel, is shown to be her grief."[124] Loewenstein chooses exactly the same word in his description of the poem: "I treat Samson Agonistes... as a troubled, unsettling dramatic poem re-engaging with, but by no means resolving, the conflicts Milton confronted as he wrote his revolutionary prose works."[125] Wittreich comments, "For Milton and his contemporaries the Samson myth found its modern extension in the failure of the Puritan Revolution, a tragedy of history but also a tragedy within a prophecy promising that history can be more than repetitions; that the cycles of history can be broken upon the block of an improved moral consciousness; that, if epic can turn over into tragedy, tragedy itself can turn over again into an epic wherein history is redeemed and paradise regained not by the sword but by the Word."[126] This idea is supported in Paradise Lost when we are assured by the archangel Michael, that "over wrauth grace shall abound." (PL XII 478) Radzinowicz argues, and I agree, that Samson Agonistes showed how "the Elect themselves had frustrated their election without frustrating God's plan for them. The New Jerusalem they had lost might be retrieved if as individuals they developed a freedom and composure within themselves...each would become his own deliverer into a state of individual liberty from which all could go forward to a new consensus."[127] This notion of internal composure is the final message in Paradise Lost, "then wilt thou not be loath/ To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess/ A paradise within thee, happier farr." (PL XII 585-7) It is also surely the central tenet of Paradise Regained.

The person of Samson, although characterised as heroic, and celebrated as such in literature and exegesis, is also thought to be worthy only of admiration, not of imitation, and while holding him up as an example of heroism, few writers can be supposed to have considered him an example to be followed. Milton's Samson is

[123] For a discussion of the politics of monarchical power in relation to public punishment, see Knoppers, Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power and Poetry in Restoration England.
[124] Wittreich 181.
[125] Loewenstein 6. In this respect, the biblical account may be seen to be ideal for Milton's purpose, as the Scriptural stories of the Old Testament offer critiques of the societies to which they pertain, rather than merely portraying ecclesiastical or political histories.
[126] Wittreich 114.
[127] Radzinowicz 69.

perhaps something of an exception, and his purpose in creating this particular representation of the biblical figure is considered below. Milton's Samson derives from a multiplicity of Samsons, both current and emergent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and is related most closely to those interpretations of the figure which were circulating in the latter half of the seventeenth century. It has been argued that Milton synchronises these representations in his tragedy such that Samson can be seen anew.[128] In this portrayal of an Old Testament figure, Milton has commenced by altering, or more precisely, by rewriting biblical history.[129] A more interesting question to consider is that which has informed my critical approach to Milton's work as a whole, and which is especially pertinent in relation to this poem: does Milton rewrite more than just the Bible in Samson Agonistes? Could it not be argued that Milton, in rewriting the figure of Samson, in rewriting some of the details of his own private life, and in rewriting the political message of his time, actually succeeds in rewriting history? If this is the case, then the reader must assume that Milton wrote thus with specific purpose, and every awareness of the final result. He therefore uses the prescriptions of epic splendour and tragic grandeur to redraft the political and theological struggles of his age, realigning their forms and regrouping their features that they might appear to posterity as he would have wanted them to, rather than as they truly were.

Samson Agonistes and the Critics

The opening section of this chapter suggested that Milton criticism is currently at a point of greater interest than any before, and although this argument could be made by any scholar at any point on the curve of critical understanding, the growing influence of interdisciplinary scholarship has undoubtedly improved the quality of critical interpretation. Arguably a Renaissance approach to learning assists in our understanding of the Renaissance, [130] and as Milton was so thoroughly versed in so many disciplines, it is appropriate to approach his work with breadth as well as depth

[128] Wittreich 180.

[129] Wittreich argues this point 70-1: highlighting the way in which Milton crafts his plot by arranging the elements of the Judges narrative into a significant order.

[130] Wittreich has argued cogently for a pluralistic approach to interpreting Samson Agonistes, and reminds the modern scholar not to rely upon easy solutions: "Milton's poem, no less than its sourcebook, opposes automatism in perception; it teases us out of, instead of coercing us into, tired formulas, redundant patterns, and calcified religiosity; it operates against the tendency of taking things for granted, making us see the Samson story anew. Milton cannot be expected to conform so easily to a tradition that in his own day is on trial." Wittreich Preface x. He also suggests that as there are many ideologies contained within Samson Agonistes, so criticism, like the poem itself, should attempt to restructure them. Instead of this, he complains, many critics have ignored the "pluralistic, polysemic, and analogical" aspects of the story, thereby encouraging what he terms "the reductive tendencies that are ubiquitous in interpretation of Samson Agonistes." Wittreich Preface xviii.

of interest.[131] Wittreich suggests that the importance of historical context is paramount therefore, claiming that context is a mental construction which enables the reader to decipher what he or she reads, and notes that those critics who assume a poem to be self-sufficient will not find that Milton's poetry conforms to their assumptions.[132] Radzinowicz also emphasises the importance of contextualisation, suggesting that the scholar should stand in different places to analyse a poem. Therefore, as the content of the critical mind dictates, or at least conditions interpretative response, then the modern Milton scholar should be cognisant of Milton's ideas, earlier works, and biographical details, and have some understanding of the historical, political and theological issues of the time. All this argues for a new historicist approach, which Wittreich defends,[133] claiming that any Samson poem written by Milton would of necessity:

> ...involve reflections upon a revolution which Milton had championed and self-reflection by virtue of the fact that Milton himself had been given an identity with Samson and certainly preserves a measure of that identity in his poem. It is conceivable that Milton wrote his poem simply accepting that identity with Samson and, through him, urging another, this time successful, revolution; it is equally conceivable that, divorcing himself from Samson, Milton composed this poem as a retrospective repudiation of the cause he once championed.[134]

It could also be argued that Milton wrote Samson Agonistes very much in the way that he wrote Eikonoklastes, as a retrospective historical account, a rewriting of history, or a retelling of the facts, in a way which elevated the status of the revolutionaries, and allegorised the Civil War. The ending is perhaps a communication of what potential glory and salvation had been squandered, somewhat after the fashion of the warning in the Second Defence, by one who had stepped forward and not been afraid to speak out, that failure would bring regret and shame. Loewenstein makes a similar point when he asserts that the poem portrays the crisis of a deliverer at a time when an already weak

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[131] It would appear from the analysis of Wittreich that there are certain camps in the Samson Agonistes critical debate; those who believe that Milton conforms to a select part of the Samson tradition, and those who believe that he is displaying the conflicts within previous tradition, with regard to the interpretation of the Samson figure. Wittreich 227. Does the poem therefore represent the attitudes and conditions of Milton's society? Wittreich attacks those critics who make typologically determined interpretations of Samson Agonistes: See Wittreich Chapter IV for these arguments. He disagrees with writers like Stanley Fish and A.D. Ferry for this reason in particular, and demonstrates at length that Milton is undermining the typological readings in his poem.

[132] Within the last decade criticism has tended to move away from the post-structuralist influences which promoted "art" as a discrete entity independent of its social, political and cultural context, and has linked the aesthetic with the political more coherently. See Michael McKeon, "Politics of Discourse and the Rise of the Aesthetic in Seventeenth-Century England" where McKeon claims that it is anachronistic to refer to literature as such in the seventeenth century: "referring either backward to a broadly inclusive idea of *litterae humaniores* or forward to our modern notion of a sharply defined and autonomous realm of written objects that possess an "aesthetic" character and value." Politics of Discourse 36.

[133] Wittreich Preface xix. See also Knoppers, Historicizing Milton, where she argues for the validity and credibility of a new historicist approach to Milton, which she believes is particularly significant in relation to the final poems, which she describes as "radical, complex and distinctive." 4.

[134] Wittreich Preface xxi.

nation is vacillating in their allegiance to God. Milton was concerned, he continues, that he himself would be compared to "the elect hero who has failed to repay the "debt" (509) owed to God".[135]

Wittreich agrees with Radzinowicz's argument that Samson Agonistes is the moral and intellectual analysis of failure, and that Milton embraces the salvageable elements of the experience of Revolution, in a vision which translates hope to the future. He also applauds Christopher Hill for arguing for historical and political readings, and for emphasising the importance of the Samson literature to which Milton would have had access himself. However he disassociates himself from the ideologies to which these critics subscribe. He allies himself instead with John Carey, Donald Bouchard, Helen Damico and Irene Samuel, claiming that they see the same Samson as he does. Wittreich's understanding of Samson Agonistes and its purpose takes the view that the poem is a dark vision, a scene of failure, "where all is dark and deadly, cheerless, comfortless. Only the dark side of the Apocalypse obtrudes upon this play..."[136] He also points out that the aftermath of Samson's tragedy is the loss of hope for Israel. Loewenstein agrees, suggesting that there seems to be "little in the tragedy to comfort or reassure the Hebrew characters about God's mysterious and terrible actions in the drama of history. The Chorus discern no satisfactory providential explanation for Samson's tragic condition: it is as though God were acting like capricious fortune."[137] This is true for the biblical source, but Milton wanted a very different aftermath for post-Restoration Britain. Radzinowicz also understates the message of the poem when she claims that only at the end is there any hope, which she describes as "a muted and tragic hope".[138] It seems incongruous to describe Samson's violent and dramatic achievement, his long and agonised quest, and his growing reconciliation with God in these terms. Milton wanted to reform his countrymen; he wanted, as Radzinowicz has asserted, to point out to his nation how and where they had failed, by letting God's light die out in their actions, and as a result, saw tragedy as an education. While Radzinowicz has argued convincingly for the educative power of tragedy, citing the Preface to Samson

[135] Loewenstein 132. The reference is to Samson Agonistes.
[136] Wittreich 373.
[137] Loewenstein 130. Hill takes a contradictory view in The Experience of Defeat when he states that neither Paradise Regained nor Samson Agonistes should be read as "a tragedy of defeat, despite our historical hindsight." He claims that history looks different to our perception because we know the ending, and observes that Milton was not writing history. "We cannot be certain what God's purposes are until history has unveiled them. Samson's destruction of the Philistine aristocracy and clergy, the Son of God's triumph over Satan, opened up possibilities which in the past were not acted upon; but the people of England for whom Milton was writing might one day do better." 313.
[138] Radzinowicz 108.

Agonistes as an indication that Milton intended "Samson's educative experience to be curative to an audience,"[139] Loewenstein believes that Milton saw iconoclasm as "a creative and dramatic means of affecting the historical process."[140] These arguments both have a place in the assumptions of this thesis, as although Samson Agonistes was arguably intended to be curative to an audience, the next logical step to take is the affirmation which Loewenstein makes when he says that Milton saw history as a process which may be actively altered and shaped by vehement polemic."[141]

Milton arguably saw himself as the renovator of history, and was writing, not just to record, but to change history. It was becoming his story, and he wrote to alter it in the minds of those who read it, to render them more open to the prospects of change, ultimately, to inspire them to lay down the book, to go out, and to act.[142] Wittreich claims that the issue in Samson Agonistes is whether man will "follow in the way of Samson, act of his own accord, isolate himself from God, and thereby subvert God's plan for history. Milton recognises himself and his own age in the character of Samson and so casts Samson off."[143] It is hard to recognise Samson, Milton or Samson Agonistes from this argument. God's plan for history of course is fulfilled in spite of, or perhaps because of Samson's attempts to take matters into his own hands. If one accepts the argument of foreknowledge or omniscience, then Samson's actions are no surprise to God. Samson assumes that God has departed from him with the loss of his hair, and this may be the human understanding of the broken commandment and the resulting loss of strength. However, just as vision is not limited to the eye, so Samson's election is not limited to his hair. God protects his Nazarite calling by allowing him to fall into the hands of the Philistines for a short time. It is only by being blind and apparently weak that Samson can make his way to the religious heart of the Philistine stronghold. Samson does not require his sight to tear down the pillars of the temple, only the strength which God supplies, and when he asks for assistance in humility, it is immediately forthcoming with devastating effects. Samson's freewill takes him a

[139] Radzinowicz 55.
[140] Loewenstein 52.
[141] Loewenstein 52.
[142] Alan Fisher addresses this point with reference to Paradise Regained, when he suggests that we are naturally depraved and do not rejoice in salvation. He concludes that Milton knew this of human nature and would have his readership confront it: "Endurance...is a mode of faith. Faith surmounts frustrations not by explaining them or assuaging them but by enduring them in the fullness of what they are - and dismissing them." Alan Fisher, "Why is Paradise Regained so cold?" MS 21 (1985): 209. Lawrence W. Hyman in his article "The Reader's Attitude to Paradise Regained." PMLA 85 (1970) 496, suggests that the success of the poem does not depend upon the "reader's ability to sympathize and agree with Christ's actions," but rather that our discomfort is the dramatic tension within the poem.
[143] Wittreich 375.

different route to the temple, but God still guides him there all the same.[144] Milton has invested so much creativity and personal detail in his characterisation of Samson that it is hard to see what Wittreich can mean by intimating that Milton casts Samson off. Milton identifies with the Samson who was seen in the 1640s as one who shattered the wall between the reality of this world and the possibilities of the next for his people, a man who enabled his nation to see a vision of deliverance through his own actions. Radzinowicz also sees the poem as a document of deliverance, arguing that Milton believed God suffered man to learn through experience, and that Samson therefore delivers by showing that each man must be his own deliverer.[145] Loewenstein sees a wider scope in the work than either of these when he suggests that Samson Agonistes is a turbulent drama, wrestling with historical concepts: "The politics of exile, the crisis of national community, the covenant between God and His elect, political bondage, apocalyptic judgement, and radical iconoclasm are among the concerns which figure centrally in Samson Agonistes; all reflect Milton's evolving sense of history in the revolutionary writings."

This thesis, if it had to integrate with any one critical ideology, would agree largely with the premises stated by David Loewenstein in his study, Milton and the Drama of History. He also believes that Milton's revolutionary prose deserves special attention both in its own right, and in relation to his great poems, believing them to have had a profound effect. This thesis also argues that Milton's poetry is the logical continuation of his prose. Radzinowicz makes a similar point in her discussion of the political nature of Samson Agonistes, attacking those critics who attempt to play down the political content of the work, and pointing out that like his views on divorce, a free press, and the Church, Milton's political views were not private concerns, but something which had to be addressed in order to set others free. Radzinowicz approaches Milton's works from a different angle to that taken by this thesis. She seeks to "open new perspectives by analysing Samson Agonistes in relation to Milton's works as a whole, and in relation to the development of his thought through as many as possible of Milton's perpetual concerns", finding that Samson Agonistes "is the conclusion which embodies the very principle of the process itself as the model of its structure and

[144] See Stanley Fish, "Question and Answer in Samson Agonistes." CQ 11 (1969) 237-264.
[145] Radzinowicz 107.

content."[146] In order to achieve this, she separates Milton's interests into six discrete areas, logic or dialectic, conception of history, politics, ethics, theology and poetics. This approach has the advantage of enabling the reader to concentrate upon individual strands, but sacrifices something of the interconnected complexity of the poet's concerns as a result. Her reading of the text is close, and her analysis is incisive, often revealing linguistic examples to support her arguments.[147] However, it is more difficult to agree with her conclusions regarding the nature and purpose of Samson Agonistes, when she argues that it is a republican drama, "not because it urges a new political revolution, but because Samson is a popular hero who could teach Milton's contemporaries a republican truth."[148] Arguably Milton is urging his countrymen strongly through the poem towards some form of revolution. In her essay "Elective poetics and Milton's prose," Susanne Woods suggests that in Samson Agonistes, "The reader is left to judge the result perhaps to gain "new acquist/ Of true experience from this great event" (lines 1755-6), and certainly to learn from Milton's grand but nondirective style that God's call, the only true command, depends on an inner hearing. In Samson, human freedom comes through the choices mandated by the authority of individual conscience. This is also the principle theme of the prose."[149] Loewenstein is closer to the overall trajectory of this thesis when he writes that Milton's major poems "courageously attempt to confront the drama of history as it unfolded in the revolutionary years and found urgent expression in Milton's controversial writings".[150] This critical approach acknowledges "Milton's iconoclastic, turbulent sense of history," and also addresses the need to examine Milton's "violent and dramatic sense of historical transformation."[151] Loewenstein also asserts the presence of more than one aspect of Milton's previously mentioned Samsons in the poem: the historically regenerate and iconoclastic Samson, and the tragic Samson grinding in the misery of isolation and betrayal. However, the softer side of Milton's tragedy, the Christian triumph of one man's struggle through prayer, repentance and meditation, and the growing closeness in his relationship with his God, is not emphasised by Loewenstein, and they are certainly present and significant not just within the tragedy itself, but in reference to the final works as a whole.

[146] Radzinowicz Preface xix.
[147] For example, her remarks regarding the conflict within Samson where she highlights Milton's use of "I" and "him", 18-19.
[148] Radzinowicz 113.
[149] Susanne Woods, "Elective poetics and Milton's prose: A Treatise of Civil Power and Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings Out of the Church." Politics, poetics and hermeneutics 197.
[150] Loewenstein 6.
[151] Loewenstein 6-7.

Loewenstein's vision of the end of the poem is one of violence and rage, as he maintains that Samson is not reconciled, and neither, by implication, is Milton:

> As an expression of inexpiable rage and iconoclasm, Samson Agonistes will continue to challenge commentators who wish to see Milton as a more temperate thinker and writer in his later works. Can we really conclude that the terrifying outcome of Samson's struggles confirms the value of turbulent passions tempered and purified, or the value Milton would place on the exercise of reason? I have suggested instead that the vehement iconoclasm of Samson Agonistes dramatises a turbulent side of Milton that was deep in his writings from at least the early revolutionary tracts.[152]

He suggests further that readers ought to confront the unsettling and dramatic power of Milton's iconoclasm, implying that there is little point in arguing that Milton became softened and resigned at the close of his life, urging regeneration, but rather that he preached a message of rage and despair which could lead only to destruction. This interpretation holds some attractions, in that it acknowledges the blaze of defiance which is apparent at the close of Samson Agonistes, but it fails to take into account the definition and direction of that defiance. Samson acts under God's will, and the prayerful contemplation which ultimately characterises his approach towards an understanding of God is deeply at odds with this reading of the poem. Also, Loewenstein has considered Milton's purpose in retelling history, but there is still another question to be asked; if Milton is seeking to change history which has already passed, could it not therefore be argued that he wishes to change the course of history yet to come? He intended that his works should not merely record and reflect the glory and despair of his time, but should influence the succeeding generations of readers, such that if his own contemporaries fail to lay hold on the occasion, perhaps the readers of the future may find his arguments persuasive, and may find the strength and the courage to act. It necessitates a full and careful consideration of Milton's works and the influences upon him, for the reader to decide the nature of the action which Milton sought to inspire.

[152] Loewenstein 150.

Chapter 1

The service of truth: Areopagitica and Milton's early realisation of his purpose in prose.

It has been argued that Milton's prose writing formed a trajectory from beginnings which were too personal and too vehement, to a high point in Areopagitica, where style and substance balanced to form an elegant and persuasive literary creation.[1] Corns suggests that this early brilliance is the result of friction between genius and genre, and claims that it arose when Milton the poet redirected his energy into "the limiting medium" of prose.[2] The writing of Areopagitica formed an important turning point for Milton, in that the work demonstrates the marriage of earnest conviction and literary skill which was to characterise his prose writing: Ernest Sirluck suggests that in Areopagitica, "both object and argument are products of the Revolution."[3] Sirluck's analysis of Milton's method of argument in Areopagitica reveals intimations of Milton's future methods. The quadripartite form commences with Milton's historical argument, which discredits licensing as a device of the Roman Catholic Church. The second argument upholds the exercise of reason in reading both good and bad books, and although appearing to come from Christian authority, uses these sources against each other, thereby preventing any from being decisive: thus "the way is cleared for submitting the issue to the test of reason alone."[4] Milton emphasises that good or evil do not relate to circumstances in themselves, but only in man's application of them to specific ends. Virtue therefore is only valid if man chooses it actively, by knowing evil and rejecting it. Milton's third argument is ironic, arguing that the mere licensing of the press is inadequate to control evil, but that all things in life should be similarly licensed. The final argument takes issue with the aspersion cast at authors implicit in the licensing of the press, extolling scholars and men of letters, in a personal vindication of his purpose in life, and concludes by claiming that licensing stops the nation from choosing for itself.[5] From this it may be argued that Areopagitica addresses many of Milton's fundamental concerns, and to that end, this chapter explores Milton's motivation and sense of purpose at the start of his prose career, using Areopagitica as an framework for that discussion. Milton's education had served as vocational training for his chosen

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[1] See Stavely.

[2] Thomas N. Corns, "Milton's Prose" The Cambridge Companion to Milton. Ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 195.

[3] Complete Prose Works of John Milton Ed. Don M. Wolfe *et al* vol. 2: 1643-1648 (New Haven: Yale University Press, MCMLIX) 2.

[4] CPW vol 2, 164.

[5] This anticipates the emphasis upon self-justification with which Milton was to engage throughout his life in literature. When no longer employed in the rhetorical practice of prose, where the demands of an exordium might explain such a stance, Milton continued no less vehemently to defend himself in the realms of poetry, where the transformation of the biblical Samson into an intellectual and spiritual iconoclast, and the portrayal of a scholarly and rational Christ completed his own self-fashioning. Don M. Wolfe argues that "to Milton

career, and as such it had been carefully planned to transform him into a great poet. Moreover, the duty and responsibility of the poetic vocation was undoubtedly something to which Milton felt himself called, as this description in Via's article, "Milton's Antiprelatical Tracts" demonstrates: "The poet is a divine agent like the minister, and through his poetry inculcates virtue in the epics, purges the passions in the tragedy to restore harmony, praises God and the works of his servants in odes and hymns, and castigates evil in the nation and the Church."[6] Moreover, as Sharpe has argued in his work Criticism and Compliment, Milton felt that it was the responsibility of the poet to improve man, through the representation of the virtue of nature which men should emulate and the criticism of "the artificial values and priorities of society by which men had lost their innocence."[7] However, Milton was turned aside from his initial goal by the obligation which he felt, to use his God-given talents in the struggle for what he saw as his country's freedom. Milton initially regarded the writing of his controversial prose as an interruption to his plans for his life, but it was an interruption which he embraced, because at the time, it was the obvious way for him to fulfil his duty. Milton himself has this to say about taking up his pen to write controversial prose:

> ...I should not write thus out of mine own season, when I have neither yet compleated to my minde the full circle of my private studies, although I complain not of any insufficiency to the matter in hand; or were I ready to my wishes, it were a folly to commit any thing elaborately compos'd to the carelesse and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times. Next if I were wise only to mine own ends, I would certainly take such a subject as of it self might catch applause, whereas this hath all the disadvantages to the contrary...Lastly, I should not chuse this manner of writing wherein knowing my self inferior to my self, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand.[8]

It was not therefore that Milton desired to "leave a calm and pleasing solitariness fed with cheerful and confident thoughts to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes,"[9] but rather that he was called by his great task-master to perform certain

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Christ represented in greater degree the rationality of righteousness than the forgiving grace of a compassionate redeemer." *CPW* vol. 4 part 1, 77.

[6] Via, "Milton's Antiprelatical Tracts: The Poet Speaks in Prose." 114. From this description, it is clear how Milton applied the same criteria to his prose writing as he had regarded necessary for poetry

[7] Kevin Sharpe, Criticism and Compliment: The politics of literature in the England of Charles I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 270.

[8] The Reason of Church-Government Urg'd Against Prelaty, The Works of John Milton vol. 3 part 1 (New York: Columbia UP, 1931) 234: 15 - 235: 5. All quotations are from this edition. Editorial commentary from the Yale edition of the prose is also cited.

[9] Diekhoff 12.

duties in his capacity as a writer for his country.[10] As Denis Saurat says in his biography of Milton: "Milton's pamphlets must not be looked upon as literature, but as action."[11] That is not to say that Milton's prose is in any way a hindrance to his ambitions as a poet, or to the evolution of his thought: "the Milton of the prose is far from being a temporary intruder on the poet with his garland and singing robes about him, but a man with the same basic aims, the same hopes of poetic fame to be realised quickly."[12] E.M.W. Tillyard claims in his biography of Milton, that the prose preserves "fragments of the epic Milton would have written, had political events been otherwise,"[13] and Macaulay waxes lyrical about the poetic power and beauty of Milton's language:

> It is to be regretted that the prose writings of Milton should, in our time, be so little read. As compositions, they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold. The style is stiff with gorgeous embroidery. Not even in the earlier books of *Paradise Lost* has the great poet ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, "a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies."[14]

Milton's first work of interest in the context of this thesis is Areopagitica. It is arguably his most expressive piece of writing,[15] and is a richly constructed representation of his views and influences at that time. It has something in common with his early anti-episcopal tracts, having what Tillyard describes as "the Renaissance tone, the instinct for action, the defence of schisms, and the immense hope of a speedy national Reformation."[16] Stavely claims that in it "Argumentative vigor becomes inseparable from

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[10] An early biographer observes: "And Now for Some Years Poetry must be Suspended, and all the Delights of the *Greek* and *Roman* Ideas Exchang'd for Modern Janglings; his Aversion, but as his Zeal represented them to be his Duty, and Somthing Within, which He Interpreted to be the Voice of God and his Country, call'd him into the Lists of Controversy, while the Country Gentlemen, Citizens, Artificers, and Peasants became Men of the Sword, Polluting our Delightful Fields with the Blood of Relations, Friends and Neighbours." Helen Darbishire, ed., The Early Lives of Milton (London: Constable, 1932) 257.

[11] Denis Saurat, Milton: Man and Thinker (London: Dent, 1944) 20.

[12] Tillyard 119.

[13] Tillyard 110.

[14] Macaulay, Critical and Historical Essays Contributed to the Edinburgh Review (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861) 27. See also Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics in Milton's prose Essays edited by David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) Introduction: "Labouring in the Word" 1. An examination of the development of Milton's ideas through his years of prose writing, giving special attention to specific "landmarks" such as Areopagitica, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, and The Second Defence, shows that his epic poetry was written as a result of, and not inspite of the intervening years spent in the "cool realms of prose."

[15] "Areopagitica is the best of Milton's English prose works, because it expresses more of his mind than any other." Tillyard 156. Stavely comments that the rhetorical methods which Milton uses in the earlier pamphlets come to fruition in Areopagitica. Stavely 66. Patterson describes it as "the only seventeenth-century response to censorship that has acquired the status of high art." Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984) 111. See also John X. Evans, "Imagery as Argument in Areopagitica." TSLL 8 (1966) 189-205 for a discussion of image and metaphor in particular.

[16] Tillyard 156.

imaginative vitality, and emotional appeals achieve a new range and urbanity."[17] Areopagitica captures the two essential components of Milton's personal philosophy: liberty, and action in virtue: "The whole plea that the free publishing of books is founded on freedom and width of choice is instinct with the notion that life is worthless without activity, and the more valuable as it is more active."[18] Milton himself claims "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."[19] He was moved to write Areopagitica in defence of "domestic or private liberty." The first organised censorship of the press was in the time of Elizabeth I, and was introduced to protect the monarchy and the established Church. In 1637 the Court of Star Chamber issued a Decree tightening the censors' control of the press, and the pamphleteers who wrote for the Puritan cause suffered particularly as a result. After the Long Parliament had abolished the Court of Star Chamber, thereby destroying censorship, the Puritan element in Parliament was as troubled by opposition pamphlets as Laud had been by the Puritan pamphleteers. As K.M. Burton observes in her introduction to a selection of Milton's prose, they passed an Ordinance for the regulation of printing in June 1643, stating that:

> "many false...scandalous, seditious, and libellous works have lately been published, to the great defamation of Religion and government": decrying the establishing of private printing presses, and claiming that "divers of the Stationers' Company" were infringing the rights of the company. "It is therefore ordered by the Lords and Commons in Parliament...[that no book etc.] shall from henceforth be printed or put to sale, unless the same be first approved of and licensed by such person or persons as both or either of the said Houses shall appoint for the licensing of the same."[20]

Furthermore, the Ordinance authorised the Stationers' Company to seek out unlicensed presses, and to destroy them, to confiscate unlicensed books, and to "apprehend all authors, printers and others" concerned in the publication of unlicensed material, to bring them before the House, and to submit them to "further punishments."[21] Milton believed that the fears of Parliament were unfounded, and he attempts in Areopagitica to

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[17] Stavely 66. He also comments upon the tonal change from "classical innocence to mature Christian experience. The gentle humanist scholar is reborn as the crusading Protestant." Stavely 67.
[18] Tillyard 157.
[19] Areopagitica, Works, vol. 4, 311: 8-12.
[20] K.M. Burton, introduction, Areopagitica, Milton: Prose Writings (London: Dent, 1958) 146. See CPW vol. 2, 158 for the background to the writing of Areopagitica.
[21] Burton 146.

show that censorship is an instrument of tyranny: in a sense the worst restraint which can be inflicted, as men like Milton would be unable to protest against other injustices if they could not voice their indignation. In a state which censored information, men had no chance to develop towards reasoned understanding. With a free press, men had a field for strenuous debate, and Milton was well aware that his vision would not work unless men could reason and judge for themselves. He also believed that free controversy would encourage truth and defeat error, however heated the debate became.

Areopagitica is central to Milton's ideas on learning, and allows us an insight into how he saw his own labours: "When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditats, is industrious, and likely consults and conferrs with his judicious friends; after all which done he takes himself to be inform'd in what he writes, as well as any that writ before him."[22] He also claims that such a writer "hath been labouring the hardest labour in the deep mines of knowledge;" and is no "false pretender to learning," but:

> the free and ingenuous sort of such as evidently were born to study, and love lerning for it self, not for lucre, or any other end, but the service of God and of truth, and perhaps that lasting fame and perpetuity of praise which God and good men have consented shall be the reward of those whose publisht labours advance the good of mankind...[23]

This is Milton's motivation, and while it accords well with the obvious desire for fame in God's service apparent in the Nativity Ode, Milton has become aware of pressing issues and injustices which require the immediate service of his pen. Indeed, Areopagitica shows in Milton's mind a change from the planned training to be an epic poet, "in a rather old-fashioned way...by a conscious programme of reading, and by a cultivation of learned and aristocratic friends and patrons,"[24] to an active engagement with civil liberty. In Areopagitica, it is possible to see Milton's classical learning being used in action: it does not merely adorn his discourse, it has become germane to his argument. Not only is the "old and elegant humanity of Greece" esteemed for its "polite wisdom and letters," but the very stuff of classical mythology jostles for supremacy with his Christian images:

> Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of

[22] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 324: 19-24.
[23] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 323: 25 - 324: 3.
[24] Wilson 77.

> good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were impos'd on *Psyche* as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt. It was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evill, as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World.[25]

Milton describes a good book, which he claims to contain:

> a potencie of life...as active as that soule was whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous Dragons teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men...hee who destroys a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye (...) we should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of publick men...since we see a kinde of homicide may be thus committed...whereof the execution...strikes at that ethereall and fift essence, the breath of reason it selfe.[26]

It is in this equality of balance,[27] where neither the Christian tradition nor the classical myth predominates in significance or validity, that one can see the emerging form of his epic poetry, which blends classical and Christian cultures. Certainly the seeds of Milton's epic ideas were already germinating in his mind, as we can see from his Samson references, and his concern with Adam and freewill. In the case of Samson, he had already identified the state of his nation with the biblical hero: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks."[28] This was an idea which he was to develop and nurture over the succeeding years, until finally, the inner vision coincided with the political reality, and he was able to publish Samson Agonistes. Perhaps more revealingly, he described the tyranny of the Parliamentary Ordinance on licensing as "a servitude like that impos'd by the Philistims, not to be allow'd the sharpning of our own axes and coulters, but we must repair from all quarters to twenty licencing forges."[29] He urged the English Parliament not to bind Truth when she sleeps, and although the reference which

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[25] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 310: 20-28.
[26] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 298: 1-24.
[27] See also the mixture of pastoral elegy and Christian doctrine which characterises Lycidas.
[28] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 344: 19-21.
[29] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 327: 28 - 328: 3.

follows this is a classical allusion, the pre-echo of the Samson story is unmistakable. Clearly Milton's vision of England as a Samson tormented by a Philistine government, was in his mind already. The humanist dignity, portrayal of freedom, and questioning of obedience to the will of God, which would be central to Paradise Lost were also a part of Milton's convictions by the time he wrote Areopagitica:

> If every action, which is good, or evill in man at ripe years, were to be under pittance, and prescription, and compulsion, what were vertue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what grammercy to be sober, just or continent? many there be that complain of divin Providence for suffering *Adam* to transgresse, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions. We our selves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did he creat passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of vertu?[30]

Another theme central to Paradise Lost is the problem of knowledge: "And perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill,"[31] although the optimism of Areopagitica has turned to a note of tragedy in Paradise Lost. Milton's view of knowledge is uncompromising: Adam fell through "knowing good *by* evil,"[32] yet the gift of knowledge is not corrupting in itself:

> Read any books what ever come to thy hands, for thou art sufficient both to judge aright, and to examine each matter...Prove all things, hold fast that which is good...To the pure all things are pure, not only meats and drinks, but all kinde of knowledge whether of good or evill; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defil'd.[33]

So by 1644, in Areopagitica, Milton has developed his theories of free will, determinism and reason to an advanced extent, and an examination of his theological position in Paradise Lost reveals that he has not deviated substantially from here: "God uses not to

[30] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 319: 1-16.
[31] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 310: 28 - 311: 2.
[32] Italics mine.
[33] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 308: 17-27.

captivat under a perpetuall childhood of prescription, but trusts him with the gift of reason to be his own chooser."[34] His perennial concern with freedom of choice and inner liberty demonstrates that he considered Christian liberty as vital, and leads him to employ language which is freighted with theological imperative.[35] The final poems are also all concerned with knowledge, choice and vocation. They insist upon what Woods has described as "the primacy of individual choice, including the reader's interpretive choices in the face of textual authority."[36] In this way, Milton forces the reader to make choices, to exercise their Christian liberty, and to make the leap of faith from cultural norms and towards Milton's desire to act: "He who would be among the elect must choose liberty, and in so choosing exercise the liberty his calling requires."[37]

The three remaining subjects in Areopagitica which express a particular point of interest in the development of Milton's thought, are the government of the Church, his view of his country, and the importance which he places on writing for liberty. Although I shall be discussing some aspects of the development of his personal theological views in Chapter 4, this is in a sense an artificial distinction, as his arguments for Church government form the public face of his theological convictions. His passionate beliefs in active interference and free expression underpin his theology, and at the same time prompt him to write.[38]

In his early pamphlets against episcopacy, Milton argues strongly for the full Reformation of the Church. His anger is clearly directed at the priesthood, whom he regards as the remains of a Roman Catholic jurisdiction, a token of remembrance which prevents the Church from achieving full Reformation. His quarrel lies with the ceremonial aspects of Anglicanism which had become significantly more pronounced under the combined influence of Charles I and Archbishop Laud.[39] He contends that the gifts of creed, litany, liturgy and vestments left to the Reformed Church by the Roman Catholic Church, cannot be a disinterested gift, and should be refused: "Christ refus'd great riches, and large honours at the Devils hand. But why, saith he, *as they were*

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[34] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 310: 3-5.
[35] See Woods: "Freedom is a gift of the spirit and characteristic of the regenerate. By linking free conscience solidly to the Gospel, Milton invites his reader to test not only the author's logic, but the reader's own sense of grace." Politics, poetics and hermeneutics 202.
[36] She continues by suggesting that the final poems in conjunction with the pamphlets show the "core paradox of Milton's poetic stance: the reader is invited to accept the truth and the authority of Milton's call to freedom, but only by rejecting authoritative pronouncements and only if the reader's conscience is persuaded to choose this truth. If we are left in Paradise Lost wondering at the dynamic of Satan's energy, or in Paradise Regained at the apparent passivity of divine self-knowledge, or in Samson Agonistes at the human complexity of the hero's motives, we are continually taught to think in new ways...and be free." Woods, Politics, poetics and hermeneutics 209.
[37] Woods, Politics, poetics and hermeneutics 209.
[38] See Thomas Kranidas, "Polarity and Structure in Milton's Areopagitica." ELR 14 (1984) 174-90 for a comparison and linking of the vocabulary and treatment of the Roman Catholic church between the anti-prelatical tracts and Areopagitica.
[39] See Chapter 4 for a fuller consideration of these policies in the Church.

tender'd by him from whom it was a sin to receave them."[40] Aside from specific issues such as the creed, and the Communion Table, ordered by Archbishop Laud to be fenced off from the laity in churches throughout the land, he is also arguing in a more general sense for the abolition of prelacy.[41] He enlarges upon the biblical precedents for presbyters and ministerial duty, and at this point in his pamphlet writing seems to support the Independent Reformed Churches. His criticism is reserved for the Church of England. In Areopagitica however, he has adjusted his stance. His hopes for Reformation and "unity" for the Church have been replaced by a tolerance of all sects and schisms. Christ, he points out, "exhorts us to hear with patience and humility those, however they be miscall'd, that desire to live purely, in such a use of Gods Ordinances, as the best guidance of their conscience gives them, and to tolerat them, though in some disconformity to our selves."[42] He still holds hopes of a final true Reformation: "Let us therefore be more considerat builders, more wise in spirituall architecture, when great reformation is expected."[43] His patience with the Presbyterians was waning, however, by 1644: "if some who but of late were little better then silenc't from preaching, shall come now to silence us from reading, except what they please, it cannot be guest what is intended by som but a second tyranny over learning: and will soon put it out of controversie that Bishops and Presbyters are the same to us both name and thing."[44] This is a very different tone from: "there should be a ministery set a part to teach and discipline the Church, both which duties the Apostles thought good to commit to the Presbyters."[45] His language in these tracts has met with a mixed critical reception. Woods describes his tone as "thunderous bombast"[46] and Stavely argues that the "exalted "poetic" texture" limits its political effectiveness. He says of both these tracts and of Areopagitica:

> In making them so coherent, Milton systematically performs the idealistic artist's task of legislating the world by imaginative fiat. Milton's political writings prepared him in this aesthetic sense for his epic poetic legislations. (...) Milton the prose artist showed the way to Milton the

[40] An Apology &c., Works vol. 3 part 1, 362: 13-15.
[41] He descends to facetious fury in his efforts to communicate a firm belief that a hierarchy among clergy has no scriptural basis, describing a bishopric as: "the meerest, the falsest, most unfortunate guift of fortune. And were the punishment and misery of being a Prelat Bishop terminated only in the person, and did not extend to the affliction of the whole Diocesse, if I would wish any thing in bitternesse of soule to mine enemy, I would wish him the biggest and the fattest Bishoprick." An Apology &c., Works vol. 3 part 1, 342: 5-11.
[42] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 346: 24-28.
[43] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 342: 23-25.
[44] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 331; 6-11. The close echo of this sentiment in On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament, line 20 "New presbyter is but old priest writ large." has been noted by Diekhoff 161.
[45] The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 197: 24-26.
[46] Woods, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 205.

> blind bard, but Milton the citizen and revolutionary activist could not work effectively for the only revolution he believed in, a revolution that would liberate the poet.[47]

The rhetorical zeal which Milton employs has been noted also by Kranidas who suggests that this is entirely appropriate at the start of a revolution, but that later, a greater sense of rationality and control are desirable.[48] He continues: "For Milton, the emblem and mode of rational truth is the perused, printed word."[49] While Patterson notes Milton's use of "chivalric metaphor to dignify the revolution against formalism in the church,"[50] it is Corns who has expressed the clearest sense of the sheer joy of writing which Milton demonstrates in his early prose, arguing for: "a flamboyant style, rich in imagery and lexically innovative to the point of playfulness. In it, metaphors and similes abound, often in great elaboration."[51]

The hopes of the early anti-episcopal pamphlets are for a Church in England built upon Scripture. His praise is for the Independent Churches under the Presbyterian mode of government. His vision of the clergy is of an array of pastoral teachers, ministering and administering the Gospel, and mirroring "the person of Christ in his highest work of communicating to us the mysteries of our salvation."[52] He dismisses schism in the Church as "trifling doubts and jealousies" which should not be allowed to "overcloud the faire beginnings of purpos't reformation."[53]

> Other things men do to the glory of God: but sects and errors it seems God suffers to be for the glory of good men, that the world may know and reverence their true fortitude and undaunted constancy in the truth. Let us not therefore make these things an incumbrance, or an excuse of our delay in reforming, which God sends us as an incitement to proceed with more honour and alacrity.[54]

Milton had already connected religious intolerance with civil injustice in his defence of

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[47] Stavely 2. I believe that Milton desired liberty for all, and not just the poet.

[48] Milton's prose does indeed mature and develop in order to fit the changing situations for which he writes, and this is addressed later.

[49] Thomas Kranidas, "Words, words, words, and the Word: Milton's Of Prelatical Episcopacy." MS 16 (1982) 161. Kranidas notes that Milton's puritan rhetoric of zeal was employed against the Anglican via media, and that the strength of some of his images is entirely consonant with equivalent passages in Scripture, particularly in Revelation. Kranidas, "Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal." TSLL 6 (1965) 432.

[50] Patterson 176.

[51] Corns, The Cambridge Companion to Milton 184. Corns also notes that Milton scorned the use of foreign tongues, and loved English itself. His frequent use of neologism is perfectly in line with English usage at the time, although sometimes stylistically brilliant. Traditional arguments that Milton's style is self-consciously ponderous, affectedly classical, or unnecessarily Latinate are therefore inaccurate. 185. Rosenberg cites the sources for these tracts as "the pulpit, the polemical pamphlet, and the Biblical prophets." D.M. Rosenberg, "Style and Meaning in Milton's Antiepiscopal Tracts." Criticism 15 (1973) 43.

[52] The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 201: 2-4.

[53] The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 223: 16-17. This sentiment runs counter to the popular Puritan arguments of the time, and identifies closely with Arminius, who declares in his Oration V, delivered in 1606 that he was desirous of uniting all of the Reformed Churches.

[54] The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 223: 3-9.

liberty. The clergy who wished to keep the State Church "accustomed, ceremonious"[55] were aligned in his mind with the royalists who desired to retain the royal prerogative over Parliament and the people. The divine right of the monarchy and the apostolic succession of the episcopacy were unnecessary, tyrannical and backward to Milton.[56] By 1644, however, when he wrote Areopagitica, Milton had grown more critical of the ministry, and of the Reformed and Independent Churches:

> it reflects to the disrepute of our Ministers also, of whose labours we should hope better...then that after all this light of the Gospel which is, and is to be, and all this continuall preaching, they should be still frequented with such an unprincipl'd, unedify'd, and laick rabble, as that the whiffe of every new pamphlet should stagger them out of thir catechism, and Christian walking.[57]

The note of criticism and disappointment is unmistakable, as is the rather tetchy description of the works of these ministers: "all the Sermons, all the Lectures preacht, printed, vented in such numbers, and such volumes, as have now well nigh made all other books unsalable."[58] But if Milton is disillusioned with the state of the national Church, ("This is not, yee Covnants and Protestations that we have made,"[59]) the same is not yet true of his attitude to the nation itself. He is aware in 1642 that "something is rotten in the state"[60] in "these present times wherein most men now scarce permitted the liberty to think over their owne concernments have remov'd the seat of their thoughts more outward to the expectation of publick events,"[61] but throughout the period of his early pamphlets, he still views the British as God's chosen people:

> in this Age, *Brittains* God hath reform'd his Church after many hundred yeers of *Popish* corruption...Let us all goe every true protested *Brittaine* throughout the 3. *Kingdoms*, and render thanks to God the Father of light, and fountaine of heavenly grace, and to his son CHRIST our Lord...he being equally neere to his whole Creation of Mankind, and of free power to turne his benefick and fatherly regard to what Region or Kingdome he pleases,

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[55] W. B. Yeats, *A Prayer for my Daughter*, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1982) 214.

[56] He linked them thus, addressing himself: "to those that lov'd religion, and their native liberty. Which two things God hath inseparably knit together, and hath disclos'd to us that they who seek to corrupt our religion are the same that would inthrall our civill liberty. Thus in the midst of all disadvantages and disrespects... having given proofe of themselves to be better made and fram'd by nature to the love and practise of vertue, then others...and having in all the trialls of a firme ingrafted honesty not oftner buckl'd in the conflict, then giv'n every opposition the foile, this moreover was added by favour from heav'n, as an ornament and happinesse to their vertue...God and man consenting in joynt approbation to choose them out as worthiest above others to be both the great reformers of the Church, and the restorers of the Common-wealth." An Apology &c., Works vol. 3 part 1, 336: 15 - 337: 5.

[57] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 329: 1-8.

[58] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 329: 12-15.

[59] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 331: 22-23.

[60] Shakespeare, Hamlet I.iv:90.

[61] An Apology &c., Works vol. 3 part 1 283: 25 - 284: 1.

> hath yet ever had this Iland under the speciall indulgent eye of his providence...[62]

He writes lovingly of "this Land...the holy reformed Church, and the elect people of God."[63] His patriotic conviction does not, however, blind him to the flaws in England, but at this stage, it is the unreformed state of the Church which attracts his notice most, rather than the constitution or the government. He exhorts Parliament to take seriously the responsibilities laid upon them in politically difficult times:

> Lords and Commons of England, consider what Nation it is wherof ye are, and wherof ye are the governours: a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, suttle and sinewy to discours, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to.[64]

His hopes that England shall be God's new Jerusalem are undamaged by disappointment in 1644: "Why else was this Nation chos'n before any other, that out of her as out of *Sion* should be proclam'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all *Europ*."[65] The disappointment is present, certainly, but it has not yet twisted his vision. His mood is one of confident and excited change. It is a turning-point in the history of the nation as well as in his own life: "God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, ev'n to the reforming of Reformation it self: what does he then but reveal Himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his English-men."[66]

But in Areopagitica, the tone has changed from the admonishment of the earlier pamphlets[67] to encouragement. Milton urges his country to be tolerant of schism within the Church, and promotes a two-fold vision for England. Firstly, he argues passionately for the freedom of ideas and intellectually tolerant communication: "Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making,"[68] and supports what he describes as "the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which

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[62] Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence, Against Smectymnuus, Works vol. 3 part 1, 144: 28 - 145: 15.
[63] The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 279: 5-6.
[64] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 339: 16-21.
[65] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 340: 7-10.
[66] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 340: 21-25.
[67] In Of Reformation, he urges the nation to be active in virtue and to join the other Reformed Churches in Europe, and in The Reason of Church-Government he threatens that if England fails to "lay hold on this occasion" (*SA* 1716) then God may withdraw his guiding hand: "The doore of grace turnes upon smooth hinges wide opening to send out, but soon shutting to recall the precious offers of mercy to a nation: which unlesse Watchfulnesse and Zeale two quick-sighted and ready-handed Virgins be there in our behalfe to receave, we loose: and still the ofter we loose, the straiter the doore opens, and the lesse is offer'd." The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 225: 20-26.
[68] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 341: 15-18.

God hath stirr'd up in this City."[69] Secondly though, and this is the more revealing expectation, Milton wants for England an unmanageable dream: that all men should behave as good Christians, this in a society where Christians were struggling to behave as good men:

> Truth may be on this side, or on the other, without being unlike her self. What but a vain shadow else is the abolition of *those ordinances, that hand writing nayl'd to the crosse*, what great purchase is this Christian liberty...How many other things might be tolerated in peace, and left to conscience, had we but charity, and were it not the chief strong hold of our hypocrasie to be ever judging one another.[70]

Finally, the message of Areopagitica, and Milton's purpose in writing it can best be expressed in the lines: "Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."[71] This is probably the crux in the turning-point of Areopagitica, if the work can be described as such, as it is the instant upon which the whole body of the work rests. Milton sees in censorship a threat to his own vital intellectual arena: to argue and to utter are his ways of communicating the truth, and of rescuing his countrymen from folly and error. Censorship to Milton was a disaster of some magnitude: all his power and divinely gifted strength of argument would be useless if he could not publish his work. Although he had already turned from poetry to prose writing in the early anti-episcopal pamphlets, it is not until Areopagitica that Milton realises how serious a curb censorship would prove to his purpose.[72]

Just as the pursuit and defence of liberty inspired the writing of Areopagitica, so too were the divorce pamphlets conceived. Milton dedicated his work:

> to the Parlament and to the Assembly of Divines, that as they were busy then about the general Reformation of the Kingdom, they might also take this particular case of domestic Liberty into their consideration: for he thought all the boasted Freedom of public Judicatures signify'd little, if in the mean while one must be oblig'd to indure a kind of Servitude at home below the Dignity of a Man.[73]

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[69] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 341: 19-21.
[70] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 348: 17-26.
[71] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 346: 5-7.
[72] "The urge to defend himself was immediate for Milton: his movement to objectivity was one of the major achievements of the tract." Thomas Kranidas, "Polarity and Structure in Milton's Areopagitica," 176. This issue of achieving objectivity whilst addressing the personal is one which recurs frequently in Milton's prose. It characterises the divorce tracts also, see below.
[73] Darbishire 120.

The autobiographical outbursts in The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce and Tetrachordon reveal something of Milton's state of mind between 1643 and 1645. These tracts meant a lot to Milton in their writing and publication, and they disappointed him greatly in their reception and in the widespread condemnation which they provoked. The ringing objective tones of Milton's arguments in the divorce pamphlets have been criticised, and it has often been assumed that Milton's own personal involvement might arguably undercut the force of generality in the argument.[74] The reality and immediacy of Milton's concerns soften the stark translation between generalised rhetoric and personal pain, and as a result, his arguments are strengthened through autobiography. Knowledge lends his words an awful realism, and renders the orator's speech the poignant voice of experience. At times the quiet knowledge of his words cuts through his indignation with an insight of moving intensity:

> the sober man honouring the appearance of modesty...may easily chance to meet, if not with a body impenetrable, yet often with a mind to all other due conversation inaccessible, and to all the more estimable and superior purposes of matrimony uselesse and almost liveles: and what a solace, what a fit help such a consort would be through the whole life of a man, is lesse pain to conjecture then to have experience.[75]

Toland, the seventeenth-century biographer, comments positively upon the autobiographical content of Milton's divorce tracts, and in doing so makes a valuable point in support of the validity of Milton's approach:

> And indeed the best Books we have on any Subject, are such as were oppos'd to the prevalency of the contrary opinion: for as he that was forc'd to pass som part of his time in the Regions of extreme Heat or Cold, can best value the Blessings of a temperat Country; so none can be so well furnish'd with Arguments for a good Cause, like such as were Sufferers under a bad one; the Writings of unconcern'd and retir'd Persons being either an Exercise of their Parts, and the Amusements of

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[74] The most extreme of these arguments is that of Hilaire Belloc, who declares in his biography that Milton desired to change the law on the strength of his own personal experience. Hilaire Belloc, Milton (London: Cassell, 1935) 147. To balance Belloc's spite, one could argue that Milton had become painfully aware of the wrongs of an existing situation, and used the service of his pen to redress the evil, attempting to persuade his countrymen to embrace domestic liberty. Wilson tries to put this point: "The really striking thing about Milton's ideas on the subject is that he never once suggests desertion as a plausible ground for divorce. Other writers on the subject have thought desertion a reasonable ground; it seems an obvious one. This is surely a sign that he very deliberately avoided discussing the matter from his own point of view. If he mentioned desertion, there would be those who thought Mary had deserted him, and that he was merely asking Parliament to change the laws of England to suit his own convenience. It was a general issue, and one of political relevance; he could not risk it being dismissed *ad hominem*." Wilson 134. Unfortunately, this charitable defence is inaccurate. Milton does indeed cite desertion as a ground for divorce: "But divorce for adultery or desertion, as all our Churches agree but England, not only separats, but nullifies, and extinguishes the relation it self of matrimony, so that they are no more man and wife; otherwise the innocent party could not marry else-where, without the guilt of adultery."[74] And also in his commentary on Genesis 5: 24: "*Cleav to a Wife*, but let her bee a wife, let her be a meet help, a solace, not a nothing, not an adversary, not a desertrice; can any law or command be so unreasonable as to make men cleav to calamity, to ruin, to perdition?" Tetrachordon, Works vol. 4, 97: 11-14.

[75] The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 395: 7-15.

> idle time, or, what is worse, pitiful Declamations without any Force, Experience, or Vivacity.[76]

Stavely adds his comment to this vein of argument when he commends Milton's integration of "logical and pathetic proofs" which he suggests made the tracts "more attractive and powerful as works of rhetorical imagination."[77] He also acknowledges that in order to refute suggestions of personal obsession, Milton's arguments sweep out from the discussion with increasingly broader implications.[78]

Notably, Milton's apparent acceptance of the doctrine of Predestination, and his view of reprobation, identify him apparently as a Calvinist[79] at this stage:

> And the solitarines of man...hath no remedy, but lies under a worse condition than the loneliest single life; for in single life the absence and remotenes of a helper might inure him to expect his own comforts out of himselfe or to seek with hope; but here the continuall sight of his deluded thoughts without cure, must needs be to him, if especially his complexion incline him to melancholy, a daily trouble and pain of losse in som degree like that which Reprobats feel.[80]

We can already see the shadowy personae of Satan and Samson looming in Milton's imagination: his ability to identify with the agony of reprobation shows how effectively he will be able to project the Archangel's fallen point of view:

> ...but other Powers as great
> Fell not, but stand unshak'n, from within
> Or from without, to all temptations arm'd.
> Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?
> Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
> But Heav'ns free Love dealt equally to all?
> Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate,
> To me alike, it deals eternal woe.
> Nay curs'd be thou; since against his thy will
> Chose freely what it now so justly rues.
> Me miserable! which way shall I flie
> Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
> Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
> (...)
> ...is there no place

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[76] Darbishire 126-127. Stavely also suggests that the personal dimension to these works influenced Milton's style for the better: "He was compelled to become more realistic, to urge greater flexibility on those in charge of society's domestic institutions. Similarly, the absence of unambiguous scriptural support for his views meant that his style had to conform to given human standards of discourse." Stavely 54.

[77] Stavely 54.

[78] Stavely 62.

[79] Notably, Janel Mueller suggests in her essay "Embodying glory: the apocalyptic strain in Milton's Of Reformation" that Milton's salient arguments in the anti-prelatical prose are based in Calvin. Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 9-35. At this time in his life he appears to have held the tenets of Calvinism to be true. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of Milton's theology.

[80] Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 391: 19-28.

Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
(*PL* 4: 63-80)

Obviously Satan is not talking from the reprobate point of view in the pure Calvinist sense, as he chose to fall, and was unfallen initially, but imaginatively speaking, he has taken the step of putting himself in the reprobate's mind, and in this imaginative leap, Milton is like his own creation.[81] Similarly, his disgust at having the object of his pain constantly before him foreshadows Samson's rejection of Dalila: although unable to see her, he refuses to let her touch him, and in her offer to look after him for the rest of his days, one can imagine what type of a hell Milton was endeavouring to portray. Samson's horror forms a type of imaginative correlative to Milton's own horror.[82] Although he cites Moses, Job and Abraham as examples of Old Testament men with idolatrous wives, Samson and Dalila, (Israelite and Philistine),[83] and Milton and Mary Powell, (Puritan and Royalist), may also suggest themselves to the reader:

> ...if they shall perpetually at our elbow seduce us from the true worship of God, or defile and daily scandalize our conscience by their hopeles continuance in misbelief, then ev'n in the due progresse of reason, and that ever-equall proportion which justice proceeds by, it cannot be imagin'd that this cited place, commands lesse then a totall and finall separation from such an adherent...while we remember that God commanded *Abraham* to send away his irreligious wife and her son for the offences which they gave in a pious family.[84]

Milton identifies his plight with Samson's in describing "mis-matching with an Infidell"[85] as the worst example of mismatch in marriage, but his autobiographical claim supersedes this: "yet next to that what can be a fouler incongruity, a greater violence to the reverend secret of nature, then to force a mixture of minds that cannot unite, and to sowe the furrow of mans nativity with seed of two incoherent and uncombining dispositions."[86] One of the more subtle Samson references is that which shows that Manoa and Samson both have their origins in the questionings of Milton's own mind: as if father and son were arguing from earlier and later points in Milton's thought:

Alas methinks whom God hath chosen once

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[81] See Chapter 4 for a consideration of Calvin's doctrine of predestination.
[82] See Chapter 6 for an examination of Dalila.
[83] Tony Davies also notes that Samson Agonistes is "a poem with a close intertextual relationship with the divorce pamphlets." Tony Davies, "'The meaning, not the name': Milton and Gender." Writing and the English Renaissance Ed. William Zunder and Suzanne Trill (London and New York: Longman, 1996) 202.
[84] Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 409: 4-14.
[85] Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 417: 16.
[86] Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 417: 16-20.

> To worthiest deeds, if he through frailty err,
> He should not so o'rewhelm, and as a thrall
> Subject him to so foul indignities,
>
> Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father,
> Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me
> But justly; I my self have brought them on,
> (*SA* 368-75)

Furthermore, in an impassioned section of The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Milton uses words which are echoed strongly thirty years later, in Samson Agonistes.

> If any therfore who shall hap to read this discourse, hath been through misadventure ill ingag'd in this contracted evill here complain'd of, and finds the fits and workings of a high impatience frequently upon him, of all those wild words which men in misery think to ease themselves by uttering, let him not op'n his lips against the providence of heav'n, or tax the wayes of God and his divine truth: for they are equal, easie, and not burdensome; nor doe they ever crosse the just and reasonable desires of men, nor involve this our portion of mortall life, into a neccessity of sadnesse and malecontent, by laws commanding over the unreducible *antipathies* of nature sooner or later found: but allow us to remedy and shake off those evills into which human error hath led us through the midst of our best intentions; and to support our incident extremities by that authentick precept of soveran charity; whose grand commission is to doe and to dispose over all the ordinances of God to man; that love & truth may advance each other to everlasting.[87]

The echo lies in the structure of the argument, and the repetition of the word "tax", but there is some difference in tone between the last extract and the speech of the Chorus in Samson Agonistes:

> Tax not divine disposal, wisest Men
> Have err'd, and by bad Women been deceiv'd;
> And shall again, pretend they ne're so wise.
> Deject not then so overmuch thy self,
> Who hast of sorrow thy full load besides;
> (*SA* 210-14)

By the time Milton reached the end of 1645, the stock-taking which marked the close of this part of his experience, he had gained experience in both public and private affairs. He had realised the importance of freedom within the system of Church-

[87] Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 496: 10-28.

government, and of freedom in publishing, that his voice might be heard, and the paramount significance of domestic freedom. It would be of little use to have civil liberty and public freedom, and yet to be ruled in one's own house by tyrannical divorce laws. Dzelzainis has pointed out that "one of Milton's arguments for divorce...had been that to deny this form of relief to those who were unhappily married was to render them 'unserviceable and spiritles to the Common-wealth' - or, as he was to put it more trenchantly still in Tetrachordon...'unactive to all public service, dead to the Common-wealth'.(CPW, II, 347, 632)."[88] It is apparent that his concern for the spiritual well-being of the individual is already directing his writing, and that for the greater good, he is prepared to take the risk of censure: as Corns has recognised, in his divorce writings Milton exhibits "a singularity of doctrine...indicative of one who could not for long expect to find a place in even a newly reformed and Presbyterian Church of England."[89] Morse also emphasises the magnitude of Milton's decision to embroil himself in polemical writing: "Milton's whole life was profoundly influenced by his decision to involve himself in public affairs and to work for the public good," it was a radical step he continues, to devote himself to the well-being of his fellow citizens at the cost of unpopularity, and the sacrifice of a life of peace and tranquillity.[90] This measure of understanding would have a profound effect on all of his subsequent work, but perhaps more significantly for the development of his ideas: he had received a setback in his faith in the human nature of his countrymen. The hostility with which his divorce tracts had been received made as lasting an impression upon his vision as the events which prompted their creation. Englishmen had proved themselves to be unwilling, at least initially, to hear Milton's call to liberty.

[88] Dzelzainis, Milton and Republicanism 11. References are to the Yale edition of the prose.
[89] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 25.
[90] Morse 345. From our understanding of Milton, it is unlikely that he would have regarded a life without active involvement in the public eye, without campaigning for the public good, and without the public discharging of his sacred duty, as one of peace and tranquillity, but it does serve to remind the reader that although the choice was no choice for Milton, it was not an easy task which he set himself.

Chapter 2

Historiography and Iconoclasm: resisting the tyranny of political government and of the literary image.

> For I shall relate no common things, or mean; but how a most puissant king, when he had trampled upon the laws, and stricken down religion, and was ruling at his own lust and wantonness, was at last subdued in the field by his own people...how he was thereupon put under guard, and ...was finally by the highest council of the realm condemned to die, and beheaded before his very palace gate. I shall likewise relate...under what system of laws, especially what laws of England, this judgment was rendered and executed; and shall easily defend my valiant and worthy countrymen...For what king's majesty high enthroned ever shone so bright as did the people's majesty of England, when, shaking off that age-old superstition which had long prevailed, they overwhelmed with judgement their very king...ensnared in his own laws him who alone among men claimed by divine right to go unpunished, and feared not to inflict upon this very culprit the same capital punishment which he would have inflicted upon any other.[1]

It has been suggested that Milton wrote specifically to answer the political and cultural circumstances of the time, and that as his work was directed at specific goals, there is an implication that it loses something of its artistic or timeless integrity. Undoubtedly his republican prose "obeys the polemical exigencies of the time,"[2] but this chapter demonstrates that he utilised the opportunities which presented themselves in order to further his purpose: it would have been of little use to address any subject which was not of immediate relevance in a time where the political and theological stakes were so high: "it were a folly to commit any thing elaborately compos'd to the carelesse and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times."[3] Milton did not sacrifice his literary talent upon the altar of political expediency, as every work functions simultaneously in the realms of aesthetics and politics.[4] Loewenstein addresses this point, arguing that his "state polemics...were more than simply occasional works: they were also creative occasions - opportunities for Milton to employ his imaginative powers for political ends and to contribute to the social forces of his age."[5] These

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[1] Defence of the People of England Against Claudius Anonymous, alias Salmasius his Defence of the King, Works vol. 7, 3: 15 - 5: 25.
[2] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 30. Also 36: Milton "took his polemical orientation in each of his regicide tracts from his sense of the immediate requirements of the debate and from the larger policy his government was developing."
[3] The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 234: 18 -21.
[4] Loewenstein notes "Milton's prominent use of poets as authorities in his controversial prose suggests that he not only wished to align his revolutionary discourse with theirs, but that he consciously attempted to use the aesthetic as a means to promote his polemical ideals." Loewenstein, "Milton and the Politics of Defense" Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 178.
[5] Loewenstein Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 172. See also 172-3: "Literary form and political discourse remain deeply interconnected in Milton's defense: not only did he channel his creative energies directly into his pamphleteering for the state, but this

political works should not therefore be dismissed as an interruption to his thoughts, since it is possible to follow a logical progression in his vision from Areopagitica through the political tracts, while acknowledging the influence of the emerging political scene around him. This chapter addresses the two foundations of Milton's regicide argument: the nature of Parliament and its purpose; and the legality of resistance to the Crown. Eikonoklastes is the literary frame into which this discussion is set, and the final section of the chapter addresses the literary significance of this prose work, unusual in its rigid combative structure which Milton has adopted in order to refute the narrative of Eikon Basilike.[6]

The first of the political tracts, The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, was published shortly after the execution of Charles I in 1649. In Areopagitica, his tone is one of encouragement and vision for his country: he may criticise the government of the Church and of the nation, but already he is aware that many of the faults lie with individuals rather than institutions. For example, he applauds the Presbyterian mode of church government, yet deplores their political involvement, and the way in which they changed their attitude towards Charles I. Equally, however irritated he may be with certain individuals within the state, particularly the Puritan government which had reintroduced the censorship laws, he still feels that the English are God's chosen people. The frustration which inspired him to write Sonnet 12 is apparent at the opening of Tenure of Kings and Magistrates:

> If men within themselves would be govern'd by reason, and not generally give up thir understanding to a double tyrannie, of Custom from without, and blind affections within, they would discerne better, what it is to favour and uphold the Tyrant of a Nation. But being slaves within doors, no wonder that they strive so much to have the public State conformably govern'd to the inward vitious rule, by which they govern themselves. For indeed none can love freedom heartilie, but good men; the rest love not freedom but licence; which never hath more scope or more indulgence then under Tyrants.[7]

The hostility with which his divorce pamphlets were received was still clearly rankling here, six years after the publication of Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, and four years

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enterprise sharpened rather than thwarted his sense of social reality." This argument directly contradicts Stavely's viewpoint that the literary excellence of Milton's writing undercut his political effectiveness.

[6] "Milton's handicap in writing Eikonoklastes was his obligation to match it, chapter by chapter, with Eikon Basilike," CPW vol 3, 161. Rather than being a handicap, it would appear that Milton used this structure to order his narrative, demonstrate his own apparently superior grasp of the historical facts, and refute Charles upon matters of accuracy, style, and ultimately principle.

after Mary Powell returned to him: the use of the word "licence", also found in the sonnet, shows that the notion of liberty without responsibility was one which irked him. However it is his countrymen's attitude to the execution of the King which has prompted this fresh outburst of impatience with his nation.

Charles I succeeded to the throne in the same year that Milton matriculated at Cambridge. He was an important figure in Milton's imagination, as he was the only image of kingship of which Milton had personal experience.[8] The latter part of the reign of Charles I was shadowed by rumours and whispered conspiracies. The century as a whole was one of faction and division, due in part to the religious intensity with which people held political views, and the passionate fervour which characterised their beliefs. The problems which faced Charles I were partly of his own making, and partly arising from the ideology of Stuart kingship and its collision with Puritan ideas of reform. The political situation which Charles I inherited certainly had its problems, but it was his inability to compromise with Parliament, and his determination to rule without it from 1629, which caused many of the ruptures in the state. The ideology of Stuart kingship had fundamental flaws, a position inherited from the Tudors, but aggravated by the mishandling of an already difficult situation. James I in his work The Trew Law of Free Monarchies, outlines an ideological picture of kingship which had become an established tradition in the seventeenth century: "The king towards his people is rightly compared...to a head of a body...for from the head, being the seat of judgment, proceeds the care and foresight of guiding."[9] His arguments rest on the theory of divine ordination and the descent of authority in a political version of the apostolic succession: "the lineal succession of crowns being begun among the people of God and happily continued in divers Christian commonwealths."[10] This ideology raises a number of points. Notably, however, in the light of the events of the Civil War, there are two problems to be borne in mind: the function of Parliament,[11] and the legality of resistance, and it was to these points in particular that Milton directed his attention.

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[7] Tenure, Works vol. 5, 1: 1-11.

[8] See Joan S. Bennett, "God, Satan, and King Charles: Milton's Royal Portraits." PMLA 92 (1977) 441-57. Bennett also makes this point: Charles was the tyrant with whom Milton was most familiar.

[9] James VI and I, The Trew Law of Free Monarchies. As quoted David Wootton, ed. Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writings in Stuart England. (Middlesex: Penguin, 1986) 99.

[10] Divine Right and Democracy 104.

[11][11] This was a substantial part of Milton's opinions on government. His republicanism has already been addressed in the Introductory Chapter. It is worth noting, however as Corns does, that the word "Commonwealth" which Milton employs "is a deeply ambiguous term" and could apply to monarchy or oligarchy as well as republic. Corns, Milton and Republicanism 28. Sharpe and Zwicker note in their introduction that the term "Commonweal", current at the end of the sixteenth century referred to "a unitary vision of politics" and

With regard to the function of Parliament, as Roger Lockyer has observed in his work The Early Stuarts: A Political History of England 1603-1642, the King ruled in a political sense: "...the government was the King. Appointed by God, and not accountable to any human institution, the King alone was responsible for the formulation and execution of policy."[12] Milton viewed the function of Parliament very differently, claiming that as well as laws to govern the King, it was important to add: "...Counselors and Parlaments, nor to be onely at his beck, but with him or without him, at set times, or at all times, when any danger threatn'd to have care of the public safety. Therefore saith *Claudius Sesell* a French Statesman, *The Parliament was set as a bridle to the King.*"[13] Similarly, the King had influence over the government of the Church, effectively ruling in his choice of bishops. James I had already insisted that Church and state politics went hand in hand, ruling according to the maxim, "No Bishop, no King."[14] Charles I showed the importance of this prerogative in state government when he claimed in Eikon Basilike:

> ...I find it impossible for a prince to preserve the state in quiet unless he hath such an influence upon churchmen and they such a dependence on him as may best restrain the seditious exorbitancies of ministers' tongues; who with the keys of heaven have so far the keys of the peoples' hearts as they prevail much by their oratory to let in or shut out both peace and loyalty (...) The moving bishops out of the House of Peers...was sufficient to take off any suspicion that I incline to them for any use to be made of their votes in state affairs; though, indeed, I never thought any bishop worthy to sit in that House who would not vote according to his conscience.[15]

Henry VIII had acknowledged the importance of Parliament's role in government,[16] including them in the nature of the body politic, but the Stuart kings had no such conjunction in mind, having taken the state and nature of majesty to a position removed from ordinary mortals, as James I claimed: "The state of monarchy is the

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meant the good of the whole. The term "Commonwealth" was more common by the middle of the seventeenth century, but by the end of the century, it had become synonymous with treachery. Politics of Discourse 5.

[12] Roger Lockyer, The Early Stuarts: A Political History of England 1603-1642 (New York: Longman, 1989) 253. Lockyer continues: "as the governor of a long-established state his freedom of action was in practice curtailed by custom, tradition and routine. (...) He was...dependent for the exercise of his authority upon the co-operation of the political nation which governed the local communities. Its members were accustomed to obey the King's orders even when they disapproved of them, but no sovereign could afford to take their obedience for granted and assume that he had an absolute right to it." 253

[13] Tenure, Works vol. 5, 10: 2-6.

[14] For a more detailed look at a comparison of the respective attitudes to the Church and the clergy demonstrated by James I and Charles I, see Chapter 4.

[15] 'Eikon Basilike': The portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitudes and Sufferings. Ed. Philip Knachel. New York: Cornell U. P., 1966: 101. I write as though Charles I were the author for ease of argument. One may assume that if Gauden were the author, then Charles I would have approved the sentiments, and probably the content of the manuscript also.

[16] See Note 26.

supremest thing upon earth. For kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods."[17] Charles I emphasised his elevated position as head of the state, and his disinclination to co-operate with an uncongenial Parliament when he is made to claim in Eikon Basilike that the votes of Parliament were:

> ...not by any law or reason conclusive to my judgement; nor can they include or carry with them my consent, whom they represent not in any kind; nor am I further bound to agree with the votes of both Houses than I see them agree with the will of God, with my just rights as a king, and the general good of my people, I see that, as many men, they are seldom of one mind; and I may oft see that the major part of them are not in the right.[18]

Milton's answering argument centres upon the importance of the country's existing system of laws:

> to say Kings are accountable to none but God, is the ouerturning of all Law and government. For if they may refuse to give account, then all cov'nants made with them at Coronation; all Oathes are in vaine, and meer mockeries, all Lawes which they sweare to keep, made to no purpose; for if the King feare not God, as how many of them doe not? we hold then our lives and estates, by the tenure of his meer grace and mercy, as from a God, not a mortal Magistrate, a position that none but Court Parasites or men besotted would maintain.[19]

However, the seventeenth-century concept of Parliament was very different from our concept of an elected house of representatives. The King himself was a member, and "Parliament" was regarded as being the King, the Commons and the Lords together. Gradually, during the reign of Charles I, as Conrad Russell has observed, the type of Parliament which was summoned only for "weighty and great causes"[20] was replaced by a self-regulating body of men who demanded the right to meet at specific times, and to have the authority to disband when they wished, rather than being subject to the whims

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[17] James VI and I, A Speech to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at White-Hall (1610). As quoted Divine Right and Democracy 107.

[18] Eikon Basilike 25. He continues with remarks which reveal the extent to which he believed himself to be of greater importance than his office: "Nor do I think my kingdoms so considerable as to preserve them with the forfeiture of that freedom which cannot be denied me as a king because it belongs to me as a man and a Christian, owning the dictates of none but God to be above me, as obliging me to consent. Better for me to die enjoying this empire of my soul, which subjects me only to God as far as by reason or religion He directs me, than live with the title of a king, if it should carry such a vassalage with it as not to suffer me to use my reason and conscience in which I declare as a King to like or dislike." Eikon Basilike 25-26.

[19] Tenure, Works vol. 5, 11: 27 - 12: 8. This is the heart of the conflict between the Parliamentarians and the Crown: Charles I was executed because he attempted to act above the law, or was perceived as attempting to act above the law. It is also the central tenet of Milton's argument against him. For Milton, the elect nation and the welfare of the law-abiding majority were of paramount importance. Hence his value of the system of laws which governed the nation.

[20] John Hooker, member for Exeter in 1571. As quoted Conrad Russell, "The Nature of Parliaments." Before the English Civil War: Essays on Early Stuart Politics and Government Ed. H. Tomlinson (London: Macmillan Press, 1983) 126.

of the sovereign. As early as 1604, Parliament was claiming: "Our privileges and liberties are our right and due inheritance, no less than our very lands and goods...They cannot be withheld from us...but with an apparent wrong to the whole state of the realm."[21] In 1610 they claimed their "ancient general and undoubted right...to debate freely all matters which do properly concern the subject,"[22] and Lord Keeper Ellesmere claimed that the maintenance of political order required a balance between three assumptions: "1. The King is to have his regality and supreme prerogative and sovereignty inviolable preserved. 2. The nobles, prelates and lords to have their honor and dignity maintained. 3. The Commons to have their ancient liberties and privileges kept without breach or prejudice."[23] He added that if any of these tries to extend their sphere of influence, then "the balance of the whole would be upset, and chaos would ensue."[24] It is evident from this that Charles I's attempt to rule without Parliament was at best unwise.

"We at no time stand so high in our estate royal, as in the time of Parliament, when we as head and you as members are cojoined and knit together into one body politic."[25] This sentiment of Henry VIII is something of a contrast to Charles I's evident mistrust of Parliament which led him to establish eleven years of personal rule.[26] In Eikon Basilike, Charles I is represented as declaring: "[I]...always thought the right way of Parliaments most safe for my crown and best pleasing to my people." Almost in the same breath he says: "I...was not forgetful of those sparks which some men's distempers formerly studied to kindle in Parliaments (which, by forbearing to convene for some years, I hoped to have extinguished)."[27] Benjamin Rudyerd spoke for many when he said of the Short Parliament in 1641: "The main causes of this infelicity and distraction of these times have been the frequent breaking of Parliaments."[28] It appeared that Parliament was dissolved because of its relationship with the King. The strength of Parliament was seen to be in its inter-dependence with the monarch: James I had

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[21] Apology of the House of Commons, June 1604. As quoted J.W. Allen, English Political Thought 1603-1660 vol. 1: 1603-1644 (London: Methuen, 1938) 26, note 1.
[22] Petition of May 23rd 1610. As quoted Allen 26, note 2.
[23] A memorandum by Lord Keeper Ellesmere, composed soon after the dissolution in 1610. As quoted Richard Cust, The Forced Loan and English Politics 1626-1628 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 19.
[24] This tripartite form resembles Charles I's own definition of government in The Answer to the Nineteen Propositions.
[25] Henry VIII. As quoted Allen 4.
[26] This perhaps says much about the differing styles of leadership of these kings, and more about their respective personalities, than about the nature of parliament. Charles I had been interested in parliamentary debate, as he showed when still a prince, but seemed to find the reality of criticism impossible to accept.
[27] Eikon Basilike 3.
[28] Ann Hughes, The Causes of the English Civil War, ed. Jeremy Black, (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1991) 4.

declared in 1621: "a parliament is composed of a head and a body. The head is the monarch...In monarchies only are parliaments held, which were created by monarchs. A strange folly it is in those that would have parliaments to be popular contrary to their own institution."[29] Milton disagreed, and the impression of order and rectitude which he portrays is underpinned by the perennially important notion of freedom:

> To sum up the whole truth, Parliament is the supreme council of the nation, constituted and appointed by an absolutely free people, and armed with ample power and authority, for this end and purpose: viz., to consult together upon the most weighty affairs; the king was created to take care that there should be executed, obedient to their vote and resolution, all the acts and decrees of those Orders, Estates, or Houses.[30]

Aside from the fundamental ideological problems, there were practical issues which accelerated the processes of dissolution: as Ann Hughes has commented in her study, The Causes of the English Civil War: "the narratives of high politics or the doings of great men alone cannot explain the origins of the Civil War,"[31] but they certainly contributed. Arguably, Charles I alienated his subjects, and although it seems harsh to argue, as John Morrill does in his work Reactions to the English Civil War 1642-1649, that: "Charles I made a series of disastrous mistakes and miscalculations which drove into reluctant warmongering those who had continued until the last minute to hope for and to expect a peaceful resolution of their differences with him..."[32] he cannot be exempted wholly from blame. His first political crisis was the tax termed the "Forced Loan," which had a high political cost, and influenced much of the early part of the reign of Charles I.[33] Discussion of the political repercussions of the Forced Loan have demonstrated that the controversies which it raised were concerned with wider issues than the loan itself.[34] The Forced Loan raised several problems for the people, who regarded it as parliamentary taxation without parliamentary sanction, and who regarded their property as indisputably their own, a tradition which is outlined in the Magna Carta under the claim that the people shall not be taxed without the consent of Parliament. The enforcement of payment merely incited individuals to resist, and concern came to a head over the 'five knights' affair, where a group of leading resisters had been seeking a

[29] James I 1621, N.R.S., IV, 2. As quoted Before the English Civil War 126.
[30] First Defence, Works vol. 7, 459: 5-12.
[31] Hughes 158.
[32] John Morrill, ed. Reactions to the English Civil War 1642-1649 (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982) 2.
[33] For example the first five sections of the Petition of Right, all of which relate to constitutional issues which arose from the Loan.

public trial, so that the basis of the loan and the grounds of their confinement could be tested at law. In the event, any discussion of the legality of the loan was avoided, and only the King's right to imprison without showing cause was demonstrated. This provoked a public outcry, and was the central issue in the 1628 Parliament.[35] It also led to discussion of the King's supposed attitude to the common law, and raised disquieting questions about the limits of royal power.[36] Thus while preachers like Sibthorpe and Mainwaring declared that all taxes were due to the King by divine right, some politicians, in particular Pym, declared that Charles I was claiming as his right: "not power to make law, but a right to break it."[37]

This was the main question at issue between the Crown and Parliament: the idea that the King was not bound by statute, constitution or common law. It was this assumption which caused Pym to declare in 1628 that he recognised the King as sovereign, but did not recognise "sovereign power."[38] Milton suggests that if the King should rule without the power of the law, then he is as any other man, and uses a significant image: "*The words of a King*, as they are *full of power*, in the autority and strength of Law, so like *Sampson*, without the strength of that *Nazarites* lock, they have no more power in them then the words of another man."[39] This image closely echoes his description of majesty in the Reason of Church Government, which had been published in 1642, where Milton likens the ideal "state and person of a King" to:

> ...that mighty Nazarite *Samson*; who being disciplin'd from his birth in the precepts and the practice of Temperance and Sobriety, without the strong drink of injurious and excessive desires, grows up to a noble strength and perfection with those his illustrious and sunny locks the laws waving and curling about his god like shoulders.[40]

There were other contributory factors in the King's unpopularity. The largest single catalyst for rebellion was arguably religion. Hill observes: "We need not doubt the

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[34] Notably by Richard Cust.
[35] Cust 4.
[36] There were two contradictory traditions involved. Since the thirteenth century, the monarch had been entitled to demand extra aid when the security of the realm was at risk, and Charles I had judged that to be the case. Convention demanded however, that the King must first consult his council, and that he must refrain from using coercion in levying: if these conditions were observed, then the subject was obliged to pay. Against this was the tradition that even in an emergency, the property of a subject could only be taken with the consent of Parliament.
[37] Allen 12.
[38] Pym's speech of 1628, as quoted Allen 13, note 1.
[39] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 257: 5-8.
[40] The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 276: 8-14. The contrast is obvious between this declaration of James I: "whosoever should bid the King go against law was a viper." (As quoted Lockyer 237) and the actions of Charles I which inspired the speech of the Lord President at the King's trial on 27th January, 1649: "the law was [the King's] superior, and...he ought to have ruled

sincerity of the great numbers of preachers who proclaimed that Parliament's cause was God's, and that - whatever Charles's subjective intentions - his government was objectively forwarding the cause of the Roman Antichrist."[41] The rise of so-called Arminianism,[42] and the relaxation of the recusancy laws during the reign of Charles I gave rise to widespread fear that the Church was being systematically undermined; "Arminianism blurred into Catholicism in the minds of many,"[43] largely owing to the emphasis upon human free will, the contribution of works to salvation, the stress on ritual and sacrament, rather than the preaching of the word, and justification by faith alone. The elevated Arminian[44] view of the clergy, and the support of the King and of Archbishop Laud, served to help the parliamentarian cause, and gave arguments for active resistance to authority an added dimension. The episcopacy came under attack, being seen as the main obstacle to reform, and the claim of the right to act on the strength of religious conviction further complicated the emerging political crisis. Pym described the rise of Arminianism as: "an attempt to subvert the state, both by depriving it of that religious unity without which it could not function, and by destroying that unity between king and people without which no government could be other than arbitrary."[45] Religious division did much to exacerbate the problems which led to the Civil War, in that it contributed greatly to the Scottish and the Irish rebellions.[46] The Civil War was not in itself a unique event: between 1639 and 1642, Charles I faced resistance in all three of his kingdoms.[47]

Charles I was in the difficult position of ruling three kingdoms which all had different religions, all of which were internally divided by religion, and all of which had powerful minority groups whose sympathies lay with one of the other kingdom's religions. James I had a policy for drawing together the religions of the three kingdoms, which was one of gradual adjustment, as he sought to establish a Church, "with Scottish

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according to the law. The difference was, who should be the expositors of the law (whether he and his party...or...the Parliament of England, that is...the sole maker of the law)."

[41] Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution (London: Penguin, 1972) 33.

[42] See Chapter 4 for an exploration of the nature of English Arminianism and Laudianism.

[43] Hughes 165.

[44] For clarity in discussion the popular term Arminian is used to denote the Laudian ceremonialism which characterise the Anglican Church after the 1630s, but see Chapter 4 for a more detailed refutation of the term Arminian.

[45] Conrad Russell, The Parliamentary Career of John Pym as quoted Anthony Fletcher, The Outbreak of the English Civil War (London: Edward Arnold, 1981) Introduction xxi, note 7.

[46] Conrad Russell, in his discussion of the contributory factors which led to the Civil War, dismisses the theory that it was merely the result of a short-term failure to resolve political differences.[46] He comments: "...'to lose one kingdom might happen to any king, but to lose three savours of carelessness'." Russell, UE 233.

[47] "It has been argued that there could have been no English Civil War without the risings in Scotland in 1638 and in Ireland in 1641." Hughes 10. See also Russell, UE 233: "when three kingdoms under one ruler all take to armed resistance within three years...their actions may have had some common causes."

doctrine, and English government."[48] Charles I, however, sought to impose the English religion on the Scots and the Irish, while the Covenanters attempted to convert the English to Presbyterianism. The English, who were hostile to Laud and Arminianism, saw Presbyterianism as a more attractive option. It is ironic however, that groups as far apart, doctrinally speaking, as Laud and the Covenanters desired the same end: religious unity. Charles I made little attempt to defuse the situation, and his placatory moves of appointing more liberal clergy in 1641, were too little, too late. Indeed, his attempts to impose the English prayer book upon the Scots were directly responsible for the rebellion in 1637. Ireland too was a kingdom torn by internal struggle, as the native Irish, the "old English" and the new English Protestants competed for supremacy. As Russell remarks: "...the Irish Rebellion was a reaction to changes in the power structure in England, brought about by Scottish intervention, which in turn had been provoked by attempts to impose English religion on the Scots."[49] From this account, the interdependence of the three kingdoms can clearly be seen. Furthermore, in the English Civil War, England itself was the last kingdom to resist.

However, it was in the latter years of the reign of Charles I that matters really came to a head: the proceedings of the Short and the Long Parliaments could be said to have been instrumental in the outbreak of Civil War.[50] The monarchy was beginning to be seen as a promoter of change, and ironically, as Morrill has observed, the "organized Parliamentarian movement were essentially conservatives, reacting against the innovative administrative, fiscal, religious and cultural policies and actions of King Charles I.[51] This phenomenon has been noted by literary critics also, who have realised that Milton's politics are fundamentally conservative for a writer who has traditionally been cast as a radical. Corns notes that Milton's perspective is "ultimately conservative; tyrannicide does not initiate a new order but returns an aberrant state to its pristine legitimacy."[52] The political events which preceded the Civil War were at least partly driven by rumour and hearsay. The talk of plot and counter-plot, however, despite appearing far-fetched from our standpoint, was based upon the political developments of

[48] Russell, UE 249.
[49] Russell, UE 245.
[50] The Short Parliament was summoned in 1640 as a result of the Scots revolt, and by that stage, finance was a significant problem for the crown. Also, both the King and Parliament believed that the other side was plotting. Anthony Fletcher claims that "myths of conspiracy" (Fletcher: Chapter 4 outlines the growing parliamentary insecurity) ultimately triggered the Civil War, and by the time the Short Parliament was called, Charles I was convinced that a small number of MPs were deliberately conspiring against him.
[51] Morrill 1.
[52] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 31.

the preceding fifteen years. It was in this atmosphere that Parliament prepared the Grand Remonstrance, which has been described by Fletcher as: "A declaration to the people" more than a petition to the King.[53] A spate of acts followed, which augmented Parliament's powers, and limited the power of the Crown, the most important of which was the Triennial Act, which ensured the perpetuity of parliamentary government. Charles I described it thus:

> That the world might be fully confirmed in my purpose at first to contribute what in justice, season, honor, and conscience I could to the happy success of this Parliament, which had in me no other design but the general good of my kingdoms, I willingly passed the Bill for Triennial Parliaments; which, as gentle and seasonable physic, might, if well applied, prevent any distempers from getting any head or prevailing, especially if the remedy proved not a disease beyond all remedy. (...) When that first act seemed too scanty to satisfy some men's fears and compass public affairs, I was persuaded to grant that bill of sitting during the pleasure of the Houses, which amounted in some men's senses to as much as the perpetuating this Parliament. By this act of highest confidence I hoped forever to shut out and lock the door upon all present jealousies and future mistakes; I confess I did not thereby intend to shut myself out of doors as some men have now requited me.[54]

In reply to the king's claim that his generosity was "an act unparalleled by any of my predecessors," and one which denied him "in so high a point of my prerogative,"[55] Milton points out that a Parliament "in times past was our annual right."[56] He suggests moreover, that Charles I had an ulterior motive for agreeing to the proposals of Parliament on this particular issue, being in extreme need of additional funding: "which would never have bin lent, nor could ever be repaid, had the King chanc'd to dissolve this Parlament as heertofore."[57] Charles I concludes his remarks on the passing of these Bills with the example of Christ's temptation on the pinnacle of the temple:

> Nor had I any reservations in my own soul when I passed it, nor repentings after, till I saw that my letting some men go up to the pinnacle of the temple was a temptation to them to cast me down headlong.

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[53] Fletcher 81. It was intended to "hold up a glass unto his Majesty," Sir Edward Dering. As quoted Hughes 172, note 13. and dealt with the perennial complaints of Parliament: episcopal courts, the Jesuits, the dissolution of Parliament, the papist conspiracy, the restraints of government, the reform of the Church, and the rooting out of Puritanism. It was a formal indictment of the King's rule, and although "strong on rhetoric," it was "weak on specific proposals." Lockyer has observed that, as a result: "Those who opposed the Grand Remonstrance did so because it implied much more than it stated." Lockyer 367.

[54] Eikon Basilike 19-20.

[55] Eikon Basilike 20.

[56] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 116: 11-12. He adds: "But wheras he attributes the passing of them to his own act of grace and willingness, as his manner is to make vertues of his neccessities...a little memory will sett the cleane contrary before us...The first Bill granted us much less than two former Statutes yet in force by *Edward* the third; that a Parlament should be call'd every yeare, or ofter if need were; nay from a farr ancienter Law Book call'd the *Mirror*, it is affirm'd in a late Treatise call'd *Rights of the Kingdom*, that Parlaments by our old Laws ought twice a year to be at *London*. From twice in one year to once in three year, it may be soon cast up how great a loss we fell into of our ancient liberty by that act, which in the ignorant and Slavish mindes we then were, was thought a great purchase." Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 116: 18 - 117: 7.

[57] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 118: 7-9.

> Concluding that, without a miracle, monarchy itself, together with me, could not but be dashed in pieces by such a precipitous fall as they intended; whom God in mercy forgive, and make them see at length that as many kingdoms as the devil showed our Saviour, and the glory of them (if they could be at once enjoyed by them), are not worth the gaining by ways of sinful ingratitude and dishonor, which hazards a soul worth more worlds than this hath kingdoms.[58]

Milton answers using the same simile, and neatly turning the tables upon the King's assumed godliness, compares him instead to a model of secular kingship:

> In this *Simily* we have himself compar'd to *Christ*, the Parlament to the *Devill*, and his giving them that Act of settling, to his letting them goe up to the *Pinnacle of the Temple*. A tottring and giddy Act rather then a settling. (...) But it was no Pinnacle of the Temple, it was a Pinnacle of *Nebuchadnezzars* Palace, from whence hee and Monarchy fell headlong together.[59]

The Nineteen Propositions followed a year later, and were the clearest record of Parliament's grievances by the end of the reign of Charles I.[60]

Charles I's Answer to the Nineteen Propositions was curt. He opened by propounding the Aristotelian view of government: the tripartite union of absolute monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. This arrangement is a blend of the largely Christian theory of monarchical authority: an absolutist chain of fathers from Adam to the King, and the mainly pagan contract theory: where political societies were formed for defence purposes under a type of contractual agreement whereby the people could rebel if they were unhappy with the government of the monarch. The people of England felt that Charles I had betrayed his side of the coronation oath, and were using the contractual side of British government to rebel. James I argued this very point in 1598: "I deny any such contract to be made then [in the coronation oath]." Charles I also denied "the majesty of the crown of England to be bound by any coronation oath, in a blind and brutish formality, to consent to whatever its subjects in Parliament shall require."[61] The issue of the binding nature of the Coronation Oath was difficult to resolve, because if Charles I refused to be bound by his side of the agreement, then the people had no recourse to justice, without turning justice against the King. Milton takes up this point:

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[58] Eikon Basilike 23.
[59] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 124: 4-11.
[60] The Petition of Right in 1628 was a good indicator of early grievances: dealing with "illegal" taxation, which ran contrary to various statutes, and calling for the disbanding of the English and Scottish armies.
[61] Eikon Basilike 26.

> Another of the king's crimes was the causing some words to be struck out of the usual coronation oath before he would take it. Unworthy and abominable action! Him that did it I call wicked; what shall I call him that defends it? For by the eternal God, what breach of faith and violation of the laws can possibly be greater? What ought to be more sacred to him, next to the holy sacraments themselves, than that oath?...What else could be expected than that one who began his reign with so detestable a wrong, and dared as a first step to adulterate that law which he thought his only hindrance from perverting all the laws, would rule most unrighteously, craftily, and disastrously?[62]

Charles I argues his prerogative thus:

> So far am I from thinking the majesty of the crown of England to be bound by any coronation oath...as some men will needs infer, while, denying me any power of a negative voice as King, they are not ashamed to seek to deprive me of the liberty of using my reason with a good conscience, which themselves and all the commons of England enjoy proportionable to their influence on the public...I think my oath fully discharged in that point by my governing only by such laws as my people, with the House of Peers, have chosen, and myself have consented to.[63]

Milton replies:

> What Tyrant could presume to say more, when he meant to kick down all Law, Goverment, and bond of Oath? But why he so desires to absolve himself the Oath of his Coronation would be worth the knowing. It cannot but be yeelded, that the Oath which bindes him to performance of his trust, ought in reason to contain the summ of what his chief trust and office is.[64]

Ironically, Charles I follows his description of tripartite government with the declaration that the House of Commons was "never intended for any share in government, or the choosing of them that should govern." His attitude to the Lords is similar, reducing them in his description to "an excellent screen and bank between the prince and people." He refuses Parliament the right of preferment, declaring it would leave the monarchy with nothing left to do but look on, as others effectively governed the country, and accuses them of attempting "to erect a universal over-swaying power to themselves" which he declares "belongs only to us, and not to them."[65] His use of the Samson image must have

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[62] First Defence, Works vol. 7, 535: 17 - 537: 8.
[63] Eikon Basilike 26.
[64] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 133: 10-16.
[65] Calendar of State Papers, Domestic - 1641-3, 44. As quoted Fletcher 47, note 26.

struck Milton as particularly ironic, given his own earlier identification of this figure with both the King and the people:

> But to bind myself to a general and implicit consent to whatever they shall desire or propound, for such is one of their propositions, were such a latitude of blind obedience as never was expected from any freeman nor fit to be required of any man, much less of a king by his own subjects, and of whom he may possibly exceed as much in wisdom as he doth in place and power. This were as if Samson should have consented not only to bind his hands and cut off his hair but to put out his own eyes, that the Philistines might with the more safety mock and abuse him; which they chose rather to do than quite to destroy him when he was become so tame an object and fit occasion for their sport and scorn.[66]

Samson was a common image at the time, through the typological representation of certain Old Testament figures, and the difference between Milton's use of Samson and the King's serves to highlight the contradictory readings of Scripture which characterised the battle of images or icons between Royalist and Puritan. Indeed, Milton makes a revealing remark about his understanding of Samson's nature when he retorts that the King is confusing a lesser evil with a greater: "And thus out of an unwise, or pretended feare least others should make a scorn of him for yielding to his Parlament, he regards not to give cause of worse suspicion, that he made a scorn of his regal Oath."[67] This has an echo in the opening of Samson Agonistes, where Samson is concerned about being an object of pity or scorn.[68] The approaches of Harapha and Dalila are also a form of torture to him, initially in his self-pity, then later in his self-contempt. In this, Samson is more concerned with the effect of his actions upon man: his countrymen, his father, his enemies, and himself. Is Milton perhaps suggesting that as Samson should have been more concerned at having betrayed God rather than himself, so Charles I should have noticed that his duty to abide by his coronation oath was more important than his ability to subdue Parliaments, and correspondingly that the office of the King was more important than his person as the King? Milton's answer to the thrust of the King's arguments regarding the Nineteen Propositions may be summarised as follows, because they centre upon the conflicting arguments of the rights of the people, and Charles I's sense of prerogative:

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[66] Eikon Basilike 53-54.

[67] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 179: 12-15.

[68] Manoa and the Chorus emphasise this aspect of his downfall: "Can this be hee, / That Heroic, that Renown'd, / Irresistible *Samson*?" (*SA* 124-6) "The rarer thy example stands, / By how much from the top of wondrous glory, / Strongest of mortal men, / To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fall'n." (*SA* 166-9) "The glory late of *Israel*, now the grief;" (*SA* 179): "O miserable change! is this the man, / That invincible *Samson*, far renown'd" (*SA* 340-1).

> he brings his own conditional rights to contest and be preferr'd before the Peoples good; and yet unless it be in order to their good, he hath no rights at all; raigning by the Laws of the Land, not by his own; which Laws are in the hands of Parlament to change or abrogate, as they shall see best for the Common-wealth; eev'n to the taking away of King-ship it self, when it grows too Maisterfull and Burd'nsome.[69]

There is a certain logic in Charles I's Answer to the Nineteen Propositions. However, Parliament was not so much seeking to regulate the office of the King, as seeking to regulate the activities of this particular King. Milton may have desired the removal of the monarchy at this stage, but even he had supported the justice of prerogative rights in the past.[70] This earlier defence is for the right of the King over the clergy, not over the Parliament: he is in effect defending a lesser evil against a greater one. In the Reason of Church Government, where he likens the "state and person of a King" to Samson, quoted above, he continues by describing his "just power":

> But laying down his head among the strumpet flatteries of Prelats, while he sleeps and thinks no harme, they wickedly shaving off all those bright and waighty tresses of his laws, and just prerogatives which were his ornament and strength, deliver him over to indirect and violent councels, which as those Philistims put out the fair, and farre-sighted eyes of his natural discerning, and make him grinde in the prison house of their sinister ends and practices upon him. Till he knowing his prelatical rasor to have bereft him of his wonted might, nourish again his puissant hair, the golden beames of Law and Right; and they sternly shook, thunder with ruin upon the heads of those his evil counsellors, but not without great affliction to himselfe.[71]

However, as far as Parliament was concerned at this stage, the authority of the King was not in question. The Forced Loan, for example, which had raised the question of limits to royal authority, and the function of the King within the law, rather than beyond it, had been directed at Charles I's interpretation of the law, not at his authority. Similarly,

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[69] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 175: 18-25.

[70] Milton's support of other forms of government has been noted in the Introductory Chapter.

[71] The Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 276: 18 - 277: 2. Compare this account of the King as Samson with his later interpretation of the same source in the First Defence, which was published in 1651, nine years after the above extract: "Samson, that renowned champion, though his countrymen blamed him (Judg. 15, "Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us?"), yet made war singlehanded against his rulers; and whether instigated by God or by his own valor only, slew not one, but many at once of his country's tyrants. And as he had first duly prayed to God to be his help, it follows that he counted it no wickedness, but a duty, to kill his masters, his country's tyrants, even though the greater part of his countrymen refused not slavery. First Defence, Works vol. 7, 219: 13-21.

Parliament did not seek to exclude him from their assembly, but rather wished to redefine his position within it. As Charles I himself admitted: "most part of my subjects fought against my supposed errors, not my person, and intended to mend me, not to end me."[72]

The trial and execution of Charles I raise the second problem associated with the ideology of Stuart kingship to be discussed: the legality of resistance. James I had answered rebel arguments for resistance in The Trew Law of Free Monarchies, with the claim that vengeance upon a tyrant was for the hand of justice, not the people, and that the only judge of "God's deputy upon earth" could be God himself.[73] Milton defends regicide firstly by arguing that if the King is a tyrant, then he has already himself forfeited all right to be treated with due respect and deference:

> A Tyrant whether by wrong or by right comming to the Crown, is he who regarding neither Law nor the common good, reigns onely for himself and his faction: Thus St. *Basil* among others defines him. And because his power is great, his will boundless and exorbitant, the fulfilling whereof is for the most part accompanied with innumerable wrongs and oppressions of the people...Against whom what the people lawfully may doe, as against a common pest, and destroyer of mankinde, I suppose no man of cleare judgement need goe furder to be guided then by the very principles of nature in him. But...it is the vulgar folly of men to desert thir own reason, and shutting thir eyes to think they see best with other mens...[74]

Milton's examples of previous instances where people have lawfully deposed tyrants embrace Scripture, philosophy, Greek and Roman legend, and the advice of divines. He claims that Calvin and Luther among others support his view, but Calvin teaches in the Institutes of the Christian Religion that obedience to a monarch should be absolute, and is necessary: "since the magistrate cannot be resisted without God being resisted at the

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[72] Eikon Basilike 85.

[73] James I used another common image when he likened the King's position to that of a father, and as it was "monstrous and unnatural" for a son to rise up against his father, so the idea of regicide was regarded in the same light. Milton answered this image by attempting to show his people that resistance to the King was lawful and, moreover, defensible: "A king and a father are very different things. Our fathers begot and made us; our king made not us, but we him. Nature gave the people fathers, but the people itself gave itself a king; so that the people is not for the king, but the king for the people. We bear with a father, as we do with a king, though he be harsh and severe; but we do not bear with even a father, if he be a tyrant. If a father murder his child, he shall suffer capital punishment; and why should not a king likewise be subject to the same most just law if he have destroyed the people his children? Especially as a father can never cease to be such, but a king can easily bring it to pass that he shall be neither father nor king." First Defence, Works vol. 7, 45: 23 - 47: 6.

[74] Tenure, Works vol. 5, 18: 20 - 19: 8.

same time." However, Calvin also says: "But in that obedience which we hold to be due to the commands of rulers, we must always make the exception, nay, must be particularly careful that it is not incompatible with obedience to Him, to whose will the wishes of all kings should be subject."[75] Certainly Milton felt that Charles I persecuted the Reformed Church, or at least attempted to impose certain aspects of Laudianism upon Churches whose Presbyterian persuasion still inclined them towards the teachings of Calvin. In Milton's case, his sensibility for liberty had been outraged, and the value which he placed upon the constitution and freedom of his country had been threatened. It was the attempts to impose Laudian innovations, arguably, combined with the King's reluctance to persecute Catholicism, and the discovery by Cromwell of Charles I's treachery and untrustworthiness, which led Milton to advocate regicide. The legality of the proceedings is very important to him: in condemning Charles I for disregarding the laws of the realm, it would be inappropriate, to say the least, for Milton to urge an action which ran counter to those same laws. He argues:

> what can be more just and legal, if a subject for certain crimes be to forfet by Law from himself, and posterity, all his inheritance to the King, then that a King for crimes proportional, should forfet all his title and inheritance to the people: unless the people must be thought created all for him, he not for them, and they all in one body inferior to him single, which were a kinde of treason against the dignitie of mankind to affirm.[76]

The freedom of man, and the dignity of a being created in God's image, is the central tenet of Milton's belief in liberty.[77] It is this picture of mankind which has prompted his writing up to this point, and it classifies Milton as a humanist.[78] Sharpe argues in Criticism and Compliment that Milton belongs to a type of Renaissance humanism, believing that control over self led man to improve and regenerate. This emphasises the

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[75] Calvin, John. Institutes of the Christian Religion Trans. Henry Beveridge. (Edinburgh: 1836) vol. 3, 553.

[76] Tenure, Works vol. 5, 11: 19-26.

[77] "No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey: and that they liv'd so. Till from the root of *Adams* transgression, falling among themselves to doe wrong and violence, and foreseeing that such courses must needs tend to the destruction of them all, they agreed...to ordaine som authoritie, that might restrain by force and punishment what was violated against peace and common right. This autoritie...being originally and naturally in every one of them, and unitedly in them all, for ease, for order, and least each man should be his own partial Judge, they communicated and deriv'd either to one, whom for the eminence of his wisdom and integritie they chose above the rest, or to more than one whom they thought of equal deserving: the first was call'd a King; the other Magistrates. Not to be thir Lords and Maisters...but, to be thir Deputies and Commissioners, to execute, by vertue of thir intrusted power, that justice which else every man by the bond of nature and of Cov'nant must have executed for himself, and for one another. And to him that shall consider well why among free Persons, one man by civil right should beare autority and jurisdiction over another, no other end or reason can be imaginable." Tenure, Works vol. 5, 8: 4 - 9:7.

[78] See Sinfield's interpretation of Protestant humanism, 21, He classifies Milton as a Puritan humanist, claiming that he exhibits "a persistent tension between religion and literature," and describes "the conflicting imperatives in people who were deeply committed both to protestantism and literature." Sinfield 26.

human powers of Christ, and also the power of poetry "as a force in that regeneration."[79] As early as Areopagitica, Milton was arguing vehemently for men to use right reason: he had a vision of a commonwealth where men were rational and governed each other wisely, precisely because they governed themselves equally wisely.[80] As he says of Cromwell in the Second Defence:

> ...he had either destroyed, or reduced to his own control, all enemies within his own breast - vain hopes, fears, desires. A commander first over himself, the conqueror of himself, it was over himself he had learnt most to triumph. Hence, he went to encounter with an external enemy as a veteran accomplished in all military duties, from the day he first entered the camp.[81]

Christ in Paradise Regained makes the same style of judgement:

> Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules
> Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more a King;
> Which every wise and vertuous man attains:
> And who attains not, ill aspires to rule
> Cities of men, or head-strong Multitudes,
> Subject himself to Anarchy within,
> Or lawless passions in him which he serves.
> (*PR* 2: 466-72)[82]

From propounding the legality of resistance to tyranny, [83] Milton moves towards venerating the act of regicide as heroism:

> The *Greeks* and *Romans*, as thir prime Authors witness, held it not onely lawfull, but a glorious and Heroic deed, rewarded publicly with Statues and Garlands, to kill an infamous Tyrant at any time without tryal: and but reason, that he who trod down all Law, should not be voutsaf'd the benefit of Law. Insomuch that *Seneca* the Tragedian brings in *Hercules* the grand suppressor of Tyrants, thus speaking,
>
> ...Victima haud ulla amplior
> Potest, magisque opima mactari Jovi
> Quam Rex iniquus...

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[79] Sharpe 273.

[80] See Tenure, Works vol. 5, 1: 1-8, quoted above.

[81] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 215: 8-14.

[82] If Milton had been a man given to the construction of mottoes, "Vincit qui se vincit" might well have been his watchword throughout his literary career. His own life was suitably disciplined, rising at dawn, and working many hours between frugal meals, interspersed with the lighter disciplines of music and maths, and punctuated with exercise in the form of swordsmanship. See Blair Worden "Milton and Marchamont Nedham" in Skinner, Milton and Republicanism 158: Worden suggests that Milton's temperance and frugality are "virtues which, in his writings, are central to his system of values."

[83] Such is his belief in the divinely ordained freedom of man, that Milton argues tyrannical kingly power to originate from the devil: "[Authority] must be also understood of lawfull and just power, els we read of great power in the affaires and Kingdoms of the World permitted to the Devil: for saith he to Christ, *Luke* 4.6. *All this power will I give thee and the glory of them, for it is deliver'd to me, & to whomsoever I will, I give it*: neither did he ly, or Christ gainsay what he affirm'd; for in the thirteenth of the *Revelation* wee read how the Dragon gave to the beast *his power, his seate, and great autority*: which beast so autoriz'd most expound to be the tyrannical powers and Kingdoms of the earth." Tenure, Works vol. 5, 16: 17-27.

...There can be slaine
No sacrifice to God more acceptable
Then an unjust and wicked King...[84]

This quotation is important at more than one level. The notion that the sacrifice of a wicked king is pleasing to God demonstrates Milton's attempts to rally his countrymen by pointing out that many tyrants have been put to death in the past without a fair trial, whereas the English gave Charles I the benefit of the law, albeit in a trial whose proceedings were a mere pretence at justice:

> ...how much more milde and human then is it, to give them faire and op'n tryal? To teach lawless Kings, and all who so much adore them, that not mortal man, or his imperious will, but Justice is the onely true sovran and supreme Majesty upon earth. Let men cease therfore out of faction & hypocrasie to make out-cries and horrid things of things so just and honorable.[85]

Also, the example of Heracles suggests that the parallel myth of Samson is already in Milton's mind as a heroic figure of destruction and iconoclasm. The garlands and statues call to mind the unusually pagan ending of Samson, whose father desires to provide:

> A Monument, and plant it round with shade
> Of Laurel ever green, and branching Palm,
> With all his Trophies hung, and Acts enroll'd
> In copious Legend, or sweet Lyric Song.
> Thither shall all the valiant youth resort,
> And from his memory inflame thir breasts
> To matchless valour, and adventures high:
> The Virgins also shall on feastful days
> Visit his Tomb with flowers, only bewailing
> His lot unfortunate in nuptial choice,
> From whence captivity and loss of eyes.
> (*SA* 1734-44)

This description itself uneasily echoes Dalila's vision of her own reward:

> In *Ecron*, *Gaza*, *Asdod*, and in *Gath*
> I shall be nam'd among the famousest
> Of Women, sung at solemn festivals,
> Living and dead recorded, who to save
> Her countrey from a fierce destroyer, chose
> Above the faith of wedlock-bands, my tomb
> With odours visited and annual flowers.
> (...)
> Nor shall I count it hainous to enjoy
> The public marks of honour and reward

[84] Tenure, Works vol. 5, 19: 10-23.
[85] Tenure, Works vol. 5, 40: 25 - 41: 4.

> Conferr'd upon me, for the piety
> Which to my countrey I was judg'd to have shewn.
> (*SA* 981-7 & 991-4)

It also raises questions in the mind of the reader about the relevance of Manoa's response to Samson's death: if Samson were alive to comment upon his actions, would he have chosen this form of remembrance?[86]

In this contest between Milton's account of history, and the royalist account of events, between Eikon Basilike and Eikonoklastes, there are three points which I shall consider: the question of retelling the truth, the conflict between aesthetics and ideology, and the issue of the respective audiences which each writer sought to influence. With regard to the first of these, Loewenstein has remarked, Milton possessed "an acute sense of the process of history,"[87] and it is important for us to understand to what extent he sought to influence those processes himself. Milton says of the writing of Eikonoklastes:

> Even as successfully and piously as those our glorious guides to freedom crushed in battle the royal insolence and tyranny uncontrolled, and then at last by a memorable punishment utterly ended them; even as easily as I, singlehanded, lately refuted and set aside the king himself when he, as it were, rose from the grave, and in that book published after his death tried to cry himself up before the people with new verbal sleights and harlotries...[88]

From this description, it is evident that the service of the pen is as mighty as that of the sword, perhaps even more so.[89] Loewenstein attempts to show Milton as "an imaginative writer who often saw himself, especially during the revolutionary years, as actively engaged in shaping and representing the drama of history."[90] It may be argued that through the creation of works such as Eikonoklastes and the Defences that Milton sought to mould the dramatic narration of historical events. Proceeding from this, it can also be argued that Milton sought to mould the historical process itself, in his portrayal of those events. Thus his dramatisation of past events through the assumption of poetic

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[86] There is also perhaps a hint of the type of posthumous recognition and honour which Milton himself would have liked. See Lieb, Milton and the Culture of Violence for an examination of Milton's expectations for the disposal of his remains after his death, and the ironic events of the following century.

[87] Loewenstein 1.

[88] First Defence, Works vol. 7, 9: 7-14.

[89] "Armed rebellion is frankly defended in Eikonoklastes, but its title indicates another object. Rebellion against a dead man is impossible. (...) Milton explicitly treated Eikon Basilike as a weapon in the hands of his foes which it was his task to render harmless." CPW vol. 3, 167. From this Milton's use of language as a weapon not only in the prose, but also in Christ's exchanges with Satan in Paradise Regained, and the verbal conflicts between Samson and the other characters of Samson Agonistes may be seen to develop. See below, and also Chapters 5 and 7.

[90] Loewenstein 2.

authority forms an attempt to change the course of future events.[91] Loewenstein describes Eikonoklastes thus:

> *Eikonoklastes* is Milton's longest and most sustained revolutionary polemic: with immense passion and skill it demolishes the fiction, spectacle, and arguments of *Eikon Basilike*. Iconoclasm emerges...as an essential expression of Milton's dynamic sense of history...[He] attempts to free history from the tyranny of the...powerful icon of a martyred Charles I projected and fashioned with considerable visual and rhetorical art in the frontispiece and text of the king's book. Recognizing the extraordinarily alluring power of the king's theatrical image and text, Milton seeks to deconstruct point by point the arguments of *Eikon Basilike*, thereby relentlessly breaking to pieces, with his rhetorical and hermeneutic iconoclasm, the royal ideology and its symbolic icon. Iconoclasm for Milton...represents his attempt to undermine an entrenched ideological and historical perspective, so as to bring about a regenerated social order and a whole new mode of social vision.[92]

Lana Cable identifies the aesthetic principle at work in Milton's demolition of the royal image: "In the hands of the greatest poets of the era, iconoclasm became a vital artistic principle that released the imaginative energies required to build anew."[93] Milton appears to believe that history may be "actively altered and shaped by vehement polemic,"[94] a point which Stavely also makes: "Milton appears to believe that fully exploiting the resources of language can by itself produce social change."[95] With regard to the dramatic narration of historical events, Milton's execution of Eikonoklastes is a significant example. Eikon Basilike dramatised "the stability, authority, and historical merit of Charles as rightful Stuart king and godly prince."[96] Milton, however, thought that "the artfulness of the king's...text...rendered the course of history ambiguous."[97] He objected to the work's manipulation of what Loewenstein describes as "the politics of reputation, power, and self-fashioning,"[98] and as such, attacks in Eikon Basilike the same licence in the dramatisation of historical events which he himself employs in his own prose. Milton adopts a position of moral supremacy in Eikonoklastes, the narrative which claims to set

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[91] This question is addressed ultimately within the context of Samson Agonistes, and Eikonoklastes is a relevant example for the later actions of Milton's Samson.
[92] Loewenstein 51.
[93] Lana Cable, "Milton's Iconoclastic Truth" Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 142. See also the introduction to Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 3: "In Milton's demolition of the king's book and icon, the artistic and the political, the literary and the intellectual intersect: as a phenomenon, Milton's radical iconoclasm is simultaneously ideological and aesthetic."
[94] Loewenstein 52. A view borne out surely by the flood of published material during the Civil War period. Christopher Hill has remarked that the most important event in the history of English literature in the 17th century is the collapse of the censorship in 1641. It led to the publication of approximately three new books a day, and promoted the discussion of ideas which was to characterise this century of growth and change. Some of these authors must have felt that their words would change the lives of their readers; or they would not have written with such vehemence against the Church, the Parliament or the King.
[95] Stavely 65. Naturally, he disagrees.
[96] Loewenstein 54.
[97] Loewenstein 56.
[98] Loewenstein 56.

the record straight. In reality, of course, both works are twisted renditions of the same facts, and it is difficult for the modern historian to unravel fact from fiction, knowing that all contemporary accounts must be biased to some extent. Although Milton has destroyed the image of the king as martyr and saint, he has created an image of the king as tyrant in its place. The image is different, but an image of sorts still remains.[99] This portrait which Milton has created may be seen in a more artistically executed fashion in his depiction of Satan. [100] Clearly Milton had many subjects in mind for his parody, among which the Vatican and the classical world predominate, but underlying this is the sense of a secular court, perhaps the Caroline court, and the high-handed personal rule of Charles I, which hovers behind Satan's desire to rule without interference or assistance.[101] The main point of comparison between Milton's Satan and Milton's Charles is that they are both "pretenders" to a power which does not rightfully belong to them. Bennett observes:

> The comparison occurs, for example, when Milton criticizes Charles's violations of religious liberty: "He [King Charles] calls the conscience *Gods sovrantie*, why then doth he contest with God about that supreme title?...usurping over spiritual things, as *Lucifer* beyond his sphere" (Eikonoklastes) (...) Just as Milton turned the literal devil into a literary character, so also did he subject the historical king to the power of his artist's imagination.[102]

In his engagement with the individual narrative sequences of Eikon Basilike, Milton's achievement has been to correct the narratives of the King, as Zwicker suggests: "to enlarge their frame, to allow history, political theory, and ideology their proper role in narrating the destruction of monarchy and the creation of a republic."[103] Leonard Mustazza has observed of Christ and Satan in Paradise Regained, that their conflict is fought exclusively with words. He continues: "neither Christ nor Satan ever tries to communicate, in any meaningful sense, with the other. Words for them are

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[99] See Stanley E. Fish, "Things and Actions Indifferent: The Temptation of Plot in Paradise Regained." MS 17 (1983): 179: "The distinction between true and false resemblances is not a distinction between different things...but between different attitudes or intentional dispositions toward the same thing, which is therefore no longer the same."

[100] Bennett also proposes this point: "In his version of the story of King Charles, a drama not of Christian martyrdom but of tyrannous rebellion, Milton's left hand worked out, though in fragmentary form, fundamental elements of the character, action, underlying philosophy and influence of this minor tyrant, elements that find full dramatization in his right hand's portrait of Satan's epic struggle for power." 58. See also Davies: "The image of the human king...has supplied to Milton the square root...of the image of Satan, so that we would not dream of endowing the Arch-enemy with the Stuart dimensions; but because we have contemplated what Milton thought of Stuarts, the qualities of Satan are momentarily focused and given body...The hatred Milton brought to the gorgeous affluence of the monarchy addicted to a majesty that was outward and material rather than inner and spiritual informs Milton's account of Satan's enthronement..." Stevie Davies, Images of Kingship in *Paradise Lost*: Milton's Politics and Christian Liberty. (Columbia: Missouri University Press, 1983) 12. See also 13.

[101] It is not that we should assume Milton to be referring to Charles I when he describes the infernal majesty of Satan: that would be to belittle his Archangel, reducing him to the level of a defeated and diminished human, which was not what Milton had in mind.

[102] Bennett 35.

[103] Zwicker 45.

weapons designed to vanquish the foe."[104] The same could be argued of Eikon Basilike and Eikonoklastes. The King's book was designed to appeal to the popular mass, and its success as such has been observed by Hill.[105] The combination of theatricalism and aesthetic in Eikon Basilike was not designed to convince by rational, intellectual argument, but was created with a view to conquering the affections of the reader by appealing to them at a profoundly cultural, religious and superstitious level.[106] Lana Cable argues for this interpretation of use and misuse of language in Eikon Basilike:

> In its defense of personal chaplains, set prayers, and the liturgy, in the manner of its scriptural quotation, and most spectacularly in its plagiarism of Pamela's prayer from Sidney's *Arcadia*, *Eikon Basilike* makes a showcase for what Milton could only regard as idolatry of words. Words exploited for purposes alien to their original intent, words devitalized and dispirited by rote recitation, words distanced from the tensive impulses of thought and feeling that generated them, become, like their exploiters, slaves to idolatry. By their misuse made the sign not of human meaning but of its cessation, self-witnessing dead words travesty their vital origin in the divine Word.[107]

Milton's exaltation of poetry is never in doubt, but in order to combat Eikon Basilike, Milton had to deny its capacity as literature and authority, and in so doing to demolish publicly his own raison d'être: "[aiming] altogether to deny the authority of the aesthetic within political discourse."[108] Zwicker also suggests that as Eikon Basilike created a defensive position for royalists which "allied the cause of kingship with the harmonies of art and challenged the legitimacy of the republic by regretting the regicide as an inhuman barbarity perpetrated on the civic and aesthetic bodies of the commonwealth."[109] This forced Milton into the position of separating the aesthetic from the ideological elements of the King's book, to divorce poetry from polemic in an irony memorably expressed in his taunt of Eikon Basilike as a "peece of Poetrie."[110] The fraudulent nature both of the

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[104] Leonard Mustazza, "Language as a weapon in Milton's Paradise Regained." MS 18 (1983): 215.

[105] Hill comments: "We read the Levellers, Winstanley, Hobbes, Milton, Harrington, all of whom discuss politics in rational intellectual terms. Then we are faced with the fact that Eikon Basilike...outsold all of them put together, fraudulent though it is, exposed though it had been by Milton among others." Christopher Hill, Some Intellectual Consequences of the English Revolution (The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 1980) (London: George Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1980) 27.

[106] As such, language is used as a weapon. This is equally true of Eikonoklastes, where Milton smashes the royalist arguments one by one, separating carefully the aesthetic from the ideological content. He too does not desire to engage meaningfully with the author or the audience of Eikon Basilike, but rather employs the apparent use of logic to disentangle author and authority in the King's Book. Lana Cable argues that it is the metaphorical content of Eikon Basilike which allows Milton to demolish the King's arguments, it is also this which gave Eikon Basilike such wide appeal: "the book's metaphoric language was calculated to achieve specific emotional effects to broaden its appeal. It s multiple editions testify to the strategy's resounding success." Cable, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 140.

[107] Cable, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 146. See also Radzinowicz, "The Politics of Paradise Lost," Politics of Discourse 227: "The fall of language into confusion affects men's ability to live in political fraternity. Inner liberty, the reasonable capacity to learn and communicate truth, is the essential precondition for political liberty."

[108] Zwicker 39.

[109] Zwicker 43.

[110] Corns suggests that Milton regarded Eikon Basilike as being more poetic than the genre permits. Corns, The Cambridge Companion to Milton 194. Being so inclined to rework genre himself, and having the highest regard for the calling of the poet, I feel that it is more likely that Milton was outraged at Charles's inappropriate assumption of secularly poetic means for a supposedly spiritual end.

Christ-like overtones of the work, "a network of Christic allusions and parallels,"[111] and of the use of secular literature to achieve this were arguably the sources of this particular slight. Zwicker observes that it is the politics of mixed genre which connect the attack of Eikonoklastes upon borrowed secular prayer, with the preface to Samson Agonistes. It was the mixing of kinds and levels of writing which Milton found abhorrent, and although well-versed himself in what Loewenstein has termed "the poetics of fictional portraiture,"[112] within the context of what Cable has described as "easy literature," Milton regarded such "verbal sleights and harlotries" as contemptible. In reducing the aesthetics of the King's work to theatrical falsehood, he also by implication destroys the King's political credibility, as Zwicker notes.[113] "Like self-witnessing idols, easy literature depends on the cooperative servility, or more appropriately the cooperative indolence, of credulous readers and writers, word-speakers and word-hearers."[114] It is the capacity for misleading or deluding through costume or show which is the aspect of imagery which leads to idolatry,[115] but as Cable points out, for an image to become an idol, a credulous worshipper is required: Milton's dismissal of Eikon Basilike's "religious sentimentalism and gaudy theatrics is complimented by his disdain for those who let themselves be manipulated by impressive shows."[116]

Milton's imaginative portrayal of the vulgar audience of Eikon Basilike may be seen in his attempts to humiliate and denounce them.[117] He castigates the "fools and silly gazers," besotted with the "gaudy name of Majesty":

> the People, exorbitant and excessive in all thir motions, are prone ofttimes not to a religious onely, but to a civil kinde of Idolatry in idolizing thir Kings; though never more mistak'n in the object of thir worship...But now, with a besotted and degenerate baseness of spirit, except some few, who yet retain in them the old English fortitude and love of Freedom...the rest...are ready to fall flatt and give adoration to the Image and Memory of this Man, who hath offer'd at more cunning fetches to undermine our Liberties...then any British King before him.[118]

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[111] Zwicker 41.
[112] Loewenstein, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 183. Milton employed these tactics particularly in the Defences.
[113] "...by subverting the king's authorship, Milton aims to deny not only the king's intellectual and ethical capacities but more fundamentally his political integrity." Zwicker 55. He continues: "The polemic is sharp and economical: it argues theatricality as falsehood and associates the king with a striking example of a monarch who masked tyranny with piety."
[114] Cable, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 146.
[115] See Cable, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 143.
[116] Cable, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 143.
[117] Stavley suggests that as "the high style of tragedy and epic derives from the classical theory of separation of styles, and this means that it derives from and serves as ideological justification for a static, hierarchical society:" then "In other words, the high style was inseparable from a condescending attitude toward 'the people and its life.'" 117-18.
[118] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 68: 26 - 69: 15.

Milton's attitude to the common people however was not an isolated one, the earlier Eikon Atheline had adopted similar tones.[119] Stavely's remark that "Eikonoklastes contains Milton's first clear responses to a sense of lost illusions,"[120] could well apply to the disdain which he shows for the audience of Eikon Basilike. Coupled with his gloomy prognostications about the future of the Commonwealth,[121] they form a clear picture of his irritation with his countrymen:

> [others] begin to swerve, and almost shiver at the Majesty and grandeur of som noble deed, as if they were newly enter'd into a great sin; disputing presidents, forms, and circumstances, when the Commonwealth nigh perishes for want of deeds in substance, don with just and faithfull expedition. To these I wish better instruction, and vertue equal to thir calling.[122]

The better instruction was to follow in the form of Milton's Defences of the people of England. Eikonoklastes had been a forum for Milton to challenge the King, to adjust the narration of historical events, and to address the educated elite whom he sought to prepare for responsibility.[123] The Defences gave him an arena of greater scope, enabling him to reach a far wider audience, and representing opportunities to legislate beyond his previous domestic remit.

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[119] See CPW vol. 3, 149. "The attitude was to become much more marked in Milton but it was also destined to develop in any party making claims to enlightenment...as soon as it might meet dangerous popular opposition."

[120] Stavely 93. Equally, the contempt which Christ shows for the common people in Paradise Regained may be connected to Eikonoklastes: "For what is glory but the blaze of fame,/ The peoples praise, if always praise unmixt?/ And what the people but a herd confus'd,/ A miscellaneous rabble, who extol/ Things vulgar, & well weigh'd, scarce worth the praise./ They praise and they admire they know not what;/ And know not whom, but as one leads the other;" (*PR* 3: 47-53).

[121] "If God and a good cause give them Victory...then comes the task to those Worthies which are the soule of that enterprize, to be swett and labour'd out amidst the throng and noises of Vulgar and irrational men. Some contesting for privileges, customs, forms, and that old entanglement of Iniquity, thir gibrish Lawes, though the badge of thir ancient slavery. Others who have beene fiercest against thir Prince...on a suddain and in a new garbe of Allegiance, which thir doings have long since cancell'd; they plead for him, pity him, extoll him, protest against those that talk of bringing him to the tryal of Justice...wee may conclude, thir pitty can be no true, and Christian commiseration, but either levitie and shallowness of minde, or else a carnal admiring of that wordly pomp and greatness, from whence they see him fall'n; or rather lastly a dissembl'd and seditious pity, fain'd of industry to begett new discord." Tenure, Works vol. 5, 3: 2-26.

[122] Tenure, Works vol. 5, 4: 17-22.

[123] Cedric Brown has recognised this concern of Milton: "to produce and encourage an educated and responsible elite, which will in turn ensure the freedom of the people." Brown, Milton and Republicanism 46. The third person which he uses to describe the vulgar in Eikonoklastes demonstrates that he does not direct his improving discourse at them in order to effect a change, but rather describes their failings to an audience whom he assumed would at least recognise his complaint, if not agree. The difference between the lines quoted above: "the People, exorbitant and excessive in all thir motions, are prone ofttimes not to a religious onely, but to a civil kinde of Idolatry in idolizing thir Kings; though never more mistak'n in the object of thir worship..." and "To these I wish better instruction, and vertue equal to thir calling," clearly shows the difference between those whom he felt he could inspire, and those whom he could only describe, in the hope that their faults would inspire better deeds in others.

Chapter 3

Polemic for Posterity: Milton's defence of God, Law, Nation, and Self.

> I was born in those times of my country, when the effulgent virtue of its citizens - when their magnanimity and steadiness, surpassing the highest praise of their ancestors, under the inspection of God first implored, and under his manifest guidance, setting examples and performing deeds of valour, the greatest since the foundation of the world - delivered the Commonwealth from a grievous domination, and religion from a most debasing thraldom.[1]

It is important, Zwicker has observed, "not only to value the universalizing impulses of literary texts but to see how these impulses arise from the friction between partisanship and eternity."[2] This was a combination of which Milton was powerfully aware, and it is nowhere more apparent in his polemical writing than in the Defences. This chapter addresses the defensive rhetoric with which Milton signals his progression to a more elevated stance in the Defences. The epic quality of the Second Defence in particular has often persuaded critics that Milton is withdrawing from the public realms of prose into the private paradise within, which he presents so effectively in the final poems. The careful autobiographical fiction of this work in particular shows Milton's redesign of his life's work, demonstrating the layers of narrative with which he fashions himself, the events which he records, and the significance of these contributions which he has made to public debate. The Second Defence is explored specifically in its functions as a focus for Milton's purpose throughout his prose career, and as the point at which the public polemicist and the epic poet become one.

Corns has noted that the First Defence addresses similar points to those with which Milton had engaged in the earlier political tracts; the supremacy of national laws over the claims of the monarchy; but now Milton felt "drawn by the case he must confute into a concern with classical analogues and biblical arguments for and against monarchy."[3] In his consciousness that he was addressing a wider audience than previously, Milton adjusts his argumentative stance, as befits the increased *gravitas* of his position as public spokesman for the new government. The high seriousness of the tasks he was now performing led, as Corns has noted, to a new sobriety of style.[4] Milton's relationship with classical literature is one which is fraught with interpretative

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[1] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 3: 8-15.
[2] Zwicker 3.
[3] Corns, Milton and Republicanism 33.
[4] Corns, The Cambridge Companion to Milton 194.

difficulties and critical disagreements. His rejection of classical literature within the final poems is well documented, and his eschewal of secular literature has been noted from Reason of Church Government to Paradise Lost where the classical gods may be found among the devils, and Paradise Regained where he apparently rejects the classical tradition entirely.[5] In Eikonoklastes, heathenism, knight-errantry and chivalry are attacked in their association with Charles I.[6] In contrast to this Zwicker has observed a "massive reconciliation of classical with Christian culture" in Milton, and Tuttle finds a mixture of classical oratory and Puritan sermons in the language of Milton's pamphlets.[7] She continues by describing the blend of classical and puritan which characterises Milton's discourse: "The revival of classical concepts of the civic virtues were fused with those of radical Puritans - they too called for temperance, justice and piety - to form the modern language of natural rights and political liberty."[8] Just as he utilised the concept of civic duty already extant in classical literature, so Milton harnessed the power of Scripture to authorise his discourse. Woods addresses this point also: "Scripture is brought in to give weight to an assent already invited on other grounds; it is the stamp on, not the precondition for, consent to Milton's definitions and emphases."[9] Woods also notes that "Milton uses scripture radically, to help him redefine cultural assumptions about liberty and freedom," a stance which is echoed in his portrayal of Christ in the First Defence, who is "no meek and submissive figure, but rather an active and unyielding liberator who boldly censures, accuses, reproves, and warns his adversaries."[10] Loewenstein contends that Milton viewed polemic as performance, and that this is especially true of the Defences owing to the breadth of the audience which he addressed.[11]

The Defence of the People of England, (published in February, 1651) was designed to vindicate the people Milton had been so inclined to chide. England, the land

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[5] See Sinfield 29. However, Patterson has suggested that in Reason of Church Government, "Milton used chivalric metaphor to dignify the revolution against formalism in the church." Patterson 176. Sinfield also suggests that although Milton explicitly segregates Christian and pagan, "implicitly we observe his reluctance to discount classical myth." 29 Perhaps this was not so much reluctance as inability to discount the literature of the ancients. Milton's training and education had taught him in terms that would have made such allusion automatic. See also Chapter 5 for a discussion of Christ's rejection of learning in Paradise Regained. Zwicker notes that the pagan touches in Paradise Lost Book 4 "altogether deny pastoral innocence." Zwicker 123.

[6] Patterson 179. She suggests that Milton sought to retrieve some of this secular literature for Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. See however Chapter 5 for a discussion of Milton's rejection of chivalry in Paradise Regained.

[7] Tuttle, Milton and Republicanism 64-5. She notes however that in the Defences he shifts ground to address the Protestant elite readership. The classical allusion which is employed here is specifically political, and the frame of reference in the Second Defence is firmly anchored in classical texts, confirming his Arminian faith. 81.

[8] Tuttle, Milton and Republicanism 81.

[9] Woods, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 203. This parallels Sinfield's opinion: "We become aware of the exploration of pagan and Christian values as an achievement of Milton rather than a submission to divine will." Sinfield 32.

[10] Loewenstein, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 178. It is this aspect of Christ which Milton emphasises in Paradise Regained.

[11] Loewenstein, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 175.

of God's chosen race, had need of a defender, a heroic champion who would subdue the doubting and hostile intellects of other nations. Thus Milton perceived his opportunity and thus, as a hero with a task in the classical style, he chose to serve.[12] The service of the pen is at the same time more and less glorious than the service of the sword.[13] Many of Milton's countrymen had shuddered at the enormity of what had been done in the execution of their monarch, and the regicides were those whose actions Milton was upholding in the eyes of the world. However, much of his assurance is an attempt to convince the vacillating English as well as the censorious foreigners. He defends the legality of regicide with measured argument and meticulous example, and as a result the First Defence is a persuasive justification of resistance to tyranny, aligning an intimidating array of supporters ranging from antiquity, the classical world, and the early Reformers, to the word of scripture and the guidance of God Himself. Milton even defends the proceedings of Parliament, involving himself with such minutiae as the precise numbers required by law for voting in the House. His legal argument is of the highest importance, as was shown in the last chapter; now more than ever before, as Milton's defence of his people was addressed not to native backsliders, but to other more critical eyes, unclouded by any patriotic partiality.

Of this task, that of gathering support from history and scripture, and presenting his case for British righteousness under divine impulsion, he says at the close of the First Defence:

> This is my zealous labor's fruit - the highest that I for my part have set before me in this life - I gratefully enjoy; yet therewith too consider chief how I may bear best witness - not only to my own country, to which I have paid the highest I possessed, but even to men of whatever nation, and to the cause of Christendom above all - that I am pursuing after yet greater things if my strength suffice (nay, it will if God grant), and for their sake meanwhile am taking thought, and studying to make ready.[14]

[12] Loewenstein has noted the chivalric overtones in the Defences which tempted Milton to view himself as a heroic champion: Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 173-4.

[13] "it is easy for me to defend myself against the charge, if any such be brought against me, either of timidity or of cowardice. For, if I avoided the toils and the perils of war, it was only that I might earnestly toil for my fellow-citizens in another way, with much greater utility, and with no less peril. In doubtful postures of our affairs, my mind never betrayed any symptom of despondence, nor was I more afraid than became me of malice, or even of death. Devoted even from a child to the more humanizing studies, and always stronger in mind than in body, I set an inferior value upon the service of the camp...and betook myself to those occupations, where my services could be of more avail; that, if I were wise, I might contribute my utmost power, from the higher and more excellent, not from the lower parts of my nature, to the designs of my country, and to this transcendent cause. I thought, therefore, that if it were the will of God those men should perform such gallant exploits, it must be likewise his will, that...there should be others to set them forth with becoming dignity and ornament; and that the truth, after being defended by arms, should be alike defended by reason - the only defence which is truly and properly human." Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 9: 23 - 11: 17.

[14] First Defence, Works vol. 7, 559: 1-9.

The Second Defence was not however the point by point rebuttal which the First Defence and Eikonoklastes had been, and as a result it reveals more about Milton himself than any previous polemic, apart from the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.[15] Milton's view of the occupation of taking up his pen in defence of his country was profoundly serious. His intention was to uphold the glory of his nation to the world:

> I...return my highest thanks to the heavenly bestower of gifts, that such a lot has fallen to me, as may be viewed...as a subject of envy to others...when I turn my mind to that cause, of all others the most noble and most renowned, and to this splendid office of defending even the defenders...I confess it is with difficulty I restrain myself from soaring to a more daring height than is suitable to the purpose of an exordium, and from casting about for something of more grandeur, to which I may give utterance: for...I shall surpass no less the orators of all ages in the nobleness and in the instructiveness of my subject.[16]

It is this temptation which Milton faced, that of rendering his narrative in the epic style, which is so illuminating to the language of his First and Second Defences, and so crucial to an appreciation of the function of the later prose in general, and Samson Agonistes in particular. David Loewenstein argues that:

> Milton's imaginative achievement encompasses both his prose and poetry...Too often his revolutionary prose writings, except for more canonical texts like *Areopagitica* or *Of Education*, are treated as peripheral or secondary to the poems...Yet...the drama of history in the great poems is a profound and often troubled response to the sense of history and its complex figurations registered throughout the prose. The figurative and historiographical dimensions of Milton's revolutionary prose consequently deserve rigorous attention both in their own right and in relation to his poetic masterpieces.[17]

While the First Defence is measured and meticulous, the Second Defence has a completely different tone. His effusiveness over the "effulgent virtue"[18] of his fellow citizens is only slightly marred by his irritation with public opinion, which had drawn back from the extremity of regicide, and which he categorizes as the "many...vulgar,

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[15] See CPW vol 4 part 1, 256. Also: "No passages in Milton's prose are richer in autobiography and self-revelation than those of A Second Defence." 257.

[16] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 11: 19 - 13: 12.

[17] Loewenstein, 1. Milton's epic poetry is the final realisation of his oratory, expressing deeds of valour to future generations, first practised in his revolutionary prose. As I shall show in the chapter concerning the ideas within Samson Agonistes, the epics contain, in various guises, all of the ideas and views for which Milton fought throughout his life: they continue, through the mediums of prophecy and of poetry, his life's work.

[18] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 3: 8-9.

[who] hatefully calumniated deeds nobly done;"[19] and he soon returns to his preferred version of events: "And who is there who considers not the honourable achievements of his country as his own? And what can be more for the honour or glory of any country, than liberty, restored alike to civil life, and to divine worship?"[20] In this we may see the dichotomy between the reality of public opinion, and the idealised vision which Milton has of his countrymen. In Eikonoklastes he distinguished more clearly between those he addressed and those he described; in the Defences he has removed himself effectively from the immediate political situation in order to create a version of the truth which would be appropriate for the European audience which he petitioned. The retelling of the truth which this involved has been castigated by Stavely who suggests that his prose as a whole "convey[s] at best only a fragmentary sense of a political context."[21] Irene Samuel suggests in her article "Milton and the Ancients on Writing History," that Milton believed that "an era capable of truly glorious deeds will produce men adequate to their narration."[22]

He follows his admission that he is restraining himself with difficulty from soaring to a more daring height, and casting about for a greater grandeur of utterance, with a blistering personal attack upon Alexander More.[23] However scurrilous this attack, (and it has alienated critics since its publication), it is couched in the same elegantly eloquent language as the rest of this work. His prose sparkles with classical and biblical allusion, none of which has the appearance of artificial contrivance, but rather clarifies and enhances his discourse. The consciousness of addressing a wider audience led Milton to adopt a more self-conscious literary style, frequently employing a style of argument weighted with rhetorical and autobiographical self-justification which Loewenstein suggests "evokes a posture of righteousness on the part of the revolutionary polemicist." Through this assumption of what Loewenstein terms "a stance of fierce rectitude,"[24] Milton presents himself as a certain type of writer and

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[19] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 5: 1-2.
[20] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 7: 2-6.
[21] Stavely 112.
[22] Irene Samuel, "Milton and the Ancients on Writing History." 146
[23] He assumed More to be the author of Pierre du Moulin's Regii Sanguinis Clamor ad coelum adversus Parricidas Anglicanos, the answer to his First Defence, to which he was ordered to reply by the Council of State. Kranidas has frequently defended Milton's vehemence as rhetorical zeal, and suggests that "the success of an argument is tied as much to the strength as to the virtue of the speaker. Milton is solidly enough in this world, and in his rhetorical tradition to want to make his enemies look foolish or evil." "Words, Words, Words, and the Word: Milton's Of Prelatical Episcopacy," 153. Rosenberg suggests that in the pamphlets defence is a direct result of attacks from his detractors. "Theme and Structure in Milton's Autobiographies," 314. Rosenberg has also suggested that Milton parodies the language of his opponents. D.M. Rosenberg, "Parody of Style in Milton's Polemics." MS 2 (1970): 113-18.
[2424] Loewenstein, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 174. He also notes that for Milton, the active process of writing, the generating and promoting of ideological debate and social change in a revolutionary age is the basis of defence, 174.

thinker. This is not necessarily fictional, but correspondingly, neither is it necessarily the truth, as Worden points out: "Writers choose what to tell us about themselves (...) Milton's self-representation, though it selects an important part of him, the part most consonant with the ethical purposes of his writing, has its omissions."[25] Milton's self-fashioning within the confines of his polemical writing has been noted by many. Miner suggests that Milton's personal intrusion in the prose is a form of self-advertisement and self-justification, but remarks also that "personal testimony, or ethical proof, was regarded as a major rhetorical technique."[26] Self-fashioning for Milton, like the incorporation of the finest of the classical tradition, and the investing of Scriptural authority, was a method of persuasion, another literary weapon in his arsenal which he employed to challenge and win over his readership. Loewenstein has also discussed "the performative aspect of signification and self-presentation in the controversial writings,"[27] and notes that they reach a culmination in the Second Defence, where: "Milton's self-dramatization reaches delirious heights, especially when he imagines himself receiving the applause of multitudes in Europe for his heroic deliverance of an exiled liberty."[28]

The autobiographical part of the Second Defence has proved to be a rich source of information for biographers and critics alike, not least because it offers a valuable insight into Milton's mind during the Civil War years. It has already been suggested that Milton had turning points in his life, moments of stock-taking when he assessed his position, and evaluated his achievements to date: the Second Defence is one such point in his career. It was published the same year that Oliver Cromwell became Protector, and marks an ironic shift in fortune which Milton could not have foreseen when he eulogised "our chief of men" in his work. For now however, his innate belief in the potential of human nature was still relatively unshaken, despite the early signs of what was to come so inevitably in 1660. Central to this passage of autobiographical

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[25] Worden, Milton and Republicanism 159.

[26] Miner, Politics of Discourse 186. Miner continues by suggesting that in Milton's case this self-fashioning was a matter of literary habit, and that he found the writing of prose distasteful. I disagree, believing rather that Milton sought to justify his discourse to the best of his ability because of the importance of its message. However this technique is not confined to the prose, as Zwicker's characterisation of Paradise Lost as the biography of the one just man shows. Politics of Discourse 258. He also argues: "This poem is written in the language of the just, and Milton takes the whole vocabulary of literary civilisation as his to wield; but wielding that vocabulary - witnessing, condemning, preaching, and prophesying - is self-defense, vindication." Politics of Discourse 256-7. This relates to Eikonoklastes, and is a measure of Milton's defiance in the face of the Restoration. Zwicker addresses this point also, regarding Paradise Lost as: "an act of polemical self-definition, an assertion of cultural authority." It demonstrates not only an appropriation of spiritual truths, but also an appropriation "of all the instruments of literary culture. Everything is essayed in this poem; and the compendiousness, the encyclopedic character of the poem is its central polemical argument." Politics of Discourse 248. See CPW vol. 4 part 1, 256: the prevailing tone of this work "is more in the tradition of personal justification than the elaboration of principles which Milton had concentrated on in his reply to Defensio Regia.

[27] Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 5.

[28] Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 5.

commentary is Milton's discussion of his blindness, a point which Loewenstein claims to be Milton's self-representation as "a sacred figure": "the righteous, unreproachable, frugal post-polemicist who is divinely favored and, like other blind men, 'almost sacred.'"[29]

> To be blind is not miserable; not to be able to bear blindness, that is miserable. But why should I be unable to bear...what I know may happen to any mortal being, - what I know has actually happened to some of the most eminent and the best of men, on the records of memory? Or shall I mention those old poets, ancientest and wisest, whose calamity the gods are said to have recompensed with far more excelling gifts, and men to have honoured with that high honour, as to choose rather to blame the gods themselves, than to impute their blindness to them as a crime.[30]

He proceeds to illustrate the point with examples from Scripture and antiquity, all of whom play a particular part within their respective societies: evidently these are the men with whom Milton identifies:

> ...many among the philosophers, were deprived of light. Or, should I mention those men of old, so deserving of admiration for their civil wisdom, as also for their great actions? And first, Timolean of Corinth - the deliverer of his own city, and of all Sicily - than whom, a better man or more revered in the commonwealth no age has produced. Next, Appius Claudius, who, by nobly declaring his sentiments in the senate, delivered Italy from Pyrrhus, a formidable enemy; but himself delivered not from blindness. Then Cæcilius Metellus the high-priest, who lost his eyes, in saving from the flames not the city only, but the Palladium, on which hung the destiny of the city, as also the most sacred of the religious mysteries...[31]

There is one notable omission in Milton's examples of blind heroes from Scripture:

> ...the patriarch Isaac himself, than whom no mortal was ever more dear to God, lived blind no small number of years; and for some time, perhaps Jacob also his son, of God no less beloved...it is beyond all doubt from the divine testimony of Christ our Saviour, that the man whom he healed had been blind even from the womb, for no sin either of himself or of his parents.[32]

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[29] Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 182. See CPW vol 4 part 1, 258.
[30] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 63: 13-25.
[31] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 65: 12-24.
[32] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 67: 5-12.

Blind Samson plays no part in this list of the famous from the past whom God cherished so greatly, and blinded so lovingly. The reason why he is absent lies in the lines which follow:

> As for myself, I call thee, O God, to witness, the searcher of the inmost spirit, and of every thought, that I am not conscious of any offense (though, to the utmost of my power, I have often seriously examined myself on this point, though I have visited all the recesses of my heart) recently committed or long ago, the heinousness of which could have justly caused, could have called down this calamity upon me above others.[33]

No wonder Milton has been unable to cite Samson as an example here: he is concentrating upon self-justification. These men are morally justified, and have done nothing untoward to bring divine wrath down upon their heads; Samson cannot hold up his head in the company of such as these. Milton stands for the opposite type of blindness from the biblical Samson, who caused his own loss of sight, largely through disobedience and disloyalty to God's purpose, while Milton is trying to emphasise that he has sought to fulfil God's purpose in writing from: "a sense of duty, of grace, and of devotion to my country; that, above all, I have done this, with a view not only to the deliverance of the commonwealth, but likewise of the church."[34] However, he shows his sense of identification with Samson in the following lines: "methought, that, by a certain fatality in my birth, two destinies were set before me, on the one hand, blindness, on the other, duty - that I must necessarily incur the loss of my eyes, or desert a sovereign duty."[35] Already we can see the shadowy figure of Milton's Samson as he writes: an amalgamation of the biblical hero, and Milton's own vision of himself, a blind figure whose blindness is caused by the will of God, and which is suffered in the course of his divinely-dictated duty. Milton's achievement is that Samson's very failings and sins appear to fit neatly into the divine plan, obedient in his very disobedience. As Stanley Fish remarks in his essay "Question and Answer in Samson Agonistes", "there are many paths to the temple":

> Had Samson remained as he is in the opening lines of the play - self-pitying and despairing - would he have pulled down the temple? The answer to that question is 'yes', and if the Samson of Judges is substituted for Milton's Samson ('O God that I may be at once avenged

[33] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 67: 12-19.
[34] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 67: 25-28.
[35] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 69: 8-11.

> of the Philistines for my two eyes') it could be argued that this is exactly what happens.[36]

Milton's Samson is no stranger to vengeance, but through the example of Paradise Lost, we have learned that "Mercy first and last shall brightest shine," and "over wrauth grace shall abound." Fish continues:

> The fact that a regenerate Samson pulls down the temple is important - for Samson; but despairing Samson would have also pulled down the temple, if God had willed it; there are many paths to the temple, and in terms of God's prophecy, although not in terms of Samson's salvation, one is as good as another.[37]

This idea fails on one central point, in that it ignores the possibility of election. God has elected Samson to be set apart from birth, and as such surely desires his salvation, in the same way that Milton felt that he had been set aside to do the will of God, and if closely questioned would probably have admitted that he felt himself to be "elect" in a certain sense. This is an awkward area to investigate, as two types of "election" overlap: the word itself bristles with theological meaning over and above its apparent value. The Calvinist theory of election, and Milton's rejection of it, will be discussed in Chapter 4, and it is the broader, more Arminian sense of the "elect" as the "believer" to which I refer above. Milton's Samson has leapt so far from his roots in Judges that he is scarcely recognisable as the same hero; indeed as a character, he is not the same hero at all. Milton's despairing Samson could not have pulled down the temple for the same reasons that Satan was able to lift his head from the lake of fire: the connecting force is the will of God. Samson's destruction of the temple may have been achieved by brute force, but it was dictated by spiritual strength, or inner vision.

Milton's thoughts upon inner vision are outlined next in the Second Defence:

> As to blindness, I would rather at last have mine, if it must be so...Yours, immersed in the lowest sense, so blinds your minds, that you can see nothing sound or solid; mine, with which you reproach me, deprives things merely of their colour and surface; but takes not from the mind's contemplation whatever is real and permanent in them.[38]

There is a sense in all this that Milton feels a certain spiritual supremacy in his

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[36] Stanley Fish, "Question and Answer in Samson Agonistes," Critical Quarterly 11 (1969): 237.
[37] Fish 260.
[38] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 71: 20-27.

affliction,[39] an echo of Homer and Teiresias, who could not see clearly with the vision of prophecy until they were blind, as though the external world of sight merely distracts the mind from inner contemplation. Certainly Milton's vision for his country appears to have come into sharper focus between the writing of the First and Second Defences, the years when he finally lost all sight:

> There is a way, and the Apostle is my authority, through weakness to the greatest strength. May I be one of the weakest, provided only in my weakness that immortal and better vigour be put forth with greater effect; provided only in my darkness the light of the divine countenance does but the more brightly shine: for then I shall at once be the weakest and the most mighty; shall be at once blind, and of the most piercing sight. Thus, through this infirmity should I be consummated, perfected; thus, through this darkness should I be enrobed in light. (...)The divine law, the divine favour, has made us not merely secure, but, as it were, sacred, from the injuries of men; nor would seem to have brought this darkness upon us so much by inducing a dimness of the eyes, as by the overshadowing of heavenly wings; and not infrequently is wont to illumine it again, when produced, by an inward and far surpassing light.[40]

As in other parts of the Second Defence, Milton appears to have relaxed into a more genial frame of mind in this work, and his discourse is expansive and confessional. Much of the First Defence is more properly defensive, both in tone as well as in detail, but this rewriting of the situation, published three years later, has all the confidence of established acceptance.

His backward look at his earlier pamphlets has sparked discussion of his motives: "I began to turn my thoughts to other subjects; to consider in what way I could contribute to the progress of real and substantial liberty; which is to be sought for not from without, but from within, and is to be obtained principally not by fighting, but by the just regulation and by the proper conduct of life."[41] His description of the heroic part which he himself has played in the struggle for liberty has been variously addressed. Lieb suggests that Milton accounts for himself to God:

Milton's orderly putting together of his life exhibits a determination to

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[39] See Lieb, Milton and the Culture of Violence: Chapter 7 for a convincingly moving description of the vulnerability and pain which Milton was suffering at this point in his life: it was perhaps his darkest hour, as he struggled with a double bereavement and the total loss of his sight. Lieb also suggests that Milton's self-defence was provoked by the attacks of his detractors, 181. Chapter 8 considers Milton's view that his blindness was a product of his elect status.

[40] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 73: 6-26.

[41] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 131: 14-19.

> view his accomplishments as the product of his unswerving dedication to the demands of his calling. In the attempt to fulfil those demands throughout his career, he wishes to demonstrate to the world (as well as to that divine 'task-maister' in whose eye he perpetually finds himself) that he has made use of his talents to the very best of his ability.[42]

Loewenstein regards this section of the Second Defence as a creative retelling of his career, thereby suggesting that Milton rewrote himself[43] as well as, or more precisely as a part of the historical events which he retold:

> Milton gives an imaginative shape to his polemical career. His years of controversial engagement themselves assume a coherence as he reviews them...On one level, Milton's self-portrait functions as ethical proof of his political commitments and his personal ideals. It also reveals Milton engaged in a literary process of actively interpreting his history as a writer - his means of creatively embedding his personal history and the development within the history and conflicts of his culture.[44]

Stavely also notes the parallel between Milton's treatment of historical fact, and his portrayal of himself within that political landscape which he had already rewritten, arguing that Milton is claiming for himself that:

> Each of his own works has been a judicious response to the configuration of social forces at that particular time. At the appropriate moments, he has participated in the successful agitations for ecclesiastical and civil liberty and initiated the struggle for domestic liberty. As Milton had always sought to do with the issues he wrote about, this highly patterned autobiography dignifies and uplifts his pamphleteering itself into a constellation of ideals.[45]

Loewenstein identifies the Second Defence as the pinnacle of Milton's polemical achievements, as it is here that Milton "brings to a culmination [his] impressive skills as a controversial writer: its extraordinary integration of invective, panegyric, autobiographical writing, and mythopoetic vision underscores the convergence of the aesthetic and the political in Milton's revolutionary prose."[46] Milton's uncompromising portrayal of himself "as a servant of God," informs his stance as one who would guide the nation, and deliver the individual to a greater freedom within: his desire to improve society came from his innate belief that his country was ready and willing to be

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[42] Lieb, Milton and the Culture of Violence 197.

[43] There is a sense that Milton was bound up in the layers of purpose and effect which characterise the prose writing, especially latterly. His own role, or persona, his own words, and his own version of reality; his own intelligence sparring with the wits of his opponents; his own learning ranged against the education of his detractors; his own ideals and religious faith bound into an all-encompassing cloak of justification; were wrapped as securely as his singing robes around his whole endeavour.

[44] Loewenstein, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 184.

[45] Stavely 112.

[46] Loewenstein, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 172. Rosenberg has noted that it is "cast in the form of an oration given in court." Rosenberg, "Theme and Structure in Milton's Autobiographies," 322. He suggests that Milton's motives were specific and political, and that his defence of both his country and himself are selective.

improved. Milton had an exalted view of the potential of mankind, and reason or rational freewill is at the root of his theological, social and political convictions. Such is his faith in mankind, that he protests: "no ordinance human or from heav'n can binde against the good of man."[47] His conviction that learning and the right use of reason may correct much of the damage which was incurred at the time of the Fall was one which he had held at least since the early days of his pamphleteering:

> The end then of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the neerest by possessing our souls of true vertue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection.[48]

Also, as was shown in the first chapter, he believed that virtue and reason had to be coupled with action in order to come to fruition,[49] and he wanted to change the institutions of state which he believed to curtail the freedom of the individual. Moreover, the times in which he lived were times of great change where much must have seemed conceivable.[50] Milton was convinced that the hand of God was guiding the acts of Parliament, especially the reforming zeal of the Long Parliament, and he was equally convinced that the hand of God was guiding his own writing.

It was Milton's belief in the greatness of Cromwell,[51] and his conviction that the potential of the human spirit would be fulfilled in England by the government of reason and virtue under the Commonwealth, which laid the foundations for his most bitter disillusionment. There is certainly a sense that Milton understood some of the pressures which would face Cromwell;[52] his miscalculation lies in his belief that Cromwell would be able to stand as firmly as Samson, while the entire temple of the constitution was shaking and falling around his ears. A large measure of the disappointment which Milton felt at the downfall of the Protectorate stemmed also from the height of his hopes of the

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[47] Tetrachordon, Works vol. 4, 75: 10-11.
[48] Of Education, Works vol. 4, 277: 3-8.
[49] "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." Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 311: 8-12.
[50] "In politics the incredible was happening and would be fulfilled with godsent swiftness, and Milton sees himself now the poet, not of the slower inscrutable ways of Providence (hopefully as he might have treated that theme), but of a grand culminating reformation of his so much loved country." Tillyard 118.
[51] See particularly To the Lord General Cromwell, CSP 324.
[52] He acknowledges this in the Second Defence: "You have taken upon you by far the heaviest burden, which will try you thoroughly; it will search you through and through, and lay open your inmost soul; it will show what is...your strength, what is your weight; whether there is indeed in you that living piety, that faith, justice, and moderation of mind, for which we have thought that you above all others deserved, by the will of God, to be elevated to this sovereign dignity. To rule by your counsel three most potent nations; to be desirous of leading the people from corrupt institutions to a better plan of life and of discipline than they had before...to watch, to foresee...to shun the pomp of wealth and of power...these will drive against you like a mighty wind...these require a man who is upheld by divine help, who is admonished and taught by little less than divine converse." Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 227: 22 - 229: 13.

liberty and virtue of his countrymen. Here was a double defeat; not only had his dreams of a godly republic been shattered, but his very faith in the nature of man had been shaken, and his chosen race had proved themselves to be Philistines in the end. This fresh proof of fallibility served to reinforce the suspicions which must have been growing in Milton's mind, at least since the publication and success of Eikon Basilike. He had expressed his mistrust of his countrymen then in scathing tones.[53] However, his idealism had encouraged him to yield to the literary pressures which he felt to rewrite the nature of his nation, and the dichotomy between the heroic liberty-loving England as he had described it, and the real political debacle which had resulted from the execution of Charles I must have struck him forcibly.

Cromwell died on 3 September, 1658, ironically, the anniversary of Dunbar and Worcester. The rest of the trappings of the interregnum were systematically destroyed: not only did the King return, but the House of Lords and ultimately the bishops did as well. Sectaries and Presbyterians were excluded from the church after the failure of the Savoy Conference, and persecuted at the instance of the House of Commons. The Act of Uniformity dismayed those who had felt that Charles's signing of the Declaration of Breda, which promised religious toleration to all, had signalled the start of a new era of clemency. Regicides were hanged, drawn and quartered. Milton was imprisoned. Cromwell's corpse was dug up and hanged at Tyburn. As Hill has said, defeat for everything that Cromwell stood for could hardly have been more complete.[54] In seeking a response from Milton to these events, one is struck at once by his silence. The Second Defence was published in 1654, and his less politically significant Defensio Pro Se in the following year. After that there is silence until the flurry of activity in 1659.[55] Milton returned to "vernacular polemic" in what has been described by Corns as "the Indian summer of the Good Old Cause."[56] Cromwell's death brought no immediate catastrophe. By the end of the year the Privy Council felt sufficiently secure to issue

[53] Eikonoklastes, Works vol. 5, 68: 26 - 69: 12.
[54] Hill, GE 245.
[55] It has been assumed that he commenced work upon Paradise Lost and the De Doctrina Christiana in the intervening years, and indeed he may have been pushed towards his original design of epic by the censorship laws of 1655. Hill explains: "In August 1655 a colonel, an alderman and another commissioner were appointed to regulate printing. From the following month no news might legally be published without Thurloe's permission. Gone were the exuberant days of free discussion: Opposition pamphlets could appear only illegally. The author of Areopagitica soon slipped out of the public service." Hill, GE 143. In fact, it would appear that the author of Areopagitica slipped back into the role which he had originally chosen for himself, and transferred his energy to verse. If he could not for the moment communicate his frustration in open prose, and I am thinking here not only of the censor, but also of his disinclination openly to criticise the Protectorate, then he would have to find a less obvious way of voicing his disillusion and discontent, and chose the allegorical epic as his vehicle.
[56] Thomas N. Corns, Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640-1660 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 269.

writs for a new Parliament. The elections returned considerable numbers of old republicans, who were critical of the Cromwellian ascendancy, and the early months of 1659 saw renewed debate of many issues close to radical hearts.

It was this atmosphere of "revived controversy" which encouraged Milton to put political pen to paper once more. The result was a stream of pamphlets between February, 1659 and March, 1660; A Treatise of Civil Power, The Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church, Letter to a Friend, Concerning the Ruptures of the Commonwealth and Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth. The first of these is addressed specifically to the Parliament, as Areopagitica had been, and as Corns points out, it is very different in style from his previous polemics. This is most apparent in his use of biblical quotation:

> Citation has a new role in this tract. Whereas previously, except where Milton was engaged primarily and explicitly in an exegetical process, as in *Tetrachordon*, biblical texts were much more likely to be incorporated into the fabric of his own prose, now they are highlighted as the authority for his statements...Schwartz suggests that such citation has far-reaching implications for the authority Milton assumes to himself: 'the more insistently Milton cites the Bible, the more it becomes clear that he appropriates that authority he also grants...to compose one's own words out of another's is to make them one's own.'[57] Milton's argument appears at times entirely to be grounded on biblical evidence, as whole pages are dominated by the serried, italicized ranks of proof texts.[58]

Perhaps also Milton felt that biblical authority could not be argued with: if the Scripture were to be presented as condemning the injustices and shortcomings of the Protectorate, then who could argue? Perhaps there is a certain element of Milton concealing his own criticisms behind the voice of his God? After this, the audience which he addressed changed, having been dismissed by Richard Cromwell at the behest of army commanders who were suspicious of Parliament's consideration of plans to control them. As Corns has observed, the problem of identifying the source of power and securing access to it was one which was to recur throughout the rest of Milton's polemical career.[59] Corns describes the essence of Milton's problems in the context of The Ready and Easy Way:

> The Readie and Easie Way...appeared prefaced with...[a] passage [which] concedes his failure to find fit audience in time (...) But the

[57] R.Schwartz, Citation, Authority and De Doctrina Christiana, Loewenstein and Turner, 231-2.
[58] Corns 270-271.
[59] Corns 271. See Dzelzainis, Milton and Republicanism 182-3 for the dates of the writing and publication of the eight pamphlets which Milton wrote at this time, and the seven parliaments or governing bodies to whom they were addressed. Brown also notes that Milton's attempts at responses to "bewilderingly rapid change, were some of them hurried and others ill-timed." Milton and Republicanism 51, and identifies the rapidly shifting political ground as the reason for this. See also Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton: Political Beliefs and Polemical Methods, 1659-60." PMLA 74 (1959): 191.

> circumstances of publication indicate the impossibility of Milton's position: the tempo of political polemic could not match the tempo of political change. He has written a pamphlet premised on a situation which had changed by the time he wrote the preface, and...a preface premised on a situation which had changed by the time it had been carried to the press.[60]

Given the shifting nature of the political situation as the commonwealth fought out its last months, it is surprising that Milton tried to write at all, directing what must have felt like a pointless attack against an inevitable outcome. As always, he sought an obvious solution to the problems of government. His type of government would have proved feasible under different circumstances, but he reckoned without political necessity, and his idealism, still present in his plans for his country, took scant account of such matters as taxation and the funding of an army or a navy. He tried to reconcile his strong principles and fundamental belief in the potential of man with the political, social and religious reality around him. The dichotomy between his humanism and idealised vision of man's capabilities, and the reality of man's fallen nature and flawed social environment forced him to turn his attention to the issues of temptation, obedience to the will of God and ultimately to redemption. He may have written thus out of a desire to understand and to explain the failure of his hopes and dreams. I would argue however that he wrote to continue the work of his prose, writing to narrate past events, in order to change the course of future events.[61]

In considering the second of these pamphlets, The Likeliest Means, it is worth bearing two things in mind: the first being the immediate context of "Booth's Rebellion", a royalist uprising, led by a prominent Presbyterian, Sir George Booth. The troops dealt with the conspiracy quickly and efficiently, but the restored Rump was nervous and particularly impatient with the Presbyterian clergy. Milton took advantage of this atmosphere to point out that until tithes are removed and religion liberated, then no formula for church government could flourish unmolested. Secondly, Milton had high hopes of Church reform after the demise of the monarchy, believing that "liberty" would

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[60] Corns 279-280. Lewalski argues in her article, "Milton: Political Beliefs and Polemical Methods, 1659-60" that: "Milton's various government models and political arguments were drawn from and constantly adapted to the maelstrom of contemporary politics, that the contradictions in them were caused primarily by this conscious adaptation, and that the purpose of this adaptation was to preserve certain religious and civil liberties from every danger but especially from the permanent destruction awaiting them in a Stuart restoration." Lewalski, "Milton: Political Beliefs and Polemical Methods, 1659-60," 192. See also Corns, Milton and Republicanism 30 and 36.

[61] Wolfe notes Milton's reluctance to relinquish his polemic involvement for passivity, "taking refuge not in action but in contemplation, not in obligations of the citizen but in the delights of intellectual exploration...If he was not a soldier, he would still fight, like Dante, with weapons of his mind for those patterns in an enlightened commonwealth he had visualized in his reading of great minds...Milton could not separate the functions of the poet from the duties of the citizen; he thought of himself as a complete man in the tradition of David, Sophocles, Dante, and Spenser." CPW vol 4 part 1, 1.

be "restored alike to civil life, and to divine worship."[62] Small wonder that he is disappointed, and it is hardly coincidence that there are frequent echoes of his anti-prelatical tracts in this pamphlet. There is a certain alarming glossing of the facts in this tract, though, which shows that while Milton has adapted to the change of power, he is still harking back to the good old days in a way which cannot but confuse the reader. Corns has noted this aspect of Milton's writing in this pamphlet, suggesting that there is an element of nostalgia in Milton's retrospection, and adding that "Nostalgia, wishful thinking, and transparently selective recollection could scarcely have carried much conviction outside the narrowing circle of the Rump and its supporters."[63] Milton's narration of what has been, and his vision of what should be, have both diverged from the reality of history. The reader must ask if this divergence is conscious on Milton's part. Has his idealism blinded him to the reality of events, or did he write his vision of events ignoring reality rather than addressing it, in the hope that his words would effect the change which he desired? Given his desire to change the institutions of the Church and of government, we have to assume that he certainly sought to guide. It is perhaps too sweeping to claim that Milton wrote to change the world, but he certainly wrote to modify it. He expected that mankind would have enough innate godliness to see the sense of what he was saying, and would desire to change their ways accordingly. Woods remarks: "One may always reject God's call, and Milton's; one may always elect away from the path of the elect. But the interlinking of Milton's argument with the doctrine of election will be difficult for the Christian to reject without thought and the conscious choosing that already enacts the freedom Milton argues for."[64] So one could argue that he saw his role as one of catalyst, after the days of iconoclasm appeared to be at an end. When he realized that men were not innately godly, and were not inspired by the same reforming zeal as he was himself, he realized that iconoclasm still had a place and a purpose. Arguably the epics, and finally Samson Agonistes, were the result.

The end of The Likeliest Means is noteworthy: "If I be not heard nor beleevd, the event will bear me witnes to have spoken truth: and I in the mean while have borne my witnes not out of season to the church and to my countrey."[65] There is an accent of weariness in these lines, a sense of an irksome duty performed because it has to be. It is

[62] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 7: 5-6.
[63] Corns 274.
[64] Woods, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 202.
[65] Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings Out of the Church, Works vol. 6, 100: 11-14.

hard to find the ebullient enthusiasm which characterized his earlier prose. Corns has observed this evolution of style in the prose, reflecting that "such changes relate to his probable perception of his audience and of the exigencies of debate."[66] However it may be seen from the arguments of this chapter that Milton's style also changed as his vision changed, and Corns's observation: "The sober discourses of 1649 and later seem...to recognize the irrelevance of fine writing to the shaping of political events,"[67] perhaps addresses the heart of the problem. If the Second Defence had indeed been the pinnacle of his aesthetic achievement within the realm of polemical writing, then his later more subdued tone was undoubtedly related to disillusionment that his best efforts had been to so little avail. Stavely suggests that Milton's efforts were frustrated in prose because the changes which he sought were at odds not only with reality, but also with his writing. He would achieve in poetry what he had failed to achieve in prose perhaps because for Milton, poetry was an end in itself. Woods notes the emphasis upon dialectic rather than rhetoric in the later prose, and suggests that this was more studied than mere disillusion: "this change in his prose style is consistent with Milton's development of a poetics that depends on invitation and on the invocation, if not the direct presentation, of multiple points of view."[68]

By the time he came to write his epics, Milton was far more concerned with the truth than with the mythological exploits of folklore heroes.[69] His heroes were the people of England who had fought to establish a free commonwealth, and in particular the early promise of his erstwhile hero, Oliver Cromwell. Ironically of course, these people whom he purported to venerate were a product of his imagination, or at least of his prose, whereas in reality the English people were those whom he had regarded as the superstitious vulgar image-doting rabble, the mob without education or understanding; the very people he had been so quick to dismiss. The Cromwell in whom he had believed was no less a product of his vision rather than a genuine historical figure, and Milton's veneration for him became more specifically orientated towards the Renaissance concept of the heroic man, set aside by God to perform a specific task, to whom he ascribes near divine qualities:

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[66] Corns, The Cambridge Companion to Milton 184.
[67] Corns, The Cambridge Companion to Milton 195.
[68] Woods, Politics, poetics, and hermeneutics 205.
[69] See Miner, Politics of discourse 185: on Milton's "growing insistence that his poetry dealt not with fables or tales but with historical truth." Also 199. At 182-3 Miner notes that Milton's claim to be presenting historical truth in his poems is a problem for the modern reader, because of the nature of history and our understanding of it. I believe that for Milton, history was related to narration rather than enquiry, and his work should be regarded in that light.

> To evince his extraordinary, his little less than divine virtue, this mark will suffice; that there lived in him an energy whether of spirit and genius, or of discipline, established not by military rule only, but by the rule of Christ and of sanctity, that he drew all to his camp, as to the best school both of military science, and of religion and piety - nay those who were already good and brave, from all parts, or made them such principally by his own example...[70]

In this description it is clear that Cromwell fitted Milton's own vision of a leader for the commonwealth of his dreams: an iconoclastic figure who would stand for both the constitutional and the religious liberties of the people, a man who would rule according to the personal merit of the sword, wielded in a worthy cause, rather than by the sceptre, an inherited instrument of despotism. Most poignant, with the benefit of hindsight, is Milton's delight that Cromwell had refused to assume the name and character of majesty: "And justly so...for your exploits have surpassed not merely those of kings, but even those which have been fabled of our heroes."[71] There is an irony in this passage: the concern with truth and reality is clear from the reference, "*fabled* of our heroes,"[72] and linked to this is the expectation that this true and real hero will surpass these mere stories in the laying down of hard historical fact. Cromwell's deeds were expected to achieve in reality, what Samson, Milton's created iconoclast, would achieve in verse.

Milton had been working with the truth, and with matters of national importance, as he saw it, for too long ever to be comfortable in the realms of fiction.[73] By the time the republic collapsed, he was anxious to preserve his version of the truth, and undoubtedly, equally anxious to make a lasting mark upon posterity, to "leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die."[74] Zwicker suggests that as Milton had had to separate the aesthetic from the polemic in Eikonoklastes, when he no longer wrote prose for the republic, "he embraced the deepest work of the imagination, not to deny polemic or history or veracity but more fully to unite controversy and the imagination."[75] There is also a sense that he turned to

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[70] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 215: 22 - 217: 2.
[71] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 225: 8-19.
[72] Italics mine.
[73] Indeed, a glance through Milton's works shows that he never truly concerned himself with fiction as such. Comus is not based on fact, but the characters approximate to the allegorical, and as such could be argued to represent truth in some form. His other early works are based upon historical events, or upon characters in his life, such as Lycidas, and the early love sonnets.
[74] Diekhoff 7. See also Miner, Politics of Discourse 187: "He has been able to make a *prose* national epic from controversial historical writing. Although his sense of triumph would not last long, its demise seems to have set him on what he knew he was obligated to do all along: write an epic poem that would be the pride of his country."
[75] Zwicker 59.

poetic justice in the realisation that Providence could not be relied upon.[76] Just as Milton had sought to change the attitudes and perceptions of his people through what Loewenstein has termed the action of "vehement polemic", so in turning his attention to poetry he continued to promote the same convictions, exhorting his readers to reform, to regenerate, and ultimately to deliver themselves individually. In order to achieve the effect which he desires, Milton alters the form and style of the epic genre,[77] and the individual prescription which is the result perfectly encapsulates the vision which Milton sought to promote: that of a godly republic composed of rational and responsible individuals whose relationship with God was fruitful, and whose actions not only justified themselves, but benefited their whole society. Milton thus effectively redefines heroism.

In both epics, the central epic action is the salvation of man: Christ begins to accomplish in Paradise Regained what he proposes in Paradise Lost. His crucifixion and resurrection overshadow the future, reminding the reader that the outcome of these promises and actions will be the ultimate sacrifice.[78] Patience and obedience are of paramount importance in all the final poems:[79] Satan, Adam and Eve illustrate the effects of disobedience and lack of trust in God, Christ demonstrates how obedience and patience bear the fruits of faith and godliness, and Samson displays both in his initial disobedience, despair, and lack of trust in God's and his own ability, and in his regeneration through faith and the operation of grace, allowing him to step back into the paradise which Adam lost. For Milton, the value which he placed upon reason led him to value the effects of the fall in so far as their outcome gave man the freedom to return to God voluntarily: a much more valuable gesture of faith, in God's eyes, than the unthinking, instinctive praise rendered by prelapsarian Adam and Eve.[80] The theme of

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[76] See McKeon, Politics of Discourse 48-9. In the final poems Milton also dispenses with the blending of fact and heroic fiction which had characterised the later prose, as though the blend of truth and fiction in his portrayal of Cromwell had proved too sickening a combination after the collapse of the Protectorate. More was required from a hero than martial prowess, reason, strength and courage. Hence Milton's rejection of these qualities in his portrayal of Satan.

[77] Kranidas has remarked in his article "Milton's Of Reformation: The Politics of Vision," 498: "As usual he exhausts and explodes the genre he is using." This comment applies equally to each literary genre Milton undertook, as in all he has rewritten the accepted conventions. This is either because he moulded each to suit his purpose better, or because his literary talent was such that he was able to push the forms which he tackled beyond the boundaries which had been achieved before him. Lieb remarks: "generic form as Miltonic phenomenon undergoes a transformation that undermines conventional expectations and gives rise to meanings all its own. Whether as pastoral, as epic, or as drama, genre in Milton assumes a new form, one in keeping with a sensibility at once committed to the primacy of form and convention in all areas of endeavor, but at the same time entirely radicalized to accord with an outlook that is fundamentally non conformist." Michael Lieb, The Sinews of Ulysses: Form and Convention in Milton's Works (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne University Press, 1989) 139.

[78] John M. Steadman suggests that "The heroisms of flesh and spirit are at variance. The world's opinion of heroic virtue contradicts God's. In both of Milton's epics the basic contrast is really the dichotomy of piety and impiety - obedience and disobedience towards God - rather than Christianity and Hellenism." Milton and the Renaissance Hero (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 16.

[79] See discussion of Paradise Regained in Chapter 5.

[80] See *PL* 3: 102-11.

temptation is also common to all of the final poems, and like patience and obedience, also carries its own contemporary and autobiographical resonances. Adam, Christ and Samson all have specific tasks to perform, and all are tempted to diverge from their duty.[81] Only Christ resists when tempted from his mission by Satan, who endeavours to detach him from his spiritual calling, and into the world.

In analysing Milton's epic characters, the reader must bear in mind the tremendous weight of the prose work. So much of Milton's literary life had been dedicated to the production of political prose, that it would be foolish to discard any political interpretation of his epics without first giving it serious consideration. I have already aligned my argument with the current critical debate which regards the prose writing period of his life as not an interruption to his poetic endeavours, but as the logical progression of his purpose towards them, consequently the themes which occupy him in the prose, also direct the verse.[82] Thus it comes as no surprise to discover that the heroes and anti heroes of his three major poems are all in some way leaders, however unconventional their style of leadership. Milton's disappointment in the collapse of the commonwealth had led him to despise all types of recognised leadership, but his characters are elevated in the qualities of natural leadership, which Milton considered to be a sign of election and valued accordingly. As well as bringing his political disappointment and his literary ambitions to the writing of his epics, Milton also brings his own unorthodox yet profoundly Protestant faith, taking the form of epic and working out the theological implications of it for a Christian poet. Milton's choice of the Creation and Fall as his first epic theme rejects mythological heroism, and indicates clearly that his work is intended to challenge the classical epic and its values.[83] Criticism has already noted how Milton associates Satan with the classical tradition, investing him with the skills usually associated with the classical hero, such as rhetoric, oratory, martial

[81] Adam is tempted away from obedience to God by Satan, Samson was tempted also into disobedience through lust and pride, and also falls, but when faced with the second temptations of despair and doubt, he regenerates himself through grace and resists, fulfilling his mission, which is to destroy the Philistines.

[82] Loewenstein has argued persuasively for the consideration of the great poems as a logical continuation of the prose work, and I agree. See introductory chapter.

[83] Milton valued the poetry of the Scriptures far above that of the classical writers. Compare Arminius's Oration III (1603) "Let him read the charming swan-like SONG OF MOSES described in the concluding chapters of the Book of Deuteronomy: Let him with his mental eyes diligently survey the beginning of Isiah's prophecy: Let him in a devout spirit consider the Hundred-and-fourth Psalm. Then, with these, let him compare whatever choice specimens of poetry and eloquence the Greeks and Romans can produce in the most eminent manner from their archives; and he will be convinced by the most demonstrative evidence, that the latter are productions of the human spirit, and that the former could proceed from none other than the Divine Spirit." Works vol. 1, 387. See *PL* 9: 14-33.

prowess, authority and courage.[84] The army general aspect of Satan's martial prowess[85] calls to mind Cromwell, and perhaps Milton directed some of his political disappointment into this portrait, showing how far the values of the world fall short of the Christian ideal.[86] There is also a sense that Christ's rejection of political power, worldly glory, and the trappings of kingship form a comment upon the behaviour of Cromwell: arguably Christ is presenting the ideal of leadership. Christ's ministry is that of the suffering servant: a policy of self-denial and personal subservience to the greater good, which serves to illustrate the natural qualities of leadership which he possesses through his divine nature. Dalila's ironical jibe at the words of "wisest men:" "that to the public good / Private respects must yield;" is in itself a comment upon the career of Cromwell as much as a comment upon the ministry of Christ, the sacrifice of Samson, or the loss of sight of Milton. We can only speculate upon the political disappointment which lay behind Milton's attempts to teach his country that the type of heroism which he had upheld in epic fashion in the Second Defence was of no value in the eyes of God, and that man should study to be contemplative rather than to be active. The whole fabric and tenor of Renaissance heroism was at variance with his vision of true heroism: the suffering servant, the man of the spirit, the man of God. Milton demonstrates this dichotomy by contrasting futile action with fruitful contemplation: thus while Satan is active, Christ and Samson are contemplative. The ideal leader was therefore an ideal servant, and in order to liberate his people, he must first himself suffer captivity, humiliation or temptation. Milton claims that a good king should first be a good servant:

> Christ, moreover, though - not to put us under the yoke but to set us free - he underwent servitude, yet so measured his conduct as not to yield to royal right a jot beyond its just and proper due. Now 'tis time for us to come to his teaching upon this subject. (...) "Ye know," says he, "that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him

[84] This aspect of Satan's portrayal has been explored at length by Steadman in his studies Milton and the Renaissance Hero and Milton's Epic Characters: Image and Idol (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

[85] This aspect of Satan's portrayal is explored particularly by James A. Freeman, Milton and the Martial Muse: *Paradise Lost* and European Traditions of War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) See 113.

[86] See Freeman 124-5: "Milton also had personal reasons to portray Satan as the very model of a modern major general. If the fiend meets so many requirements of the complete commander and still fails, then with him falls the whole warlike mystique." Certainly the contrast between Satan's emphasis upon military glory and Christ's rejection of military, ecclesiastical and civil power could hardly be more stark. Milton uses the Prince of Darkness and the Prince of Light to illustrate his opposing portraits of majestic rule, infernal and divine.

> be your servant." (...) ...a king either is no Christian at all, or is the people's servant; if he would be lord and master out and out, he cannot at the same time be Christian.[87]

Christ in Paradise Regained is the personification of logic, an extreme example of the control of reason over passion, and in this he conforms to Milton's ideal of heroism.[88] He admired the almost inhumanly single-minded, puritanical discipline of Cromwell, and as a result his Christ is an erudite and fearless composition who seems to derive much of his scholarly manner from Milton himself:

> When I was yet a child, no childish play
> To me was pleasing, all my mind was set
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
> What might be publick good; my self I thought
> Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
> All righteous things:
> (*PR* 1: 201-6)

Compare this with Milton's account of his own childhood and ambitions: "My father destined me from a child for the pursuits of polite learning, which I prosecuted with such eagerness, that after I was twelve years old, I rarely retired to bed from my lucubrations till midnight."[89] Also: "methought, that, by a certain fatality in my birth, two destinies were set before me, on the one hand, blindness, on the other, duty - that I must necessarily incur the loss of my eyes, or desert a sovereign duty."[90] Christ also echoes Milton's ideas on the subject of monarchy, duty, and the futility of glory; Milton's comments upon his destiny are reminiscent of Christ's disregard for earthly glory:

> there were many who purchased a less good with a greater evil; for example - glory, with death. On the contrary, I proposed to purchase a greater good with a less evil; namely, at the price of blindness only, to perform one of the noblest acts of duty; and duty, being a thing in its own nature more substantial even than glory, ought on that account to be more desired and venerated.[91]

In all three of his last poems, Milton has substituted spiritual for physical warfare: the issue at stake is the spiritual well-being of the community, not the political

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[87] First Defence, Works vol. 7, 155: 15 - 159: 3. Satan, however, assumes the qualities of leadership unto himself, rather than earning or deserving them. See *PL* 2: 450-6.
[88] See discussion of the nature of Christ in Paradise Regained in Chapter 5.
[89] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 119: 22-25.
[90] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 69: 8-11.
[91] Second Defence, Works vol. 8, 69: 21 - 71: 2. There is a sense that Milton was aware of the Christic echoes in this passage, and perhaps allowed himself to indulge in a self-portrayal which could resonate in the mind of the contemporary reader, in such a way that his moral superiority would appear beyond dispute.

or social victories celebrated by the pagan writers, and so fiercely contested in the literature of his time, which by its very nature was designed for political ends. As a result, his leaders or "public figures" are all spiritual warriors with heavy responsibilities. This aspect of the traditional epic ideal is also something of a theological commonplace. Milton's innovation lies in his blending of secular and theological ideals into a single poetic framework. The central theme of the struggle in each work is huge in scope, involving whole peoples rather than individuals; the fate of the hero is connected to the fate of the people of God, and the adversary is the traditional foe of the people of God. We can see the same principle at work in the juxtaposition of Samson the man of God, and Harapha the man of the world. Samson himself is exposed initially as an example of the old style of heroism which relied upon physical strength rather than upon the strength of his faith or the will of God. His later regeneration and growing dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit underline Milton's affirmation of Christianity over classical values.[92] Renaissance theologians criticised the exploits and glorification of classical heroism, and two of the most representative points of view are those of Luther and Calvin. Luther argues that even the most exalted of the pagan enterprises were carnal and evil, taking his inspiration from Paul, Romans 3: 23, and declaring that they were void of the glory and the spirit of God. Their feats of valour, he declared, were performed for personal glory, and not for the greater glory of God. Consider this in the light of Samson's early career:

> ...when in strength
> All mortals I excell'd, and great in hopes
> With youthful courage and magnanimous thoughts
> Of birth from Heav'n foretold and high exploits,
> Full of divine instinct, after some proof
> Of acts indeed heroic, far beyond
> The Sons of *Anac*, famous now and blaz'd,
> Fearless of danger, like a petty God
> I walk'd about admir'd of all and dreaded
> On hostile ground, none daring my affront.
> (*SA* 522-31)

Calvin takes a milder view than Luther, acknowledging the virtues of pagan heroes, and contents himself with arguing that these are really due to God's special grace:

> In every age there have been persons who, guided by nature, have striven towards virtue throughout life...[These] have by the very zeal of their

[92] In this sense, Samson's turning away from the values of worldly heroism to become God's champion also follows Christ's rejection of classical learning in Paradise Regained. See Chapter 5.

> honesty given proof that there was some purity in their nature, [and their examples] seem to warn us against adjudging man's nature wholly corrupted, because some men have by its promptings not only excelled in remarkable deeds, but conducted themselves most honourably throughout life. But here it ought to occur to us that amid this corruption of nature there is some place for God's grace; not such grace as to cleanse it, but to restrain it inwardly.[93]

In the case of the unregenerate, such as the pagan heroes of antiquity, Renaissance theologians maintained that while God restrained some of them by means of the law, the inward restraining described above by Calvin was the restraint of shame. It is possible to see this theory applied in Milton to both Satan and Samson, but the dread of shame in Satan is very different from Samson's sincere repentance. Certainly, the self-pity which Samson displays at the opening of the drama might lead the reader to imagine that his shame is all for his own plight, but his quick defence of God against Manoa's disappointment shows the true colour of his misery:

> Father, I do acknowledge and confess
> That I this honour, I this pomp have brought
> To *Dagon*, and advanc'd his praises high
> Among the Heathen round; to God have brought
> Dishonour, obloquie, and op't the mouths
> Of Idolists, and Atheists; have brought scandal
> To *Israel*, diffidence of God, and doubt
> In feeble hearts, propense anough before
> To waver, or fall off and joyn with Idols;
> Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow,
> The anguish of my Soul, that suffers not
> Mine eie to harbour sleep, or thoughts to rest.
> (*SA* 448-59)

Calvin argued that "The heroism of the natural man results from God's providence - his desire to provide effective leaders for fallen man."[94] However their transient glory is recognised only by man, and not by God, as it is not dedicated to His glory. Here we can see the difference between the pagan hero and the hero of the Renaissance whose works on earth were for the glory of God and not man. Cromwell was engaged in God's business in the eyes of the Republicans, and as such fitted well with this notion of the true nature of heroism. Similarly, the concept of a hero who was set aside at birth was no innovation. Hebraic tradition justified the stature of its great men and women by the

[93] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, 1960) vol. 1: 270. As quoted Steadman, MEC 214.
[94] Steadman, MEC 214.

sanction of the divine will. Nazarites, set apart from the moment of their birth, and their birth itself often foretold in unusual circumstances, were often called by God to perform specific tasks of national concern to glorify God. The list is long: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samson, Samuel, David, Job, Jonah. Ultimately, their shadowing forth was of the birth and calling of the Messiah.

The Renaissance theologians also sought divine sanction for their heroic characters, and in order to explain their righteousness, and to reassure men of divine approval and guidance, used the doctrine which had become simultaneously the cornerstone and the stumbling block of the Reformed faith: predestined election. In order to appreciate Milton's expectations, not only of Cromwell, but of Adam and Samson as well, it is necessary to understand the Reformed theologians' views on election, reprobation, and the eternal decrees of God. These doctrines define Milton's approach, not only in the early pamphlets directed specifically at theological issues, but also in the final poems, where they have become germane to his message and purpose; delineating his characters, and shaping the epic events. To this end it is necessary to explore the influences which shaped Milton's theology, and his own personal response to them.

Chapter 4

From Calvinist to Arminian: Milton's belief in the rational and regenerative potential of mankind.

This chapter examines the theological influences reflected in Milton's work, proceeding from the understanding that these initially appear to be ambiguous. At the start of his career, in the anti-prelatical tracts, Milton takes a Calvinist stance, attacking the ceremonial Laudianism of the national church; and yet the influence of Arminian theology upon the final poems is marked. It is possible that Milton's theological attitudes became more moderate during the course of his life, as Calvin's did, and indeed the unconditional tolerance of his final prose argues that he had reached a point of intellectual equilibrium with other Protestant ideologies in an attempt to focus opposition against the Church of Rome. It is equally possible to argue that Milton's ideas did not change, and that the early antagonism which he shows for the ceremonial and sacramental aspects of the Church of England is entirely compatible with his later Arminian theology. The argument of this chapter therefore asserts two hypotheses; that the theology of Calvin has features which are shared by that of Arminius, and that the wave of anti-Calvinist ceremonialism which swept through the Church of England in the 1630s could be more accurately described as Laudianism rather than Arminianism.

The theology of Calvin and Arminius.

Like Arminius, Calvin wrote in reaction, claiming that the Reformation represented a recovery of the authentic teaching of the early church. His teachings were altered significantly by his followers after his death, largely in reaction to the political and intellectual environment of the time. They were termed Calvinist by their opponents, and their doctrines represented expediency rather than theological commitment, rendering them more a social and historical force than a theological system of belief. In an effort to distinguish themselves from the Lutherans, whose central tenet was justification by faith, they magnified the significance of their main point of difference, the doctrine of predestination. Calvin's own teaching has this as an ancillary doctrine, appended to his work on salvation, and he does not support the theory of limited atonement, one of the five points upheld at the Synod of Dort, but claims that election was in Christ alone rather than that Christ died for the elect alone. Moreover, Calvin links predestination to a life in Christ, illustrated by the visible life of the Christian within the church, nourished by prayer and the sacraments. There is unqualified support for this

vision in the theology of Arminius. Predestination was not a central tenet of Calvin's system of theology, but was rather an obsession of the later Reformed orthodoxy, namely the scholastic Calvinism of Beza, which propounded the supralapsarian[1] doctrine of predestination, and which provoked a widespread humanist reaction, exemplified by Amyraut[2] in France, and Arminius[3] in the Netherlands. The scholastic reformers demonstrated a deductive approach in opposition to the earlier analytical approach of reformers such as Calvin, and this change in methodology resulted in a theological system orientated from the perspective of God rather than man. It was ultimately responsible therefore for the ensuing emphasis upon the issues of predestination, the doctrine of limited atonement, and changes to the doctrine of faith. Scholastic reformers testified to the truth of scripture as a foundation for these doctrines, whereas Calvin declares predestination to be founded "upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."[4] The doctrine of predestination is central therefore to the theological debate, as it became perhaps the principal doctrine of Calvinism, both in itself, and as a gloss upon the nature of the sovereignty of God.

Arminius believed predestination to be a decree of the good pleasure of God in Christ, by which from eternity he determined within himself to justify believers, on whom he had decreed to bestow faith, to adopt them, and to save them. Reprobation he defined as a decree of the wrath of God, to condemn unbelievers to eternal death, who by their own fault and by the righteous judgement of God would not believe. Arminius did not believe in the necessity of original sin, and claimed that the fall was not inevitable, that is, man had been created good, and sufficient to have stood, although free to fall. He also denied the determinism of necessity, arguing that although God's decrees will come to pass, they do not do so by necessity, but rather because God has foreseen all contingencies. Arminius was guided by his belief in the priority of individual

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[1] Arminius categorises the other versions of the doctrine of predestination in his work, A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius, in a comprehensive treatment of his own views, and their relationship to the views of the other principal approaches to the doctrine. Supralapsarian predestinationists are so called because they believed that God's decree of predestination was made before man had been created, regardless of any foreseen merit or failing. Sublapsarians believed that when God viewed mankind as created and fallen, he determined to save some freely by his mercy, the remainder he left to judgement to express his justice. The main point of difference between these two categories of the doctrine is that the supralapsarians believed the fall to have been a predetermined means towards the implementation of the decree, whereas the sublapsarians believed the fall to have been an occasion of making this decree.

[2] Amyraut was a theology professor at the Academy of Saumur between 1626 and 1664.

[3] Arminius was born in 1559 and died in 1609. He matriculated at Geneva in 1582 where he met Theodore Beza, and was ordained in Amsterdam in 1588. He was appointed professor of theology at Leiden in 1603.

[4] Institutes III, ii, 7. As quoted B. G. Armstrong, Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France (Madison, Milwaukee & London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969)) 139 note 61.

conscience over the power of ecclesiastical authority, his personal motto being "A good conscience is a paradise". His belief in the value of the individual over the authority of the church is ironic given the appropriation of clerical power achieved in his name in England in the seventeenth century. Also the notion of the umpire conscience inspiring a paradise within strikes a chord with Milton's own writings, especially the final poems. Arminius preferred the teachings of the Greek theologians to the teachings of Augustine and the Latin fathers, showing his desire to recover the spirit of the ancient church, and it was this which shaped his whole theology, leading in turn to his disputations on the subject of predestination. Like Calvin, Arminius did not hold predestination as a central tenet from which to build a theological scheme, but rather his other doctrinal considerations shaped his protest against what had become the Reformed view of salvation. The main points at issue between Arminius, or the Remonstrants, and the established Reformed church, which was Calvinist, were all related to the predestination debate, and centred upon such considerations as justification, man's freewill, the divinity of Christ (an area called into question by the disputes over the part which Christ played in the predestination decree), irresistible grace, original sin, and the temptation to spiritual pride and moral apathy which could be argued to follow from a belief in one's own election. Many of these points were discussed at length in the Synod of Dort, and the area of theology which is included within this field encompasses the shades of disagreement which defined Calvinists and Remonstrants. In looking at these specific issues, the theological convictions of Calvin, Arminius, and where relevant, Milton, become more easily determined.

Calvin's main arguments are that all good comes from God, and therefore man's only free will is to perform evil; that the ordinances of God were set out in a specific order, and that the ordination of some to eternal life, established by God in the beginning, is counterbalanced by the decree of eternal death to the rest, and is unchangeable, unable to be affected either for salvation or for damnation by man's interference, as man cannot alter the decree of God. Calvin also discusses the difference between prescience and predestination in his opening chapter. This point gives Calvin's critics a convincing point of difference from his doctrine, and is the cornerstone of Arminius' own version of the doctrine. The concept of predestination can be rendered more palatable if one assumes that God foresaw the merits of each individual, and could judge their lives before their creation, rendering election or reprobation foreknown

rather than decreed, thereby mitigating the element of arbitrary despotism which characterises Calvin's portrayal of the nature of God. Calvin, however denies that salvation is related to "human worth or merit."[5] "Salvation is based on election, and election in turn is based on God's gratuitous good pleasure."[6] Also, as Augustine says, "grace does not find but makes men elect."[7] Paul, however, links predestination with foreknowledge: "those are predestinated whom God foreknew."[8] Calvin argues that God's foreknowledge was not of what the elect would be in themselves, but of what God himself could make of them; hence their faith was a gift, and did not spring from any particular virtue within them. Election, he declares, exists prior to faith and repentance, and is not dependent on them.[9] Furthermore, if faith, which is foreseen in the elect, is the true reason for election, then the reason for election is to be found outside God, and grace would therefore be offered equally to all, but only rendered efficacious by the will of man.

This point is addressed by Milton in Paradise Lost, where Christ points out the healing properties of God's universal grace, while acknowledging that man's will is impotent to seek the operation of grace:

> Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace;
> And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,
> The speediest of thy winged messengers,
> To visit all thy creatures, and to all
> Comes unprevented, unimplor'd, unsought,
> Happie for man, so coming; he her aide
> Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost;
> Attonement for himself or offering meet,
> Indebted and undon, hath none to bring:
> (*PL* 3: 227-35)

The point which Milton expresses in the words "he her aid/ Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost;" is also in accord with Arminius' discourse upon free will in Disputation XI, where he claims that when first created; "man had a mind endued with a clear understanding of heavenly light and truth concerning God, and his works and will, as far as was sufficient for the salvation of man and the glory of God; he had a heart imbued with "righteousness and true holiness," and with a true and saving love of good; and powers abundantly [instructas] qualified or furnished perfectly to fulfil the law which

[5]Institutes vol. 2, 535.
[6]Calvin, Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God Trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961) 12.
[7]C.E.P.G. 12.
[8]C.E.P.G. 14-15.
[9]C.E.P.G. 15.

God had imposed upon him."[10] However, after sin had corrupted him, man was subject to darkness of the mind, perverseness of the heart, and a weakness of all his powers to do good. Once regenerated through Christ, man is again capable of goodness, but only insofar as the Holy Spirit inspires him. Arminius describes grace as the gratuitous affection which God bestows kindly towards sinners, and can be seen firstly in the gift of his son to save mankind, and secondly in man's justification in Christ, whereby mankind is adopted to salvation. He defines grace further as an infusion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which pertain to renewal, a perpetual assistance through the Holy Spirit, and a continual aid; a portrayal of grace which is at one with Milton's. While Arminius held that many resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace which God offers, Calvin believed God's grace to be irresistible to man. He agrees that man plays a part in his own salvation, but the nature of this part is specific: "Thus the will [of man] without which indeed salvation is not obtainable, is consequent upon and not conditional for the operation of the mercy or grace of God."[11] This, as Reid observes in his introduction to Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God, "retracts the whole operation of election into the hands of God."[12]

Arminius also believes salvation to be unobtainable without the will of man, but his understanding of the part which freewill plays in salvation is that freewill saves, and that although grace is the source of salvation, the process requires two parties, God, the author of salvation, and man's freewill, the only recipient capable of salvation. Calvin would argue that man has no freewill, or at least, only a type of negative freewill which allows him to choose evil. However, he also declares that Adam fell because God deemed that he should. Milton's God in Paradise Lost knows through prescience that man will fall, and resolves to turn the situation to advantage for the cause of goodness:

> ...Man falls deceiv'd
> By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
> The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
> Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
> But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.
> (*PL* 3: 130-4)

Arminius suggests that God wills good and merely permits evil, as nothing can happen without the will of God, even if it is contrary to God's will. Calvin agrees with this,

[10]Arminius, The Works of James Arminius: The London Edition Trans. James and William Nichols Intro. Carl Bangs (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986) vol. II 191.
[11]C.E.P.G. 16.
[12]C.E.P.G. 16.

quoting from Augustine: "what is done against God's will is not done without God's will."[13] Milton illustrates the same belief in Paradise Lost:

> So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay
> Chain'd on the burning Lake, nor ever thence
> Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will
> And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
> Left him at large to his own dark designs,
> That with reiterated crimes he might
> Heap on himself damnation,
> (*PL* 1: 209-15)

The single most unpalatable issue to be drawn both from this part of Calvin's discourse, and from Milton's description, is the notion that the damned have no recourse to mercy. If God has decreed their destruction, there appears to be no prospect of grace or pardon. As Barker observes in his study, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, where he illustrates Milton's admiration for human intelligence, and his corresponding rejection of the doctrines of dependence advanced by the Puritan Revolution: "Not only were the evil damned through no responsibility of their own, but the elect were saved in spite of themselves."[14] Furthermore the argument, taken from Scripture, that God blinds the blind and hardens the stony-hearted, is one which is hard to reconcile with the concept of a loving God. Although the call of election is bestowed upon believers as an internal illumination of the spirit, Calvin opines; "Sometimes, however, he communicates it also to those whom he enlightens only for a time, and whom afterwards, in just punishment for their ingratitude, he abandons and smites with greater blindness."[15] There is an echo of this view in Manoa's distress at Samson's plight, and his criticism of God's capricious disregard for the elect. Milton himself arguably felt a similar sense of abandonment in his Godly cause after the Restoration, but we must assume, given the complex satirical patterns of Samson Agonistes, that Milton is not endorsing any criticism of God's purpose.

So did God predestine the fall into sin, or did Adam have a free choice? Calvin's argument relies upon the centrality of conscience. He declares that God implants his divine goodness in every man through the regulating spark of conscience: "Over against a thousand witnesses, the voice of conscience ought to suffice for us."[16] Arminius' belief

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[13] C.E.P.G. 19.
[14] A. E. Barker, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, (Toronto: Toronto U.P., 1942) 313-314.
[15] Institutes vol. 2, 591.
[16] C.E.P.G. 23.

in the value of conscience has already been outlined above, and Milton's words correspond:

> And I will place within them as a guide
> My Umpire *Conscience*, whom if they will hear,
> Light after light well us'd they shall attain,
> And to the end persisting, safe arrive.
> (*PL* 3: 194-7)

Calvin is not eloquent on the subject of man's freedom: the freedom of the Bible is the freedom to do the will of God, "whom to serve is perfect freedom," resulting in a freedom from the things "which would impede obedient service."[17] The choice of evil leads to bondage, and this is the only type of freedom which Calvin allows man to possess, arguing as Arminius does that man only chooses good when moved by grace. Man does not ratify his election by consent, nor is election doubtful unless confirmed by faith. Also, he who truly believes cannot fall away, and the elect are saved by God from falling into "unpardonable blasphemy" even before they have become aware of their call. This perseverance of the elect was discussed and ratified at the Synod of Dort. This reassurance does not detract from the desperate soul-searching undertaken by Puritan writers such as Bunyan, who in his Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners agonises continually about whether his love for God is great enough, and whether he stands on the side of the elect or of the damned.

The reactions of seventeenth-century theologians to the harshness of existing doctrines of predestination was mirrored in a tendency to move away from existing doctrines of justice and punishment. The uselessness of eternal punishment was emphasised: it neither deterred nor cured, but merely punished wickedness. The concept that God's justice is retributive or vindictive only, however, becomes invalid unless absolute free will is admitted, as man can only be punished justly for those sins which he could have avoided,[18] a concept which Calvin denies. Another argument was that Christ had atoned for man's sin, a theme which Milton depicts in Paradise Lost, when God declares that man must die, unless "Som other able, and as willing, pay / The rigid satisfaction, death for death." Christ replies, "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life / I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;"(*PL* 3: 211-12, 236-7). The contrast is between the

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[17] C.E.P.G. 27.
[18] D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). He continues: "This justification of vindictive justice does at least have the advantage that it apparently avoids making God punish a sin of which He Himself is the ultimate author." 45.

darkness of the repeated "death for death" in God's old covenant, and the light and hope of the reiterated "life for life" in Christ's new covenant. The dichotomy between judgement and forgiveness could hardly be more stark, and perhaps Milton's own rejection of the co-eternal nature of the Trinity is largely responsible. His argument in the De Doctrina rests upon the fact that there is no reference to the Triune nature of God in Scripture; Christ never states that he is three and one with the Father and the Spirit.[19]

Milton's theological orientation.

Milton appears to have held the views of an orthodox Calvinist in 1645, and evidently considered himself one, as this quotation from The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce shows:

> The Jesuits, and that sect among us which is nam'd of Arminius, are wont to charge us of making God the author of sinne in two degrees especially, 1. Because we hold that he hath decreed some to damnation, and consequently to sinne, say they: Next, because those means which are of saving knowledge to the others, he makes to them an occasion of greater sinne. Yet considering the perfection wherein man was created, and might have stood, no decree necessitating his free will, but subsequent though not in time yet in order to causes which were in his owne power, they might, methinks be perswaded to absolve both God and us.[20]

The echoes in Paradise Lost and in Paradise Regained of the sentence commencing "Yet considering the perfection wherein man was created and might have stood,"[21] are clear, and quite surprising: "...I made him just and right,/ Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. (...) Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell." (*PL* 3: 98-102) "...other Powers as great/ Fell not, but stand unshak'n, from within/ Or from without, to all temptations arm'd./ Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?" (*PL* 4: 63-6) "...freely we serve,/ Because wee freely love, as in our will/ To love or not; in this we

[19] Arminius also questions the Trinity, notably the elements of co-substantiality and co-essentiality, claiming that if God and Christ were one, then God had also been crucified, a heresy known as Patri-passionist which he rejects absolutely. He also maintains that the roles of the different elements of God are distinct, and should be regarded as such. God, he argues, is reconciled to man through the offices of Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit.

[20] Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 440-1. As quoted Maurice Kelley, This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* as a Gloss upon *Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1941) 14 .

[21] Milton would have been aware of the importance of the verb "to stand" in Reformation theology, notably in Luther. See also Ephesians 6:11, 13-14: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (...) Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;" Galations 5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the

stand or fall:" (*PL* 5: 538-40)

> There on the highest Pinnacle he set
> The Son of God; and added thus in scorn:
> There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright
> Will ask thee skill; I to thy Father's house
> Have brought thee, and highest plac't, highest is best,
> Now shew thy Progeny; if not to stand,
> Cast thy self down; safely if Son of God
> (*PR* 4: 549-55)

In 1673, in his last pamphlet, Of True Religion, where he attempts to draw all the branches of the Protestant church together, despite their differences in doctrine, in order to face the advance of Roman Catholicism, he defends the Calvinists, claiming that they are "not without plea of Scripture."[22] However, the De Doctrina, which asserts the fundamental freedom of man, denies the Calvinist theory of reprobation, arguing that God elects man to salvation only, emphasises the value of faith and repentance, denies that foreknowledge imposes necessity, and contends that God will reject only those who ultimately refuse to believe and to repent: "no-one is excluded by any decree of God from the pale of repentance and eternal salvation, unless it be after the contempt and rejection of grace, and that at a very late hour."[23] As a theological treatise it is an Arminian document in the true theological sense. In it, Milton also denies retributive justice, and claims that God rewards those whose merits he can foresee. Similarly, in the theology of Paradise Lost he takes an Arminian stance, in that his view of man, whom he believed should have responsibility and freedom, effects a rejection of the Calvinist God: "for the purposes of vindicating the justice of God...it is much better to allow to man...some portion of free will in respect of good works, or at least of good endeavors."[24] The doctrine of predestination is discussed at some length in the De Doctrina Christiana and this illuminates some aspects of Milton's beliefs on free will and foreknowledge, where his ideas are closely comparable to those of Arminius. He claims that divine necessity "imposes no constraint upon the liberty of free agents"[25] He continues:

> Nor do we imagine anything unworthy of God, when we assert that these conditional events depend on the human

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liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Philippians 4:1: "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved."

[22] As quoted Arthur Sewell, A Study in Milton's Christian Doctrine, (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford U.P., 1939) 110.

[23] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 157: 7-10.

[24] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 15, 213: 17-22.

[25] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 73: 20-21.

> will, which God himself has chosen to place at the free disposal of man; since the Deity purposely framed his own decrees...in order that he might permit free causes to act conformably to that liberty with which he had endued them.[26]

This is arguably a direct rejection of Calvinism. Calvin declared the first decree to be predestination, whereas Milton has made the first decree the freedom of man. The apostasy of the first man, therefore, was foreknown but not decreed: "it follows that predestination was not an absolute decree before the fall of man." Of man's responsibility for his actions, Milton says that God willed nothing absolutely which he left in the power of free agents. Man's actions, therefore, were independent of divine influence or compulsion, and whether or not Adam stood or fell depended on his own volition, for neither necessity nor the foreknowledge of God dictated Adam's behaviour.[27] Therefore with freedom placed as the first decree, Milton declares that God cannot obstruct this with a later decree, such as the satisfaction of justice, foreknowledge or predestination.[28] This wrests control out of the hands of the Calvinist God, and Milton's insistence upon the freedom of man places him firmly in the Arminian camp. As Kevin Sharpe argues in his work Criticism and Compliment: The politics of literature in the England of Charles I: "Where Milton really rejected Calvinism was in its inability to accept man's potential for reformation and innate goodness."[29] If Calvin were to have read Paradise Lost and the De Doctrina, he would have argued that Milton has exalted man above God. Milton's view of the rationality and freedom of man can be seen perhaps with even greater clarity in Samson Agonistes, where man's dignity is exalted, and his spirituality and virtue are emphasised.

Milton's discussion of predestination does not come under God's decrees, but forms a separate section. His first intention was to deny reprobation altogether: "It has been the practice...to use the word predestination, not only in the sense of election, but

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[26] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 73: 28 - 75: 6.
[27] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 65: 19-20.
[28] In her essay "The Politics of *Paradise Lost*" Radzinowicz emphasises the importance of freedom and rational choice to Milton's political vision and argues that Milton's defining use of freedom and choice in pre and post-lapsarian man is a political rather than a specifically theological conviction, and recalling Areopagitica: "It was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evill, as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World." Works vol. 4, 310 and "If every action, which is good, or evill in man at ripe years, were to be under pittance, and prescription, and compulsion, what were vertue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what grammercy to be sober, just or continent? many there be that complain of divin Providence for suffering *Adam* to transgresse, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions." Works vol. 4, 319, she contends that these offer a political reading of the fall. Politics of Discourse 220.
[29] Sharpe, Criticism and Compliment: 280-1. He continues by suggesting that Milton's "humanist convictions never surrendered to the logic of his religious beliefs, but cohabited with them at times, one senses, in uneasy tension." 281.

also of reprobation...wherever it is mentioned in Scripture, election alone is uniformly intended."[30] He supports his claim that we are predestined to salvation only, with extensive Scriptural quotation. Furthermore, he points out that the book of life has no companion volume: there is no book of death. He is careful to distinguish between the words predestination, election and reprobation:

> Election, therefore, is not a part of predestination; much less then is reprobation. For, speaking accurately, the ultimate purpose of predestination is salvation of believers, a thing in itself desirable, whereas the object which reprobation has in view is the destruction of unbelievers, a thing in itself ungrateful and odious; whence it is clear that God could never have predestinated reprobation, or proposed it to himself as an end.[31]

His scriptural support for this view is Ezekiel, 33:2, "as I live, said the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live," but he could equally well have chosen numerous verses from the New Testament. Certainly Milton's objections are the standard arguments against Calvin's doctrine of "double predestination," and most can be traced to the objections which Calvin attempts to answer in Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God. In Milton's writing, justice is only retributive against those who have sinned and have chosen to do so consciously: "But God did not make man wicked, much less did he make him so "for himself". All that he did was to sentence the wicked to deserved punishment, as was most fitting, but he did not predestinate him who was innocent to the same fate."[32] Milton is taking issue here with Proverbs, xvi:4, "Jehovah hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Milton admits that man is liable to sin: "sin originated...in the liability to fall with which man was created, whereby he, as the devil had done before him, 'abode not in the truth'."[33] He claims that election is entirely dependent upon faith and belief, and that this characterises God's foreknowledge: "Those therefore who were about to love, that is, to believe in God, God foreknew or approved... those whom he thus foreknew, he predestinated, and called them that they might believe; those who believed, he justified."[34] His criteria for salvation therefore are the faith and good works

[30] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 91: 9-13.
[31] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 99: 18-25.
[32] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 95: 24-28.
[33] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 15, 181: 16-21.
[34] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 123: 9-14.

recommended in the teaching of Arminius, and the Calvinist concept of perseverance.

However, in his artistic works, he has greater difficulty in extricating himself fully from Calvinist doctrines. The first words spoken to the Son by God the Father draw his attention to Satan, "bent on revenge." Indeed, the reader's attention has been held by Satan since the opening of the poem: for all that the first lines claim that the subject of the poem is to be "man's first disobedience," at this point in Book 3, there has been narration only of Satan's disobedience. God declares that Satan's lies will influence man, and that man will "easily transgress the sole command, / Sole pledge of his obedience:" Milton knew as well as Calvin that this would raise the question of why God permitted Adam to be tempted; an issue addressed specifically in Paradise Regained, emphasised through parallels to the book of Job, and thereby also linked to Samson Agonistes; but for Milton, the answer lay in his argument that the prime divine decree was that man should have free will:

> ...no Decree of mine
> Concurring to necessitate his Fall,
> Or touch with lightest moment of impulse
> His free Will,
> (*PL* 10: 43-6)

He declares that were man not free but motivated by God's will, then his love, obedience and faith would be worthless to God:

> Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere
> Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
> Where onely what they needs must do, appeard,
> Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
> (*PL* 3: 103-6)

As Patrides observes in his study of Milton and the Christian Tradition: "The introduction of evil into a universe controlled by an omnipotent God was a problem that Renaissance apologists endeavoured to explain by the traditional theory of 'permissive evil'."[35] Calvin denied that there was any difference between God's will and God's permission, but Milton argues in the De Doctrina that God permits the existence of evil "by throwing no impediment in the way of natural causes and free agents." Milton's God discusses the fate of the elect, but "elect" to Milton meant beloved or all believers, rather than the elite minority which Calvin had in mind. Milton avoids making God the

[35] C.A. Patrides, Milton and the Christian Tradition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966) 95. Note; Peter Sterry, A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will (1675) 23: "The will of God is commonly and rightly distinguished into *positive* and *permissive*. Evil is by the permissive, Good from the positive Will of God."

author of sin, by insisting that free will and therefore responsibility is man's alone. God cannot be held responsible in Milton's theology for man's evil or for man's choices. So, having established that man will fall, and that God can foresee that this will happen, the questions remain: was man sinful before the fall? Had he the potential for evil, and if so, where did it come from? Was he therefore created with the potential for evil? With regard to the fall, Milton is clear:

> ...whose fault?
> Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
> All he could have; I made him just and right,
> Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
> (*PL* 3: 96-9)

According to Calvin, Adam had no free choice but to choose evil, but Milton claims that would implicate God in man's own freewill:

> As if predestination over-rul'd
> Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
> Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
> Thir own revolt, not I:
> (...)
> So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
> Or ought by me immutablie foreseen,
> They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
> (*PL* 3: 114-17, 120-2)

So Milton too holds man entirely culpable, but his portrayal of God is closer to that which may be seen in the teachings of Arminius.

Milton regards the command not to eat the fruit of the tree as a pledge of obedience. Arminius also regarded it as a token, or a covenant, arguing that God had ordered love in man so that self-love was not paramount, enabling him to live in harmony with mankind, with God, and with himself. This is the first and most important kind of obedience, and is pleasing to God. The fruit of the forbidden tree, he continues, was a matter of indifference to God, a mere token, but as a gesture of willing obedience it demonstrated that man was prepared to yield to God as a superior power.[36] Thus Adam and Eve's fault, at a fundamental level, was disobedience to the only command which they had to obey, and it demonstrates a disinclination to accept God's commands without question. Eve's fault is much the same as the devil's; Satan had tried to attain to the throne of God, as the reader is made aware in Satan's soliloquy at the beginning of

[36] Arminius, Works, vol. II Disputation XXIX, 369-70.

Book 4, lines 40 to 75. The words echo the fall of man as foretold by God in Book 3 much too closely to be accidental, and in this soliloquy we have a portrait of the reprobate mind,[37] where the grace of God is absent. Satan cannot even repent:

> ...is there no place
> Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
> None but by submission; and that word
> *Disdain* forbids me, and my dread of shame
> (...)
> But say I could repent and could obtaine
> By Act of Grace my former state; how soon
> Would higth recal high thoughts, how soon unsay
> What feign'd submission swore: ease would recant
> Vows made in pain, as violent and void.
> (...)
> Which would but lead me to a worse relapse
> And heavier fall: so should I purchase deare
> Short intermission bought with double smart.
> (*PL* 4: 79-82, 93-7, 100-3)

Eve also desires to be like God, and Satan makes use of her desire to be superior in order to tempt her. First he tempts her with the promise of life and knowledge, and then assails her obedience, replacing it with courage: a greater virtue for a classical hero, but a lesser one to a Christian Renaissance poet:

> ...will God incense his ire
> For such a petty Trespass, and not praise
> Rather your dauntles vertue, whom the pain
> Of Death denounc't, whatever thing Death be,
> Deterrd not from atchieving what might leade
> To happier life, knowledge of Good and Evil;
> Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil
> Be real, why not known, since easier shunnd?
> (*PL* 9: 692-9)

John Seaman has argued that Satan follows the classical pattern of the anti-hero, and outlines some of the conventions associated with the antagonist: "...his vulnerability because forsaken by the gods, his early triumph over the lesser hero, [man] his defense of a doomed kingdom, and the rashness or *hybris* which brings about his fall...all...define Satan."[38] He continues: "The tragic pathos which accompanies the conventional hero's fall and recognition of his fate is only momentarily glimpsed in Milton's Satan, for he

[37] A point also made by John Stachniewski in The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
[38] John E. Seaman, The Moral Paradox of *Paradise Lost*, (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1971) 66.

spurns repentance and fixes his course toward despair, malice and damnation."[39] It is Satan's very nature which will not let him repent: God says in Book 3 that unlike the case of man, there is no grace for Satan.[40] The loss of support from God and the turning to despair characterise the reprobate, and can be seen elsewhere in the literature of the period. Stachniewski observes in his study of Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair: "It was Calvin's activation of the idea of reprobation as the condition of a species of psychological experience that made Satan possible."[41] It made Faustus and Macbeth equally possible. Helen Gardner argues this point in her discussion of parallel texts of the period, and goes on to explain that: "The terrible distinction between devils and men in popular theory lay in the irreversibility of the fall of the angels. Unlike men, the fallen angels were incapable of repentance and so for them there was no pardon."[42] This could equally well apply to the difference between Calvin's reprobate and elect. The reprobate could not repent, or if they did for a while, God punished their ingratitude by making it an occasion of deeper damnation. As Gardner observes: Macbeth and Faustus present "in human terms this incapacity for change to a better state. It never occurs to us that Macbeth will turn back, or indeed that he can" and Faustus is addressed thus by another character:

> Though thou hast now offended like a man,
> Do not persever in it like a devil;
> Yet, yet thou hast an aimiable soul,
> If sin by custom grow not into nature.[43]

This is reminiscent of the unregenerate, whose sin is not "an act committed by mistake," but rather "an error of the will."[44] The problem of determinism resurfaces in Paradise Lost each time we hear Satan's thoughts, simply because he presents the image of a creature driven by necessity, and unable either to act differently in the first place, or to repent now. This is a constant reminder of the reprobate state of mind, as Stachniewski comments: "That Satan once had free will becomes as irrelevant...as was Calvin's belief that Adam had been free before the Fall."[45] The absolute freedom of man forms a striking contrast to the plight of the fallen angels, and in some measure emphasises the

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[39] Seaman 72.
[40] See *PL* 3: 129-32
[41] Stachniewski 337.
[42] Helen Gardner, Milton's Satan and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy, from A Reading of *Paradise Lost*: The Alexander Lectures in the University of Toronto, 1962 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 100.
[43] Gardner 101.
[44] Gardner 102.
[45] Stachniewski 337.

warmth of God's attitude to man, and his willingness to forgive. Thus, while Calvin opposed the laxity of doctrines of self-dependence and the validity of works, Milton opposed the repressive doctrines which exaggerate man's dependence upon God, and inability to do good himself. Stachniewski suggests that Satan and the reprobate enthral themselves because they are "characterised by the underlying conviction that they had no control over their destiny, that they were prisoners of powers greater than their will."[46] This shifts the blame for their natures away from their creator, avoiding, as Milton does, the theological quicksand of arguing that God created evil, and thereby transferring the problem to the perception of the individual. The parallel between Satan and fallen man is outlined by Stachniewski thus, "Satan's redemption is forfeit immediately at his fall, just as for Calvin, human free will was forfeited at the fall."[47] Although Milton rejected the predestinarian teaching of Calvin, and embraced the teaching of Arminius, he seems to retain the doctrine of eternal punishment. Satan chose freely like man, but unlike man once Satan has chosen, the die is cast: not for him the prospect of repentance and last minute pardon. In Milton's theology, God's strength lies in his determination not to interfere. Milton manages thereby to justify the actions and decrees of his God, and deflects the charge of unfairness, but in order to do so he has to introduce a very clear cut conception of good and evil, life and death: "If thou stand, thou shalt abide in Paradise; if thou fall, thou shalt be cast out; if thou eat not the forbidden fruit, thou shalt live; if thou eat, thou shalt die."[48] Certainly this stance is grounded in Scripture: in Genesis, the choice is just as clearly defined as it is here, but it does rather highlight the plight of the reprobate, who are condemned by their very natures, and appear to be inextricably bound to their fate. Therefore, although he has managed largely to reject Calvin from the statements of his theology in the De Doctrina, and from his exalted portrayal of man in Paradise Lost, he has allowed hints of the doctrine of predestination to creep into the epic in the form of the reprobate disguised as Satan, a Calvinist serpent in his Arminian Eden. From Milton's final poems alone, it is clear how closely the teachings of Calvin and Arminius can be entwined to form a coherent doctrine.

Laudianism and Arminianism.

The major issues of Arminianism had already been fought in England, long

[46] Stachniewski 357.
[47] Stachniewski 356.
[48] De Doctrina, Works, vol. 14, 81: 9-11.

before the Arminian controversy itself arose, largely by such men as Richard Hooker, Peter Baro, and Lancelot Andrewes.[49] The Cambridge Platonists were part of the same humanist reaction to extreme Calvinism which had propelled theologians like Amyraut and Arminius into controversial debate. Nicholas Tyacke in his study Anti-Calvinists[50] agrees with Porter in his definition of the Cambridge Platonists as "Arminians *avant la lettre*,"[51] and while their theological disputations are of interest in comparison with the views of Arminius, it is their place in the development of the politico-religious structure of the English church which is of special relevance here. When William Barrett publicly challenged the doctrine of Calvinist predestination at Cambridge in 1595, Archbishop Whitgift finally intervened. In consultation with Archbishop Hutton of York, he composed the doctrinal rulings which came to be known as the Lambeth Articles, which are "unequivocally Calvinist and [which] provide an accurate index of received Church of England teaching."[52] As Tyacke has pointed out, this effectively suppressed Arminianism in England until the end of the second decade of the seventeenth century. However the conflict between Calvinism and the humanist rejection of predestination was not altogether suspended. The Hampton Court Conference in 1604 saw the first public airing of the predestination dispute outwith the confines of the two universities. It arose following the Puritan activity occasioned by the accession of James to the throne.[53] Puritan clergy and gentry hoped that the Scottish king would be able to influence the state of the English Church, and act in their favour at a conference between the English hierarchy and the puritans. They were to be disappointed. Their request that the Lambeth Articles should be appended to the Thirty-nine Articles was rejected. However there were some changes made to the Prayer Book, limiting the administration

[49] The Cambridge theological debate began between 1590 and 1600 on the subject of election. Peter Baro (ordained in 1573 by Calvin) advocated universal grace, the universal saving will of God, free will, and the death of Christ for all men. William Barrett considered the loss of justifying faith, and the limits to the assurance of salvation, and Lancelot Andrewes argued that no-one could be secure in their certainty of salvation. He also claimed that grace was offered to all men. (These are just a few of the significant men in the movement known as Cambridge Platonism.)

[50] Anti-Calvinists were critical of the Calvinist teaching on grace, and advocated decorous public worship centred on the Prayer Book, in which divine grace became available to all through prayer and the sacraments. They believed the national church to be defined primarily by its unbroken episcopal succession. The first coherent exposition of this strand of Protestantism came from Richard Hooker in the 1590s, and they have also been called Arminians or Laudians. Anti-Calvinists as a label does little to express the positive programme of reform which these Protestants sought, and Arminianism is theologically inexact as a description of their aims and beliefs. Although Laud was more concerned about sacramentalism than about theology, and although he himself is limited to a specific time, the term Laudianism is perhaps the most accurate of the above.

[51] Tyacke, Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640 Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1987) 4., n. 11

[52] Tyacke, A-C 5.

[53] James I's approach to the Church of Rome, which was to maintain that it was merely a church in error; and his profession that the Church of England was true to antiquity led him to state that the English church was not cut off from Rome, but was merely protesting temporarily until the Roman Catholic abuses could be cleared at a council. It is this attempt by James to meet the Church of Rome halfway which is the true root of Laudianism, and not the mainstream Protestant theology of Arminius, as has often been argued. In this I agree with the arguments put forward by Peter White in his essay "The *via media* in the early Stuart Church." ESC, 223.

of the sacrament of baptism to clergy, and thereby detracting from the saving role which it offered. This question of the sacrament of baptism is particularly relevant to the Calvinist debate, as belief in the doctrine of predestination, and belief in the efficacy of the sacraments were of necessity in inverse proportion, as the latter challenges the absolute nature of the former.

The intermediate position of the Church of England, delicately balanced between the Church of Rome and the truly Reformed Churches of the continent and Scotland, was one which was easily inclined by the emerging political influences of the seventeenth century. Charles's accession to the throne signalled the inevitable decline of English Calvinism, and as Tyacke observes, within ten days of the death of King James, "Laud had submitted to Buckingham a schedule of leading clergy, tabulated on the basis of 'O[rthodox]' and 'P[uritan]', for perusal by the new monarch."[54] This illustrates the inclination of the new king, but his personality is perhaps more tellingly revealed in this anecdote from Tyacke. The Arminian Bishop Richard Montagu asked Charles to defend him with the sword, saying that in return he would defend the king with the pen. The Calvinist George Carlton retorted that Charles should defend the truth and the faith over which it was his duty to preside, and God would defend him. Charles chose the former, favouring "a clerical group prepared to preach up monarchical authority in defence of its beliefs."[55] This represents in part the difference in temperament between Charles and James. James had sought a peaceful relationship between his three kingdoms in promoting Calvinist episcopalianism, whereas Charles sought uniformity of practice throughout the realms, using Laudian Anglicanism as the closest available example of primitive purity in discipline and doctrine for the church. His attempts to enforce this led to hostility in all three kingdoms to the anti-Calvinism which he promoted. While James sought to impose his personality through the spoken word, and his unusually fine command of the language, Charles used visual symbolism and outward ceremony to communicate with his subjects.[56] This can be seen not only in microcosm by comparing the discursive work of James, The Trew Law of Free Monarchies with the gaudy pseudo-mysticism of Eikon Basilike, but also in their response to and manipulation of the state church. Where James emphasised the preaching of the word, and responded to

[54] Tyacke, A-C 167.
[55] Tyacke, A-C 181.
[56] Ben Jonson complained that in the masques of the 1630s, "the elements of visual imagery and display came to predominate over the dramatic text." Fincham, ESC 47-8.

both Calvinist and Arminian clergy, Laud promoted the visual impact of the altar, railed in at the east end of the churches, the visual spectacle of the Prayer Book service, and the theatricalism of the Eucharist. James had said "No bishop, no king" in support of his view of the structure of the Church and state. In his attempts to structure both, in order that they might reflect his own personal glory, under Charles it became a case of no king, no bishop.[57]

Charles brought a combination of neurosis and determination to the throne which manifested itself in frequent suspicions that conspiracies were being plotted against him, rendering him constantly obsessed with threats to order in the church and state. The suspicion of a puritan conspiracy against the crown was not, of course, unique to Charles, (it had been entertained by both James and Elizabeth), but in Charles it attained new proportions, as the series of disastrous parliamentary sessions of 1625 to 1629 show. Charles used the power of anti-Calvinist churchmen against not only the puritans but the parliament as well, mixing politics with religion to a level unprecedented even under James. Controversial decisions were taken as early as 1625, when publications on predestination were suppressed. In June 1626, a Proclamation was issued attempting to settle disputes over predestination, when Charles acted under the advice of some of his anti-Calvinist bishops, and prohibited further discussion by preaching or writing. A Royal Declaration followed in November 1628 against contentious preaching on the subject of predestination. Parliament became involved through their concern at the rise of so-called Arminianism, although they too were driven by issues other than theology. The political situation was becoming difficult not only at home, but abroad, as the massacre at La Rochelle in October 1628 signalled the nadir of Protestant fortunes in Europe. The fear of invasion coupled with rumours of a popish conspiracy gave rise to an atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty which affected both Church and state. Charles sought to reform the court, the Church, and the commonwealth by affirming dignity, distance, and awe before the royal presence, exploiting the aspect of divine right which associated the monarch with God, and restoring ritual and ceremony to both sacred and secular practices. His motivation however was not theological, but political, and sometimes also financial. In his struggle for adequate revenue and untrammelled authority, as much as supreme governor in an episcopalian church as in the state, Charles found an able and willing supporter in William Laud.

[57] White, ESC 230.

Laud as a political force and adapter of the church has been well documented by historians, and his part in the rise of the phenomenon known as English Arminianism is well known. However, a brief consideration of his theological ideology is worth noting with regard to this argument. Laud's religion, as Tyacke observes, reflected the ethos of the Roman Catholic foundation of his Oxford college, St. John's.[58] Laud held an extremely exalted view of the episcopacy, believing that only a bishop could lawfully confer orders, and maintaining therefore that the continental and Scottish Reformed clergy were not legitimate. He argued that worship should be conducted in set forms, and should be constructed around the holy communion, rather than the sermon. His substitution of the Eucharist for God's operation of grace through election denies the central focus of the doctrine of predestination and of Calvinism itself. He had an intense concern with the material fabric of the church, and sought to promote beautiful buildings with lavish ornament and vestments. His other great concerns were for liturgy and ceremony, with the significance of prayer far surpassing that of preaching, and the sacrament at the very heart of the Christian religion. In order to reflect this, he made his famous and controversial decision to move the communion tables to the east end of the churches, and to fix them there permanently, railing them off; and changing them from tables at which the Lord's Supper might be remembered and shared, to altars, at which only the priest might assist.[59] The division between clergy and laity is apparent, as is the approach towards a more Roman Catholic style of worship. This is seen clearly in the Laudian desire for a uniformity of public worship throughout the land, with all congregations kneeling, sitting and praying in unison. It is evident from this brief outline that these views would accord well with the desires and ambitions of the king, and Laud had an ally in Charles. Peter Lake has suggested in his essay "The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s" that Laudianism is "a shorthand term for the policies and religious temper of the Personal Rule" and he affirms that it "did exist as a coherent, distinctive and polemically aggressive vision of the Church, the divine presence in the world and the appropriate ritual response to that presence."[60] The irate polemic of Milton's anti-prelatical prose may now be correctly

[58] Tyacke, ESC 55.
[59] Thus Milton's anger in Of Reformation: "the Table of Communion now become a Table of separation stands like an exalted platforme upon the brow of the quire, fortifi'd with bulwark, and barricado, to keep off the profane touch of the Laicks, whilst the obscene, and surfeted Priest scruples not to paw, and mammock the sacramentall bread, as familiarly as his Tavern Bisket..." Works vol. 3 part 1, 19: 5-11.
[60] Lake, ESC 163.

assigned to Laudianism, and not to Arminianism, as might previously have been argued. His horror of the liturgy, and of the vestments worn by the priest can be seen to refer directly to the innovations proposed by Laud:

> deck't...not in robes of pure innocency, but of pure Linnen, with other deformed, and fantastick dresses in Palls, and Miters, gold, and guegaw's fetcht from *Arons* old wardrope, or the *Flamins vestry*: then was the *Priest* set to *con his motions*, and his *Postures* his *Liturgies*, and his *Lurries*, till the Soule by this meanes of over-bodying her selfe, given up justly to fleshly delights, bated her wing apace downeward...forgot her heavenly flight, and left the droyling carcas to plod on in the old rode, and drudging Trade of outward conformity.[61]

However we compare the points on predestination, the belief in the efficacy of divine grace as it is manifested in the sacraments, or the views on the position of the altar and the font,[62] it is clear that Laudianism and Arminianism are not the same thing. The latter is a term devised after the death of Arminius to describe the theological views of the Remonstrants, whose humanism corresponded at least in part with the theological position held by Arminius. The former, though, aside from the differences in theological matters, is peculiar to the Church of England in the seventeenth century, and has as much to do with political expediency and social structuring as it has with theology. This is not to say that Laud intended that to be the case, but the religious reforms which he sought to make to English Calvinism merged with the ethos of the Personal Rule, and combined with the social forces of the times to create a movement in the church which gathered a momentum of its own. Moreover in talking of reform, it is also useful to consider the claims to restoration rather than innovation which were made by Laud and his contemporaries.[63]

The current critical debate has polarised and oversimplified the various patterns which emerge from the theological debates of the seventeenth century, and Fincham outlines some of the differences in opinion which typify this problem. Many critics, among them Fielding, Fincham, Lake and Tyacke have argued that the anti-Calvinist interest triumphed in the later 1620s, and then implemented policies which marked a

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[61] Of Reformation, Works vol. 3 part 1, 2: 18 - 3: 2.

[62] Under Laud, the font was moved from its original position at the front of the church, to the door, in order to signify the progression from baptism to communion which acts as a metaphor for the Christian life.

[63] Laud was not, of course, an isolated figure. I quote from Tyacke, ESC 70: "From 1633 onwards Laud at Canterbury, Neile at York and Juxon at London oversaw a coherent reform programme centring on doctrine and worship. The intellectual roots ran back to the Elizabethan period, but only came to fruition under Charles I. Eclipsed in the mid-seventeenth century, the movement was to re-emerge at the Restoration as a major directing force."

significant break with the past, forming a new strand of English Protestantism which threatened the dominant Protestant tradition of the previous sixty years. Others, including Bernard, Hill, Sharpe and White have argued instead that official policy in the 1630s "represented traditional conformist concerns of obedience and order against unruly puritans and lax clergy and laity."[64] Official Caroline policy did represent a departure from previous tradition, but as Fincham admits, it did have clear antecedents. So too did Laudianism; as I have argued above, the signs of an emerging reaction against the strictures of Calvinism had been apparent long before the 1630s. The roots of Arminianism lie in the continent, and the antecedents of Laudianism far back in the reign of James, or possibly even Elizabeth.[65] Calvinism itself had once been regarded as an innovation, although Calvin himself claimed to be true to antiquity. Charles and Laud also claimed to be restoring original practices, but then Cromwell was to claim the same thing. Current historiography offers two mutually exclusive visions, as Lake has observed, "Arminian innovation and radicalism" versus "Laudian conservatism and moderation."[66] He suggests that the reality might be more accurately perceived as "a number of positions, preferences, opinions, jumbled together, pushing their proponents this way and that and colliding, as always, with the demands of political prudence, personal ambition and the forces of court faction and royal whim."[67] While the traditional argument for a clash between traditional and non-conformist, or Anglican versus puritan has been partially superseded by Tyacke and others arguing for a conflict between Calvinist and Arminian, the reality lacks this clear distinction. So it is in Milton, and while we can see that his early prose attacks the ceremonial Anglicanism of Laud, rather than the humanism of Arminius, his own early theological beliefs are not entirely clear. What is clear is that the Arminian theology of the De Doctrina, and the Arminian humanism of the final poems indicate that Milton too found the predestinarian doctrines of supralapsarian Calvinism distasteful. As such he is a part of the movement against absolute Calvinism which swept Europe. Like many others, however, his theological convictions did not embrace the replacement of Calvinism, but rather its reformation: "God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, ev'n to the

[64] Fincham, ESC 13.
[65] White, ESC 213.
[66] Lake, ESC 164.
[67] Lake, ESC 163.

reforming of Reformation it self."[68]

[68] Areopagitica, Works vol. 4, 340: 21-25.

Chapter 5

The 1671 volume: Milton's recapitulation of the paradise within.

This chapter considers the ways in which Paradise Regained clarifies and informs the reader's understanding of Samson Agonistes, and the effect which their joint publication achieves. The natural conclusion to the polemical writings has often been assumed to be Paradise Lost, and indeed there are numerous arguments for various political interpretations of the work. It follows the prose chronologically in its publication, and in its vast literary range, covers most of Milton's perennial concerns.[1] However others have suggested that the grandeur of the work is too great to be subsumed into an overtly political message, and that the idea of "Paradise Lost as opposition poetry feels too narrow for the enormous range of the epic."[2] There is however, a sense that the impetus of the prose: that the solution to political crisis lay "in the cultivation of virtue, the point of which in turn is to ensure that individuals will serve the commonwealth more effectively,"[3] is also the impetus of Paradise Lost, and that contemporary disinclination to absorb the message of the paradise within, happier far, led Milton to articulate his purpose anew in the 1671 volume. Brown suggests that "The poem leaves the reader...with a world of choice, solitary, self-responsible, yet with Providence their guide. The understanding of nations is much as with the understanding of individuals: free determination, subject to correction or to blessing, but within a providential frame."[4] This message is carried into the 1671 volume, but Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes together embody the central concerns of the polemical writing in a more readily accessible, and more easily recognised form.[5]

Any consideration of Samson Agonistes must of necessity entail a consideration of Paradise Regained, as the additional and first part of the 1671 volume, and inasmuch as the one clarifies and informs the other, there has been percipient critical debate, from

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[1] See especially Book 12: 504-40 and 97-101. Armitage claims Paradise Lost to be "an epic narrative which with hindsight could be seen as critical of the kind of policies pursued by the Protectorate in the later 1650s and which was consistent with the Sallustian-Machiavellian analysis of the fatal temptations of empire for a newly liberated commonwealth. This was a conviction which later informed *Paradise Regained*..." Armitage, Milton and Republicanism 215.

[2] Zwicker, Politics of Discourse 247. This definition could be applied more easily to the 1671 volume, although it does not comprise all of the concerns of the works.

[3] Dzelzainis, Milton and Republicanism 14.

[4] Brown, Milton and Republicanism 60. That this result had not been achieved, or indeed recognised in Paradise Lost may have prompted Milton to publish the 1671 volume.

[5] If any one of the three final poems had to stand alone as a conclusion to Milton's life's concerns, or as the culmination to the polemical writings, then I believe that it would be Samson Agonistes. This is not to suggest that the three works are unrelated. Comparative studies of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained have yielded interesting discoveries. See Mary W. Carpenter, "Milton's Secret Garden." MS 14 (1980): 153-82 for a discussion of the numerical balance and the symmetry between the ten temptations of Paradise Regained, and the ten sections of Michael's prophecy in Books 11 and 12 of Paradise Lost. Also Gordon Teskey, "Balanced in Time: Paradise Regained and the Centre of the Miltonic Vision." UTQ 50 (1981): 269-83. Teskey suggests that man's perfection is everywhere implied in Milton's poetry, but occurs nowhere. Christ, however, is the perfect image of standing and waiting: "The apocalyptic redemption is the far boundary of a vision that begins with the loss of paradise, and which has Christ's mission at its centre, converting man's fall into history into a resurrection from time." 273. See also below for discussion of the links between the three final poems.

which the primary areas of discussion are considered briefly below. The publication of these two poems in one volume is itself a cause for deliberation, although most critics agree with the premise that they were meant to be published as a complete volume. Balachandra Rajan, in his essay "To which is added Samson Agonistes," points out that Milton's cohesive strategy is clearly visible in the interrelation of all his major poems, and suggests that Milton wished to express something specific through his juxtaposition of the two works in the one volume. His exploration of the similarities between the works includes their parallel multiple temptation motifs, the blind obedience which characterises the approaches of the two protagonists,[6] and the parallel climaxes, where the central character, having fulfilled the will of God, withdraws himself totally from the situation; Christ stands upon the temple pinnacle and casts down Satan in retribution, and Samson casts down the temple itself, but both enact retribution against God's enemies. Rajan regards the words "to which is added" as laconic understatement, and urges the reader to take them "as indicating that the end is both what it should be and what it was felt to be from the beginning."[7]

These words, "To which is added Samson Agonistes," have generated great curiosity, inspiring readers to ask whether the second poem was included as an afterthought, or as padding to fill out a slim volume, which was only intended to be a sequel to Paradise Lost. John T. Shawcross argues that the two were never meant to be published together, and indeed were written at different times. He claims that they were released together as an opportunity to clear out a previously unpublished work, much as the Prolusions were added to Milton's letters in 1674.[8] However, given the scrupulous consideration which Milton clearly gave to his creative works, it seems unlikely that he would present his readership with two such carefully crafted works in so careless a manner. Arthur E. Barker sums up the interpretative difficulties in his essay "Calm Regained through Passion Spent: The Conclusions of the Miltonic Effort," by pointing out the impropriety of passing from the imperturbability of Christ to the perturbingly painful experience of the defeated Samson: "Why should we be invited to contemplate first the unswerving rectitude of a hero whose spiritual triumph we must regard as a

[6] Christ may be considered "blind" according to the school of thought which believed that he sacrificed his omniscience when he took human form.
[7] The Prison and the Pinnacle Papers to commemorate the tercentenary of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes 1671-1971 Ed. Balachandra Rajan (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) "To Which Is Added Samson Agonistes" 110.
[8] John T. Shawcross, Paradise Regain'd: Worthy t'have not remain'd so long unsung (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1988) 16.

foregone conclusion, and then the misery in failure of one of the most fallible of Old-Testament national heroes?"[9] He also suggests that Paradise Regained encapsulates "the harmonious vision of spirituality" towards which Milton was striving, and that Samson Agonistes represents "the painfully guilty despair of defeat and the difficulty of struggling out of that towards vision." His understanding of this problem is that the two poems are in effect in reverse order, and that to have Samson Agonistes precede Paradise Regained, as type precedes truth, would follow historical, and testamentary chronology. The modern reader can only assume that Milton would not have allowed the effect of both of these poems to be distorted by publishing them in the wrong order; hence there must be a valid literary, aesthetic and interpretative purpose behind the existing order. William Madsen also identifies the vision of the mature Milton in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, namely the striving towards an internal paradise, and the realisation that revolution had to come from within, and he too finds Samson Agonistes strangely at odds with this ideal, claiming that it "seems to run counter to the whole tenor of his mature thought as expressed in his two epics."[10] In order to explain this apparent difficulty he suggests that either Samson Agonistes constitutes a return to earlier beliefs, as Harold Fisch does also, or that the reader is supposed to minimise the differences between the two epics and the tragedy, by regarding the latter in the light of a Christian play. However, as Madsen himself points out, Samson Agonistes does not read like a Christian play, and it is "very difficult to transmute the muscular Samson into a Christian athlete, and even more difficult to make Christians of Manoa and the Chorus."[11] Madsen illustrates this argument with those of other critics who have experienced difficulties in understanding the published order of the 1671 volume, among them Tillyard, who suggests that Milton regained his faith in the power of action after writing Paradise Regained, and consequently wrote Samson Agonistes to redress the balance; and Stein and Hanford who denied the Christianity of Samson Agonistes to the extent that Christ becomes irrelevant to man's salvation. Madsen himself argues that Samson Agonistes, in order to be understood as a companion piece to the two epics, must be read typologically; the action of one balancing the passion of the other, the letter against the spirit, or the flesh opposing the word. This argument destroys

[9] Barker, The Prison and the Pinnacle 13.
[10] William G. Madsen, From Shadowy Types to Truth: Studies in Milton's Symbolism (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968) 183.
[11] Madsen 184-5.

something of the profound universality of Samson Agonistes, and can be refuted simply by the order of publication. If Milton had intended Samson Agonistes to be the type, and Paradise Regained to be the fulfilling, all-encompassing truth which sweeps away shadowy type, then he would have published them the other way round. As it is, truth is succeeded by type, and the divine image is followed by the individual man. Ultimately, the prescription for success is followed by the reality of failure, if Samson Agonistes can be described as an anatomy of failure, an argument which is itself by no means certain. Perhaps the drama could more accurately be described as an answer to the defeated, rendering the order in the 1671 volume that of theory followed by practice, vision then reality.

The theme of striving to create a paradise within is not however confined to the two epics, but also finds powerful expression in Samson Agonistes. The essential inner liberty which Milton believed to be a precondition of political, social and religious freedom, is sought after as assiduously by Samson as by Milton's other heroes, but perhaps with less self-awareness than is demonstrated by Christ. Christ and Samson display different aspects of heroism, but it could be argued that the latter is no less heroic than the former.[12] Indeed there are many similarities between the two works, among them the interiority of the struggle with which each protagonist engages, and the unheroic nature of the heroism which is portrayed. Albert R. Cirillo discusses the internal action of the poems in his essay "Time, Light, and the Phoenix: The Design of Samson Agonistes," where he claims that the two poems share a common aim: "one deals with the moral struggle as it was defined for the Christian dispensation, while the other deals with it in a context that precedes yet prefigures that dispensation. Both are the same, united in a continuum of eternally meaningful, spiritual action."[13] Cirillo's description of Paradise Regained as a moral action or a development in meditation, or "a mind moving toward an apprehension of the divine,"[14] could equally well apply to Samson Agonistes, as each hero is increasingly aware of a sense of mission, and of being a divine instrument. The laying down of self is another image common to both works, as each hero learns passively to accept the will of God, and exercises patience in waiting

[12] Steadman claims that there are no degrees of heroism in Adam, Satan, Samson and Christ; that no one is more heroic than another, but that they are deliberately portrayed as "contrasting patterns of heroic virtue, contrary versions of the heroic enterprise." MEC 24.
[13] "Time, Light, and the Phoenix: The Design of Samson Agonistes." Calm of Mind: Tercentenary Essays on Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes in Honor of John S. Diekhoff Ed. Joseph A. Wittreich (Cleveland and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971) 213.
[14] Cirillo, Calm of Mind 213.

for the accomplishment of God's purpose. Christ forces Satan to wait, by insisting that his time is not yet come; the disciples and Mary also have to exercise patience in waiting, and Samson forces all of the other characters in the drama to wait until he is ready to act. He thwarts Dalila, Manoa and Harapha in their plans for his future, and sends away the public officer until the time is right for God's purpose to work through him. The importance of obedience underpins both poems, and is central to much of Milton's other work. Closely linked to this is the contrast between internal and external freedom. While still in physical bondage, Samson becomes spiritually free, and his father's efforts to secure his physical freedom only serve to reinforce the notion of spiritual bondage. Christ is spiritually free, and submits to bondage in order that all mankind might leave behind the bondage of sin and death and become truly free. Ultimately, serving the will of God is shown to be the only way to inner freedom.

With both heroes the reader is introduced to a previously unembroidered incident in their lives: the situations of the characters are familiar, and the interludes famous, but the detail of the material sheds new light upon their natures: with Samson, we are involved in his innermost thoughts, which are not mentioned in the biblical narrative; and with Christ, we see the temptations of the Gospel accounts developed, as the actual disputations with Satan are drawn for us. In each case the bald biblical source is enlarged and enriched to yield a new yet traditional message. Christopher Grose elaborates this point in Milton and the Sense of Tradition, when he says that both poems "record the memories, private thoughts, and conversation which precedes the definitive speeches/acts of the biblical character we thought we knew. Like other Miltonic characters...both protagonists must inhabit the narrow verge between the encroaching worlds of myth and traditional text."[15]

Certainly there are also numerous differences between the works, as might be expected from the fact that the source material for the poems comes from the New Testament followed by the Old Testament, although this distinction is not as clear as first might be anticipated.[16] Christ acts throughout Paradise Regained as a man[17] and as

[15] Christopher Grose, Milton and the Sense of Tradition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988) 4.

[16] Shawcross notes the duplication of the message in the two works in his article "The Genres of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes: The Wisdom of their Joint Publication," 245: "covenantal concerns, the substance of the subject matter...Paradise Regain'd offered truth to the intellect; Samson Agonistes, to the heart."

[17] I assume as Irene Samuel does, that Christ does not refer to himself when he says "Tempt not the Lord thy God," as to do so would contradict the meaning of the original text in Deuteronomy, and would run counter to Milton's purpose in presenting Christ's achievements as human. Satan's astonishment, I believe, relates more to his defeat by one acting as man, than to any ability of Christ's to stand upon the pinnacle of the temple. See Gary D. Hamilton, "Creating the Garden Anew: The Dynamics of Paradise Regained." PQ 50 (1971):570: In Paradise Regained, Christ moves towards "a full realization of human potential." Also: "Christ's claim to the

a Jew, whose knowledge of the Scripture and the Law protects him from the temptations of Satan. Indeed, he relies entirely upon the Old Testament to vanquish hellish wiles, quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13, and 6:16. Samson, on the other hand, uses language which is loaded with Christian overtones, often in what Madsen has referred to as "ironic counterpoint"[18] to the understanding of the other characters whose Judaic consciousness does not recognise the new dispensation, and for whom words such as ransom, forgiveness, deliverance and redemption have a different meaning. Cirillo also notes this particular use of language in Samson Agonistes, commenting that Milton uses codes and nuances, and employs contexts and patterns which are "infused with Christian consciousness,"[19] and which would have had a particular meaning for a seventeenth-century Christian reader. Rajan disagrees totally with this point of view, insisting that Samson Agonistes has to exclude Christian jargon, and although the hero's restoration "is compatible with and may even seem to invite a Christian reading," it has to avoid any suggestion of the new dispensation. It is hard however for the consciousness of the modern reader to ignore the Christian overtones apparent in such lines as "Father, I do acknowledge and confess" (*SA* 448) and

> ...these evils I deserve and more,
> Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
> Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon
> Whose ear is ever open; and his eye
> Gracious to re-admit the suppliant;
> (*SA* 1169-1173)

The greatest point of divergence between the two poems is the issue of violence. Christ turns aside the anger and violence of Satan with Scripture, but Samson himself is the instrument of God's vengeance, and at no point does he ever consider that this course of action might not absolutely be God's will. Naturally, Milton has the biblical source to consider, and can hardly change the ending of the story, as Irene Samuel appears to advocate in her essay "Samson Agonistes as Tragedy," where she acknowledges that Samson is better than the characters around him, and suggests that he should be better still, desiring him to "win through to some total comprehension, to be redeemed by his intolerable suffering, to recognize the sheer futility of a Dalila, a

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title of Son of God is to be seen in terms of his excellent performance on the human level." See also Lewalski, "Theme and Action in Paradise Regained." SP 57 (1960): 189. Milton "portrays Christ as an essentially dramatic character, seeking fully to understand and realize his nature as God-man, and his mediatorial role."

[18] Madsen 198.

[19] Cirillo, Calm of Mind 210.

Harapha, to rise above his own brute strength and learn what deliverance means."[20] However, Milton has altered the Judges narrative significantly, to render an unattractive character a contemplative man of God. As Derek N. C. Wood points out in his essay "Creative Indirection in Intertextual Space", Christ's triumph was a "great duel, not of arms" (*PR* I.174), "and many readers are convinced that Samson's triumph, too, was the culmination of an agon, a victory over temptation, a hard-won struggle for spiritual growth and renovation. However, his end re-enacts his violently physical prime."[21] It is also worthy of note, as Shawcross has recorded in his work Paradise Regain'd, that the brief epic is a celebration of life: there is no death in Paradise Regained. Samson Agonistes on the other hand leaves the reader with a powerful impression of death. As Christ and Adam choose non-violent solutions, the reader is left to wonder whether Samson's actions are admirable or misguided, and also which of these opinions did Milton espouse? Critical opinion on this subject is divided, with Loewenstein at one end of the spectrum advocating violence and retribution in Milton's message,[22] and writers such as Shawcross at the other extreme, who firmly believe that the tragedy of Samson is a memorial to waste and loss, showing the limitations of the Old Covenant, and proving that man cannot be redeemed until the intervention of Christ. There are others in between who see Samson Agonistes as a renewed call to arms, or a veiled threat to the newly restored monarchy, or as a retrospective piece upon the failure of the Good Old Cause.[23] However, much of this interpretation regards Samson Agonistes in isolation from Paradise Regained, and as the latter has so many linguistic and thematic links with Paradise Lost, it is difficult to regard any of the three final poems without some consideration of their connection with each other.

The opening of Paradise Regained establishes a clear connection with Paradise Lost, as the poet recalls the earlier epic to the reader's mind:

> I WHO e're while the happy Garden sung,
> By one man's disobedience lost, now sing

[20] Irene Samuel, Calm of Mind 254. See also Wilding, who claims that as Samson and his type of warfare are dead at the close of Samson Agonistes, Christian fortitude and patience in the person of Christ are alive at the end of Paradise Regained. Wilding 257. This may be true, but Milton could hardly have Samson survive the destruction of the temple, and hence cannot be held responsible for the biblical source: the facts of the narrative cannot be altered, only their ordering and treatment.

[21] Intertextuality: Research in Text Theory Ed. Heinrich F. Plett (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) "Creative Indirection in Intertextual Space: Intertextuality in Milton's Samson Agonistes" 196. See also Lieb, The Sinews of Ulysses: Samson receives understanding in his agon, it is "dearly bought, but its effects are ultimately restorative." 138.

[22] See also Lieb, Milton and the Culture of Violence: "Violence was triumphant in him. It became a source of renewal, as well as a source of devastation. Throughout Milton's career the dilemma represented by the undoing of the body made itself known time and again in his works, in fact, in his very being. Violence was his signature." 263.

[23] See Hill, Some Intellectual Consequences of the English Revolution: "Milton in Paradise Lost used the myth of the Fall of Man to account for the failure of the English people to live up to their great historical opportunity; in Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes he suggested ways in which good men could both accept and transcend the blind cyclical forces of history." 45.

Recover'd Paradise to all mankind,
By one mans firm obedience fully tri'd
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foil'd
In all his wiles, defeated and repuls't,
And *Eden* rais'd in the wast Wilderness.
(*PR* 1-7)

However there is a new dimension to Paradise Regained, symbolised in the continuous alteration to human history which Christ's incarnation has effected. According to Milton's account, Satan is continually being foiled, and Eden continually rebuilt in our world.[24] Barker also notes the connection between the two epics, and asks if the addition of Samson Agonistes to the 1671 volume implies that Milton intended the works to be considered as a trilogy. As he argues, Adam's experience is also purgative and restorative, as is that of the other two protagonists, an experience through which he is led by the guiding hand of the archangel Michael in the last two books of Paradise Lost. This leads Barker to argue that in Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, Milton is twice reworking books eleven and twelve of the first epic. Some critics have argued that Milton wrote Paradise Regained because of his disappointment at the reception of Paradise Lost. Certainly the major epic was received with enthusiasm, but Milton was reputed to be concerned that many readers, such as Quaker Ellwood, concentrated too firmly upon the loss of paradise, missing the message of the paradise within which Milton was seeking to convey. There may be grounds for arguing therefore that Samson Agonistes was written to further reinforce an ideal which Milton believed could not be too frequently expressed nor too sincerely emphasised. Certainly the readership of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often regarded Satan as the hero of Paradise Lost, and regarded Paradise Regained as insufficiently arresting.[25] Shawcross suggests that this was owing to the strength of the theme of cause and effect in Paradise Lost, which swamped Paradise Regained for the reader.[26] Perhaps it serves to illustrate the views about the nature of heroism held in these centuries, that Milton's heroic Christ received less interest than his falsely heroic Satan.

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[24] See Sanford Budick, The Dividing Muse: Images of Sacred Disfunction in Milton's Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 122-123.

[25] See Fish, "The Temptation to Action in Milton's Poetry." ELH 48 (1981): 516 where Fish notes the desire "that someone do something, that something happen; but in Milton's poetry that desire is invariably disappointed, either because the action is withheld, or because it occurs, but is not decisive in the way that had been anticipated, or because it occurs and is decisively disastrous." He also notes the reader's expectations of "drama, crisis, climax, plot, agency and change. It is Milton's strategy in his poetry to detach us from these expectations and return us to a moment when nothing and everything is happening, to work us, after the example of Christ, a perpetual peace." 530. Thus Milton checks narrative impulse, in stylistically forcing the reader to stand and wait. 531.

[26] Shawcross, Paradise Regain'd 3-7.

The brief epic has often been slighted in unfair critical comparisons with Paradise Lost, and difficulties appear to arise more from misunderstanding of the form and genre of the work, than from interpretational confusion, although this too has a place in the critical debate. Elizabeth Pope in her study Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem, and Barbara Lewalski in the comprehensive Milton's Brief Epic, have both clarified the arguments on genre. Pope defines the source tradition from which Milton took his inspiration, demonstrates the unconventional nature of the tower temptation which Milton has used, and presents the Protestant versions of the different temptations and their interpretations, which influenced Milton's own account. She notes that the concept of the "exalted man" was rooted firmly in theological tradition, and claims that nothing in Paradise Regained contradicts the arguments of the De Doctrina Christiana. Although Milton's account of the temptations which Christ endures was consistent with the views of his day, it is not fully consistent with any previous literary tradition; he has brought innovation to the form which he has used. In the words of Lewalski, he is "the kind of artist who does not discard old wineskins but stretches them somehow, making them fit to contain his heady new wine."[27] Particularly unusual is his inclusion of the temptation of learning which Christ rejects, and which has caused consternation among critics and readers.[28] Also unusual in his temptations is the importance which he attaches to the sin of vainglory, an issue which has alerted critics such as Christopher Hill to a possible political message within the work.[29] Lewalski has conceded that the static plot and lack of tension within the poem have contributed to the lack of enthusiasm with which it has been received; however she explains this apparent deficiency with regard to the specific genre which Milton has chosen. Working within the tight confines of the literary form, he has nonetheless succeeded in recreating and enriching the genre to an extent which is unappreciated by the modern reader, principally because the modern reader is insensible of the complex literary discipline which Milton has undertaken to exploit. In examining the literary predecessors of Paradise Regained, her treatment of the Book of Job and the exegesis which surrounds it illuminates a surprising confluence of image and theme with that of the Samson tradition.[30] Many of the models of Jobean

[27] Lewalski, Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of Paradise Regained (London: Methuen, 1966) 5.
[28] This aspect of the poem is discussed further below.
[29] This question is considered at the close of this Chapter.
[30] "In Milton's hands he [Samson] comes alive as an intensely suffering human being, struggling with God, struggling with himself - much more like Job than the legendary giant of Judges. The Bible emphasises his strength; Milton his psychology." James L. Crenshaw, Samson: A Secret Betrayed. A Vow Ignored (London: S.P.C.K., 1979) 146. See also Job 12: 13, 16 "With him *is* wisdom and strength,

exegesis current in the seventeenth century have more in common with Samson Agonistes than with Paradise Regained. This helps to link the spirit of the two poems in the 1671 volume.

Paradise Regained has often been regarded as inferior to Paradise Lost because of the strength and grandeur of the latter, but it is important to consider the brief epic not as a truncated version of the diffuse form, but as a concentrated interpretation of the same message. They treat the same themes, but if Milton considered that his readership had been too much seduced by the literary excellence of the first epic, then he ensured that the mind of the reader would be sufficiently concentrated by the subject matter of the second. This may explain in part the controversial temptation of learning which Christ repudiates so completely. Critics have taken many avenues of approach to this question, ranging from the frankly outraged, to the sympathetic acknowledgement that this was Milton's own greatest temptation, and that he was chastising his own vanity. This would itself be vanity of course, and even the notion suggested by Hill that he was attacking the Oxbridge education of ministers which was widely regarded as unnecessary and elitist, does not convince.[31] Christopher Grose suggests that Milton is showing how the narrator may be seduced by that which Christ rejects, and Steadman suggests that in rejecting the classical world, Christ is rejecting the false heroic in Satan. Barker claims that Christ rejects Satan's perversions of the values which were of the most importance to the consciousness of the Renaissance age, "wealth and power, glory, national zeal and victory over enemies, and finally learning or knowledge."[32] Lewalski has noted that Milton believed biblical literature to have been exceptional as far back in his career as The Reason of Church Government, where he describes the scriptures as "not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition may be easily made appear over all the kinds of Lyrick poesy, to be incomparable."[33] Between

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he hath counsel and understanding." "With him *is* strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver *are* his." The combination of strength and wisdom links Job, Hercules and Samson: see Lieb, The Sinews of Ulysses 117-19 for a consideration of Milton's political vision of Samson and the significance of strength, and 121: "Because all power has its root in wisdom, those who are truly strong are truly wise." See also Samson Agonistes: "Immeasurable strength they might behold/ In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean;/ This with the other should, at least, have paired,/ These two proportioned ill drove me transverse." 206-9. In the Iconologia of Heracles, the fifth emblem shows Heracles guiding a lion and a boar which have been harnessed together, symbolising the matching of physical strength and mental power: a match which Samson describes as being unequal in his nature, at line 52: "O impotence of mind, in body strong!/ But what is strength without a double share/ Of wisdom, vast, unwieldy, burdensom,/ Proudly secure, yet liable to fall/ By weakest suttleties, not made to rule,/ But to subserve where wisdom bears command."(*SA* 52-57).

[31] Hill, MER 424.

[32] Barker, The Prison and the Pinnacle, 22. Neil Forsyth refutes the suggestion that Milton rejected classical literature in Paradise Regained in his article, "Having Done All to Stand: Biblical and Classical Allusion in Paradise Regained." MS 21 (1985) 188-214.

[33] As quoted Lewalski, Milton's Brief Epic 7. Certainly a long tradition exists linking the literature of the Classical tradition to the Bible as source material, starting in the first Christian centuries, and including Josephus, Clement of Alexandria and Isidore of Seville. The Venerable Bede argued that scripture contained "all the figures of language and thought." As quoted Lewalski, Milton's Brief Epic 11.

1550 and 1650, as Lewalski has recorded, criticism of pagan secular poetry intensified, and recommendations for Christian or biblical poetry grew more urgent. In Milton's defence, Pope has noted that although the classical world of learning is rejected by Christ, Milton does not suggest that it was in the devil's power, unlike wealth, glory, might and empire, for example.[34] Lewalski suggests that the classical analogues are seen as Satanic perversions, rather than mere reflections,[35] which supports Pope's argument, and also makes this point, that hard though it might be to avoid all mention of the pagan supernatural in the epic form, Milton achieves this by attributing all false rhetoric, oracles and pagan elements to Satan, with two notable exceptions; Heracles and Oedipus, both of whom relate not just to Christ, but more immediately perhaps to Samson, thereby linking the two works at another level.

Another reading of Christ's rejection of learning, bearing in mind Milton's purpose in creating a sequel to the immensely successful Paradise Lost, is that suggested by Stanley Fish in his essay "Inaction and Silence: The Reader in Paradise Regained," when he argues that the literary tastes of the reader are also fallen, and need to be addressed by Christ as much as Satan does.[36] If we consider the strong arguments for the classical nature of Milton's Satan, and the pagan elements which he embodies, including false rhetoric and literalistic style, we can see that Christ's absolute truth cuts through the wordy speeches of Satan to the heart of true knowledge and understanding, which is sapientia, or true wisdom. Milton is attacking false or worldly knowledge in his denunciation of learning, which is scientia, and which is unnecessary for salvation. The angels are at pains to illustrate this point to Adam in Paradise Lost,[37] and it is a theme which recurs in Samson Agonistes; man does not need to know everything. Even Christ himself acknowledges that he does not have to know or understand everything which is happening to him, but is content to trust to God's superior wisdom. As Fish argues, the reader needs to change, and Milton seeks to effect this change not only through the subject matter of his work, but also linguistically and poetically, as the language reflects

[34] Elizabeth Marie Pope, Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1947) 67.
[35] Lewalski, Milton's Brief Epic 70. See Fish, "Things and Actions Indifferent: The Temptation of Plot in Paradise Regained," 177: "Satan builds plots...by presenting inessential differences as if they were constitutive, and the Son unbuilds them by seeing through those differences to the eternal choice (between God and idols) they really present." Also John T. Shawcross, "The Genres of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes: The Wisdom of their Joint Publication," 244: Shawcross claims that the rejection of classical learning involves "plurality and nonessentiality."
[36] Stanley E. Fish, Calm of Mind, 299.
[37] Interestingly, it is the Tree of Knowledge which is involved in the Fall of man, and it is man's desire to know too much, or to be as God which is the catalyst in the original temptation of Adam and Eve. Hyman argues in his article "The Reader's Attitude to Paradise Regained," that Christ's rejection of learning illustrates his disassociation "from all that is valuable in this world." 501. Lewalski argues

in Paradise Regained. Satan's style is wordy and overblown, while Christ talks mainly in metaphors, in order to distinguish not only his precise and austere style from that of Satan, but to enable him to talk at a different level of meaning altogether. The reader shares Satan's exasperation initially, as Christ seems to be unable to answer a direct question, except by an indirect answer. Ultimately, the dialogue between good and evil, God and the devil, is withdrawn into silence, on the pinnacle of the temple, and at that point the reader also has to put away self and listen to God. As Fish states, as man moves towards God in Milton's poetry, so language moves towards silence, and the reader has to "learn how to value inaction or the abdication of action and respond to silence."[38] Similarly, in the temptations, only the reader is actually tempted. Unlike Paradise Lost, where the characters share the temptation experience, in Paradise Regained, the other characters are not fooled, and the reader is the only "character" who has to reform.[39] This aspect of the work is emphasised by the temptations themselves, all of which are real in that they are "posed with reference to real problems, and all of them...are baited with charity."[40] This is the real problem for the reader, as the temptations seem reasonable, and although Satan cannot by his very nature offer anything of value, behind his evil lies good. This is partly explained by Milton's belief that evil is merely a perversion of good, as all matter comes from God initially,[41] and therefore the choice in Paradise Regained is not between black and white, but between what Barker terms "a perverted misuse and a creatively right use."[42] This difficulty of interpretation versus inclination is compounded for the reader by that which has frequently been perceived as one of the principal problems of the poem, the nature of Milton's Christ.

The "detached coldness of the Miltonic Christ"[43] has alienated many readers,

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that Paradise Regained maintains an "adequacy of revelation for both the attainment of spiritual truth (or wisdom) in relation to the inner kingdom that Everyman must rule," "Theme and Action in Paradise Regained" 215.

[38] Fish, Calm of Mind, 27.

[39] Satan cannot reform as he is effectively reprobate. See chapter 4 for a discussion of Milton's partial concurrence with the Calvinist doctrine of Predestination.

[40] Fish, Calm of Mind 33-34.

[41] See Chapter 4 for a discussion of Milton's theological beliefs.

[42] Barker, The Prison and the Pinnacle 29. See also Fish, "Things and Actions Indifferent: The Temptation of Plot in Paradise Regained," 165: "The moral in all of these poems is...[that] the true form of action is not something one does...but something one is. Or...for Milton being *is* an action, which therefore cannot be identified with any particular gesture or set of gestures but with an orientation or allegiance of which any gesture can be the expression."

[43] Barker, The Prison and the Pinnacle 22. See Alan Fisher, "Why is Paradise Regained so cold?" 215: "Milton makes Jesus distant because he believes that people must have...space of their own through which to reach toward God. (...) Not to be intimate, not to be assured, not to feel oneself a limb of God may all be 'chilling' experiences for the would-be faithful, but they are bracing, not numbing, if properly understood." Leonard Mustazza suggests in his article, "Language as Weapon in Milton's Paradise Regained," 200: that Christ tries to redeem language, and Satan to pervert it. Christ therefore is not cordial, as he is not trying to save Satan, but to save mankind. There is also arguably a political echo of Eikonoklastes in Milton's irritation with the common people who revered the idol of Stuart majesty.

partly because of his curt repudiations and blistering attacks upon such seemingly innocuous concepts as the common people and literature, and partly because of the manner in which he redefines heroism. This latter point may be answered largely with reference to genre, and to the special remit of Jesus, whose action has to be passive, and whose only permissible form of conflict is verbal. Barker urges the reader to see this action as "the representation of a temporarily withdrawn contemplative combat, representing...the achievement of the spiritual triumph...which adumbrates and prefigures the triumphs to come."[44] Fish acknowledges that the hero who has nothing to do naturally presents the reader with problems, but emphasises that these remain the problems of the reader. As all of the poetic and dramatic strengths lie on Satan's side, the reader is naturally tempted by these, but Milton does not seek "to minimize the attractiveness of self-assertion or (somehow) to make passivity dramatically appealing."[45] Consequently, the reader feels that Christ ought to do something, not to succumb to the temptations of Satan, but perhaps to explain his motives more fully. In causing the reader this discomfort, Milton is demanding a certain level of self-analysis and self-questioning from his readership, which if answered by the individual, the obstacle to understanding is removed. This process renders the reading of the poem an active one, and the parallel development in the reader closely shadows the development of the poem, while the subordination of self in the reader parallels that of Christ. The tone of Christ's answers is now more easily understood, and if we combine these arguments with a consideration of the temptations themselves, then his responses to Satan may be judged more accurately. It is important to realise that Christ cannot afford to allow Satan to advance any of his arguments, and equally, to recollect that Christ's success under temptation is of the utmost importance for the future of mankind. As God, his triumph over evil is a foregone conclusion, but he is acting here as man, and the severity of his response is a measure of the gravity with which he regards his mission, the selfless magnitude of which undoubtedly forged the approach Milton takes as a Christian poet.

In Paradise Regained, Milton follows the account given by Matthew, who is the only Evangelist to declare absolutely that Christ fasted for forty days in the desert, and

[44] Barker, The Prison and the Pinnacle 22.
[45] Fish, Calm of Mind 37.

then was tempted three times by the devil. However, he follows the order of temptations given by Luke, who presents the temptation on the pinnacle of the temple as the final temptation, and then declares that Satan departed from Christ for a time. He also introduces two new scenes of temptation, that of the banquet, and the storm. The normal order of temptations in literary and artistic tradition was that given in Matthew, which consisted of the temptation to turn stones into bread followed by the temptation of the pinnacle of the temple, and finally the temptation of the kingdoms. After the final temptation, Christ issues a positive order to Satan to stop tempting him, saying "Get thee hence, Satan:" thereby showing that in the face of a blasphemous temptation to be as God, Christ no longer has to endure Satan. Calvin and most of the other Reformers favoured Matthew's order, and Milton appears to be unique in literary tradition, not only in favouring the order of temptations given in Luke, but in having Satan fall after the final temptation.

Medieval interpretations, and those of the Church Fathers, had assumed that the temptations which Christ endured were firmly linked to those experienced by Adam and Eve; for the disobedience of the latter to be redeemed by the obedience of the former, the temptations had to match each other in type. The Adamic temptations were categorised as the triple equation of the flesh, the world, and the devil, or gluttony, vainglory, and avarice. Thus the first is the temptation that the fruit looks and tastes good, the second is that in eating it one would be as God, and the third is the temptation to know good and evil. Christ's temptations were regarded as following this pattern with the first temptation being gluttony, turning stones into bread; the second vainglory, to cast himself down and test God; and the third being the avarice of controlling the kingdoms of the world, thereby following the order of temptation given in Matthew. However, the Reformers rejected this hypothesis; as Calvin declared, the first temptation could hardly be regarded as gluttony, because Jesus had fasted for forty days, so to desire nourishment was not the sin of greed, but rather a necessity. The first temptation was therefore regarded as being an attack upon Christ's faith in God's ability to provide for him, rather than as a temptation to indulge his appetite. The Protestant version of the triple equation developed into the temptation to question God's authority, pride in oneself, and idolatry, through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Some Protestant writers rejected the triple equation altogether, as they could not reconcile their version of it with the temptations of Adam and Eve.

Although Milton broadly agreed with the Reformed version of the temptations, in writing a sequel and companion-piece to Paradise Lost, he had to incorporate some form of the triple equation. It would appear that he utilised the popular belief that Christ had undergone many temptations other than those chronicled by the evangelists, although the three most important had been recorded; and by including the temptation of the banquet scene, with its chivalric and pagan overtones, he was able to address the temptation of the appetite which had figured so prominently in the temptation of Eve. Shawcross suggests that the temptations of hunger, the kingdoms and the pinnacle correspond to temptation by necessity, fraud and violence, showing Christ tempted in his respective roles as prophet, king and priest.[46] As a man, he is being asked to consider his relationship with himself, his community, and his God, in a pattern which is later echoed by Samson when he asserts that he will do nothing to dishonour his God, his nation or himself. Lewalski notes that the temptations of the kingdom include vainglory and pride, or the desire to be as God, a point which Pope has explored in some depth. Pope points out that Milton has tied Christ's temptations to Adam's through Satan's use of doubt or distrust against them both, but that he has rendered the temptations against Christ altogether more bold and blasphemous than those used against Adam and Eve, as befits his superior worth. She also uncovers further evidence of Milton's unique handling of his subject matter in the temptations of the kingdoms. As Milton was following the order of temptations given in the Luke account, where the temptation of the kingdoms is associated with the world, and the temptation of the pinnacle of the temple is associated with the devil, one would have expected this to be reflected in Paradise Regained. However, Milton has altered the focus of these temptations, by associating Satan specifically with the temptations relating to the kingdoms of the world. Pope emphasises the unexpected nature of this decision by illustrating that the trend of seventeenth-century opinion was "to preserve the Luke equation even at the cost of superimposing it on the order in Matthew; and for a poet actually working with the Luke order to identify the sin of Satan with the *regna omnia mundi* was certainly very much out of the ordinary. Furthermore, that sin is identified not with the whole temptation, but...specifically concerned with the great man's tendency to become vainglorious to the point of committing acts of insane presumption and behaving as if he were equal to

[46] Shawcross, Paradise Regain'd, 45. A point which Lewalski also makes in her article "Theme and Action in Paradise Regained," 212.

God."[47]

Naturally, the emphatic importance which Milton has placed upon this particular aspect of temptation has led some critics to assume that a political reference is being made.[48] Christopher Hill ties the entire poem into a series of political interpretations, and argues that as Milton believed in the individual's full involvement with the process of history, so Paradise Regained sought to communicate how men should behave in the real world, not by evading or ignoring the unpleasant, but by sallying forth and meeting the enemy. He also contends that the temptations all consist of Satan offering "short cuts, instant political solutions to Israel's problems, trying to lure him to call for divine intervention to overcome all obstacles."[49] If this interpretation were assumed, it would raise interesting questions regarding the relationship between Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, as the latter does involve the intervention of the divine to solve one of Israel's problems, that of Philistine domination. However, in Samson Agonistes also, there is no instant solution, and Samson's own troubled spiritual quest is punctuated by the blandishments and temptations of his particular array of Job's comforters, many of whom offer short cuts of their own, and suggest various worldly ways of avoiding the arduous and solitary journey which he is required to make. Hill continues by asserting that Christ's responses emphasise both his humanity and his rationality in the face of the temptation to indulge in "premature or ill-conceived political action," and as an example cites the alliance with Parthia to overthrow Rome, equating it directly with Cromwell's alliance with France against Spain.[50] Christopher Grose notes that the vibrant anarchy of Hell apparent in Paradise Lost has degenerated in Paradise Regained to a council which supports Satan's own thoughts; "an enveloping cloud...of make-believe listeners and collaborators."[51]

Also in relation to political and historical interpretation, Lewalski has noted in her essay "Time and History in Paradise Regained" that Satan has a powerful sense of recurrence or inevitable doom, which leads him to assume that human history will repeat itself in a cyclical pattern. Christ's defeat of temptation frees history from mere

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[47] Pope 68.
[48] See discussion of the political portrayals of Satan in Chapter 2.
[49] Hill, MER, 414. James R. McAdams has noted in his article "The Pattern of Temptation in Paradise Regained." MS 4 (1972): 177-93 that the only unparalleled temptation, that is the only temptation to stand alone without another later in the poem to mirror it, is the temptation to rule Israel, the temptation which deals with zeal and duty. He regards it as the central and most important temptation, and Satan's inability to understand Christ's response is illustrated through this temptation as owing to his lack of faith.
[50] Hill, MER, 417. See also Hill's extended analogy of Christ's rejection of those things which had led the English revolutionaries astray, MER, 421.
[51] Grose, 110.

repetition, and although he acknowledges patterns in human development, in Christ "the historical process is seen to be linear, not cyclical, and Christian typology is shown to involve progress, re-definition, and re-creation."[52] This point is echoed in Shawcross, when he describes Paradise Regained as "a political document put in metaphysical terms." Milton's message came from his political and social realisation that "one must change people, not just institutions; one must "re-form," not simply "reform." The way to alter social, economic, and political structures is to alter the people involved in them."[53] Paradise Regained undertakes to achieve this by showing the example of Christ, acting as man, and illustrating the ways in which the individual can triumph by trusting to the will of God. In the light of this analysis, the parallels to Samson Agonistes can be seen clearly, as the individual can hope for salvation through the same regained faith in God, love and obedience displayed by Samson. While Christ's triumph is prescriptive, and relates to all mankind, Samson's is individual, and depicts the solitary spiritual endeavour which each individual has to make. As such, the second poem may be seen as an individual version of the first, and if we regard Paradise Lost as the broad sweep which includes the whole of human history, then the narrowing of focus and concentration of purpose which marks the progress of these three poems becomes more apparent, and the pattern of Milton's design begins to emerge.

[52] Lewalski, The Prison and the Pinnacle, 77.
[53] Shawcross, Paradise Regain'd, 81-2.

Chapter 6

Samson Agonistes: Milton's transformation of classical structure, biblical narrative, and exegetical tradition.

Samson Agonistes comes at the close of Milton's work, and an awareness of this leads the reader naturally into a consideration of the cumulative weight of Milton's concerns, and towards an understanding that the poem embodies these concerns to a larger extent than any of his previous works.[1] This perception of Samson Agonistes is supported by the complexity of the work itself. Milton's dramatic poem draws upon many cultural associations, thereby creating a sense of depth within its structure. The layering of classical, biblical and historical allusion, when combined in the very substance of the work, creates resonances in the mind of the reader which may be compared to the finely-tuned harmonics of a well-made violin. In the same way that the listener is unaware of the other notes and tones which underlie the note being played, so with Samson Agonistes, much of the allusion is played at a more instinctive or subconscious level. It is also true to say that if some of the harmonics were missing, or some of the allusions left out, then the whole would be a much less rich and satisfying work of art. Wood comments upon this in his study of intertextuality in Samson Agonistes:

> The meaning of *Samson Agonistes* is written in an intertextual space that had already been frequently intercrossed when the latest narrator in *Judges* finally reworked a story that recedes into a trackless antiquity of sacrificial sun-heroes and springtime renewal. It has been endlessly overwritten since then by centuries of exegesis, allusion, citation, liturgical juxtaposition and refictionalisation. The space is full of queries, contradictions, flickerings of meaning...Milton as author has tactfully withdrawn from the reader's presence so that the intertextual space...is filled with echoes, questions, whispered doubts and noisy contradictions.[2]

This chapter explores the intertextual framework of Samson Agonistes, and Milton's manipulation of that framework in his adoption and alteration of a classical structure, and a biblical narrative, and in his awareness and avoidance of centuries of exegetical tradition. His continuing iconoclasm is also discussed in relation to these engagements with varying cultural materials, and the construction of narrative which was observed in the prose may be seen to continue in the final poem. It is partly the nature of such a complex poem, that what may be said with confidence about one part of it, cannot in any

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[1] See Radzinowicz's argument that Samson Agonistes reflects "consistent and overarching principles in his works." Radzinowicz 117. See also Michael Atkinson, "The Structure of the Temptations in Milton's Samson Agonistes." MP 69 (1972): 285: "From it radiate paths of correspondence to other regions of the mind of one of mankind's greatest poets."

[2] Wood, Intertextuality: Research in Text Theory 200-201.

sense be said of the whole. Samson Agonistes raises more questions than it answers, a reflection perhaps of Milton's state of mind at the time of publication.[3] Although Samson Agonistes has many contrary influences, all of its aspects, even those which lead us a long way from the Bible, are bound in some way to the original source. As a result, the areas of divergence from the Judges narrative are the most revealing, in that they often isolate Milton's purpose.

The classical structure of the poem is the first of these, and it has led to a diversity of critical opinion regarding the precise nature of the work, as the classical austerity of the structure might appear to conflict with the Hebraic tenor and substance of the narrative.[4] Miriam Muskin highlights these difficulties in her article "'Wisdom in Adversity': Davidic Traits in Milton's Samson Agonistes": "Difficulties abound in a literary creation that places a Hebrew story in a Greek structure for the perusal of a Christian audience."[5] Milton addresses the problem of genre himself in his preface, outlining his views on the function of drama by justifying his use of Greek tragic conventions,[6] and by adjusting what Rajan terms: "the classical notion of the function of drama into the purgative and tempering - and, we should note, after connecting this notion, through a reference to St Paul, with the tragic pattern and function of the Book of Revelation..."[7] Radzinowicz asserts that Milton has written in this style for a reason:

> The play is deliberately cast in a Greek tragic pattern...the ordering of the plot has been made consonant with verisimilitude and decorum rather than shaped to fit either of Aristotle's categories.[8] Readers of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides will notice that the structure consistently reinforces the truth of the thematic material conveyed by the fable, and

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[3] Sharon Achenstein has also noted the preponderance of unanswered questions in Samson Agonistes, terming it a work to which the reader would come looking for questions rather than answers. See Sharon Achenstein, "Samson Agonistes and the Drama of Dissent." MS 33 (1996): 133-158.

[4] Arthur Barker, in his essay, "Calm Regained through Passion Spent" claims that the structure of the drama actually highlights the Hebraic tone: "some...critics...felt its neo-classical rigidities chiefly served to throw into relief the terrible and wrathful rigidities they supposed him to find in his Hebraic materials... (...) Certainly our poem is remarkably consistent, despite its classical genre and tone, in keeping the decorum of its Hebraic time...we can readily understand why our poem has sometimes been said to be unredeemably Hebraic in its bearing, because it seems chiefly occupied with the harsh retribution meted out by the wrathful Old Testament deity to his failed heroes as well as to his enemies, with the harshness already characterized by the brutally self-justifying God of the third book of Paradise Lost." The Prison and the Pinnacle 33-34. John C. Ulreich also believes that the elements of Samson Agonistes work together. He argues in his article, "'Beyond the Fifth Act': Samson Agonistes as Prophecy:" "Thus the kernel of classical myth falls into the fertile soil of Hebraic ethics in order to yield abundant fruit as Christian parable." MS 17 (1983): 286.

[5] Miriam Muskin, "'Wisdom in Adversity': Davidic Traits in Milton's Samson Agonistes." MS 14 (1980): 233. Stollman suggests that Milton himself combined the disparate elements demonstrated in the work, exhibiting Hebraism through his respect for Scripture, Christianity in showing the Law to be superseded by the Gospel, and classical Greek influence through his portrayal of the supremacy of reason, and the dichotomy between the flesh and the spirit. See Samuel S. Stollman, "Milton's Samson and the Jewish Tradition." MS 3 (1971): 197.

[6] As Barker points out, he does so "in a way more strictly neo-classical than anything attempted by any single Greek." The Prison and the Pinnacle 32.

[7] Rajan 32.

[8] That is, simple or complex plots.

those dramatists are the best guide to Milton's artistry.[9]

Milton follows classical example by commencing with a Prologue, and the opening lines carry certain classical echoes,[10] thereby intimating to the reader, albeit with subtlety, that the dramatic tragedy which is to follow will be Greek, at least in form if not in content:

> 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, when any chance
> Relieves me from my task of servile toyl,
> Daily in the common Prison else enjoyn'd me,
> Where I a Prisoner chain'd, scarce freely draw
> The air imprison'd also, close and damp,
> Unwholesom draught: but here I feel amends,
> The breath of Heav'n fresh-blowing, pure and sweet,
> With day-spring born; here leave me to respire.
> (*SA* 1-11)

However, Milton reveals his intentions to modify and improve upon the Greek form almost immediately, as is apparent from the length of the Prologue, and in the fact that as a soliloquy, it is spoken not by a minor character setting the scene, but by the protagonist in an outpouring of intellectual grief.[11] Milton's tragedy has more to do with spiritual development than with dramatic device, and although the dialogue is often energetic, it always has the purpose of accelerating Samson's intellectual growth. This is Samson's only monologue, and in it he informs the reader of the circumstances which have led to his present situation, bemoaning his destiny, and describing his current misery in terms of personal suffering. This is followed by five Epeisodia, in which Samson confronts the Chorus, Manoa, Dalila, Harapha and the Public Officer respectively. Each episode is followed by a Stasimon in which the Chorus comment upon the atmospheric and psychological developments of the drama. After the fifth Stasimon, the Exodos is said by Manoa, the messenger and the Chorus, and the Kommos, or dirge, from lines 1660-1788, by Manoa, the Chorus and the Semi-chorus, concludes the drama. Furthermore the "classical unities", erroneously ascribed to

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[9] M.A. Radzinowicz, Toward Samson Agonistes: The Growth of Milton's Mind (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1978) 8-9.

[10] "This opening has been compared to the first scene of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, where Oedipus is led forward by Antigone, and to Euripides, *Phoenician Maidens* 834-5, where Tiresias asks his daughter to lead him on, and says she is as eyes to his 'blind feet'. In Sidney, *Arcadia* 2x3, the blinded king of Paphlagonia complains that there is no one to 'lende me a hande to guide my darke steppes'. CSP 344.

[11] As Radzinowicz points out, there are no prologues spoken by the protagonist in either Aeschylus or Sophocles, and the ones in Euripides are short and summarise recent events: "Milton's prologue therefore feels very Greek without being very Greek, conspicuously differing by its inwardness, intellectuality, and personal struggle." (Radzinowicz, 16)

Aristotle,[12] are strictly observed: the action takes place between daybreak and noon, the action all takes place outside the prison where Samson worked "at the mill with slaves", and his death at the temple is narrated by a messenger, violent action traditionally taking place "offstage".[13] Also, subplots and comic elements are excluded, concentrating the mind of the reader upon the purity and austerity of Samson's mental and spiritual quest, and highlighting the inner drama. Samson stands alone as the central focus throughout. He is always present in some form: when no longer present physically, the Exodos and Kommos sections concentrate upon his life and his death no less intently in his absence. The poem is close to Greek drama in spirit as well as in form: Coleridge described it as "the finest imitation of an ancient Greek drama that had ever been, or ever would be, written."[14] Milton's own view of tragedy was elevated: "Tragedy...hath ever been held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems"; he adds that it can "...purge the mind...so in Physic things of melancholic hue and quality are us'd against melancholy,"[15] thus the spectacle of tragedy defuses our own melancholy.[16] This thesis has already noted Milton's profound belief in the ethical and didactic power of poetry; the power "to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu and publick civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune."[17] However, he did not intend tragedy entirely to displace the passions from the heart, in the fashion of stoicism, but rather to moderate them: "His servants he with new acquist/ Of true experience from this great event/ With peace and consolation hath dismist,/ And calm of mind all passion spent." (*SA* 1755-8). Sharon Achenstein also argues this point, and sees a political aspect in it: "That catharsis is not an emptying out of passion, but an invitation for readers to attend to their own condition of persecution with courage, and to remember not to surrender even further their liberty."[18]

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[12] Aristotle says nothing about the unity of time: the action should take as long as it requires. The unities of action and place were merely practical necessities of Greek drama. The concept of the three unities was neo-classical in origin.

[13] However see Radzinowicz, "The Distinctive Tragedy of Samson Agonistes." MS 17 (1983): 249-80. She argues that Milton does not have Samson die offstage because of literary convention, and notes that the reaction of the other characters to the news is carefully staged for maximum impact upon the reader.

[14] S.T. Coleridge, From Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856) xxvii. As quoted B.R. Rees, Aristotle's Theory and Milton's Practice: "Samson Agonistes": An Inaugural Lecture Delivered in The University of Birmingham on 4th November, 1971 (Birmingham: Birmingham U.P., 1972) 3.

[15] John Milton, Of That Sort of Dramatic Poem Which Is Called Tragedy, The Preface to Samson Agonistes, CSP 341.

[16] This is not a new opinion for Milton: in the Elegy I, to Charles Diodati, Milton describes tragedy in similarly homeopathic terms: "Sometimes raging Tragedy, with streaming hair and rolling eyes, brandishes her bloody sceptre. It makes me sad to watch, yet watch I do, and find a pleasure in the sadness. Sometimes there is a sweet bitterness even in weeping." CSP 23. Carey suggests 1626 as a possible date for this Elegy.

[17] Reason of Church-Government, Works vol. 3 part 1, 238: 17-19. See John Arthos, "Milton and the Passions: A Study of Samson Agonistes." MP 69 (1972): 209-21. Arthos notes that while tragedy for Aristotle meant the imitation of action, for Milton it was the imitation of passion.

[18] Sharon Achenstein, "Samson Agonistes and the Drama of Dissent": 154. She also argues: "When passions are spent in Samson Agonistes...I take it to mean that the full measure of liberty is felt, and with that, suffering, and the full scope of obligations. That is the

Given Milton's opinions of the exalted nature of poetry and tragedy, it appears that the stark austerity of the Greek tragic form best suited his purposes,[19] hence the undeniably Greek emphasis in Samson's thoughts and attitude at the start of the drama. The concept of a suffering hero, buffeted by the blows of fate, and reduced to a level of pain and humiliation far beneath the dignity of his former state, combines with the idea of being the pawn or plaything of a remote, rationally inaccessible deity, to recall the Classical tradition, suggesting characters such as Oedipus in Oedipus at Colonus, and Prometheus.[20] Samson bemoans the cruelty of desertion by God, and despairs with a sense of self-awareness reminiscent of classical influence:

> ...if I must dye
> Betray'd, Captiv'd, and both my Eyes put out,
> Made of my Enemies the scorn and gaze;
> To grind in Brazen Fetters under task
> With this Heav'n-gifted strength? O glorious strength
> Put to the labour of a Beast, debas't
> Lower than bondslave! Promise was that I
> Should *Israel* from *Philistian* yoke deliver;
> Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
> Eyeless in *Gaza* at the Mill with slaves,
> Himself in bonds under *Philistian* yoke;
> (*SA* 32-42)

The echo of the Greek tragic hero which can be detected in Samson at the opening of the poem also directs the reader, albeit subconsciously, to the end of the narrative. At the close of such tragedies as Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, and Prometheus Bound, the hero is elevated beyond his former status. In these examples the hero surpasses his proud early days, in the sublime edification of his death. So too it is with Samson, but in Samson Agonistes, the hero is introduced at the lowest point of the circle. His wheel of fortune has taken him to the lowest levels of humiliation which he will have to face, and his dark steps have to reascend into some form of light.[21] As Barker comments: "In this conventional concentration, the poem must seem to be underscoring something like the sense of inevitable fatality we associate with Greek

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position from which action may be taken. Samson has not *erased* his passion, but has allowed himself and his cosufferers to feel the full measure of it and thus to experience the extent of their liberty." 153.

[19] This is consistent with his adaptation of other genres to promote his convictions in the form he thought most suitable for his purposes. Ker makes this point in the Art of Poetry: "the Greek form was the right form for something that Milton wanted to say," W.P. Ker, The Art of Poetry (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1923) 59.

[20] Oedipus, especially in Oedipus at Colonus, by Sophocles. Prometheus in Prometheus Bound by Aeschylus.

[21] Radzinowicz notes the unusual timing of Milton's opening in her article, "The Distinctive Tragedy of Samson Agonistes," where she suggests that by presenting Samson initially "at a moral nadir, but a zenith of tragic passions," Milton gives the narrative more time in which to develop and concentrates the attention of the reader upon the intellectual growth of Samson. 250.

tragedy and its view of the human situation."[22] Frye has argued:

> In Greek literature tragedy is inherent in the human situation...partly because in the long run the gods can shrug it off or detach themselves from it. For Milton, no tragic action can take place without the will of God being directly involved, and therefore tragedy, for Milton, is ultimately explicable in terms of God's revelation.[23]

This raises questions about the nature of Milton's tragic drama: can it be tragedy at all, in the light of God's purpose for man? W. C. Curry argues that a belief in beneficent divine providence is not incompatible with tragedy but only with Greek tragedy,[24] and this would seem to accord with Milton's own view that the tragedy of the human situation is used by God to teach mankind a greater understanding. Just as in Aeschylus, suffering brings a greater wisdom: "Man must suffer to be wise," so too, Milton's God suffers man to learn by experience, in the words of Radzinowicz: "to learn wisdom by feeling the full impact of the lack of wisdom, to be purged of passion and of evil. God does not annul tragedy but bends it to revelation."[25]

Arguably, Milton has reworked the classical form to create an original yet appropriate setting for his poem. He also reworks the biblical source, altering the character of Samson substantially. The Samson narrative in Judges is set against a background of apostasy, at a time when Israel was conscious of God's anger. As Webb points out in his study of the book of Judges, the previous narratives of Jephthah or Gideon show Israel making specific appeal to God to deliver them out of slavery, and God answering their call: but the Israelites in the Samson episode show little signs of even wanting to be freed.[26] Samson himself makes little effort to vanquish the enemy, reacting often only to personal affront, or responding when the spirit of the Lord comes upon him. [27] Certainly he mounts no extensive or organized military campaign, unlike Gideon or many of the other earlier Israelite leaders. His attacks are random and often

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[22] Rajan 33.
[23] Rajan 162.
[24] W.C. Curry, Sewanee Review 32 (1924): 336-52. As quoted Carey, CSP 332.
[25] Radzinowicz 87.
[26] Barry Webb, The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987) 163. This is consistent with Milton's Samson's irritation at a nation who prefer bondage with ease to strenuous liberty.
[27] Samson himself is less inclined towards violence or revenge than to a quiet life, and after avenging specific acts against his own person would have perhaps sunk into peacable obscurity. The giving of his wife to his companion prompts him to an act of revenge: "Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure." Judges 15: 3. This revenge is the capture of the three hundred foxes, and the burning of the Philistine crops. The Philistine revenge is the burning of Samson's wife and her father in their house. It prompts this response from Samson: "Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease." Judges 15: 7. This shows quite clearly that left to himself, Samson would have been unlikely to deliver, or even start to deliver the Israelites from Philistian domination.

seemingly unconnected: more like folk tale or legend than historical campaign.[28] It is God who seeks an occasion against the Philistines: "But his father and his mother knew not that it *was* of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel."[29] This accords well with Milton's drama, in that the main character of Samson Agonistes is God also: He is the prime mover, the directing force behind the action throughout.[30] The divine foretelling of Samson's birth occupies an extensive part of the Judges narrative, and reveals a substantial amount of information regarding Samson's future. The prohibition about strong drink and unclean flesh is given to the mother: only the prohibition of shaving is directed to Samson himself. Thus it is this vow which God uses most tellingly in his search for an occasion against the Philistines.[31] He never deserts Samson for the breaking of any of his Nazarite vows, but merely withdraws a little in order to preserve Samson's separateness at a deeper level. God uses Samson throughout his life as a way of punishing the Philistines, and thus when Samson is weakened, captured, blinded and humiliated, God places his champion precisely where he can act most successfully: the Philistines take him right into the heart of their theology, not just into their temple, but to a place where their god, and the very foundation of their belief can be destroyed.

Samson was chosen by God while still unborn, and was elect in the specific and the general sense, being set aside for God. While Samson was not perfect, his power was derived from God, and as such he is described by Steadman as a true and valid "Image of [God's] strength," a "mighty minister," armed with "celestial vigour".[32] The most important thing which the angel says about Samson's purpose from the point of view of Milton's work, is that he "shall *begin* to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."[33] This indicates that Samson is just the start of a long-term plan, and was not intended to perform this deliverance within his lifetime. The narrative emphasizes

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[28] "Samson never commanded an army, whether local or consisting of all Israel; he is the typical individualistic hero of popular fantasy. The story is really interested only in his actions, a mixture of extravaganza, or provoked sexuality, of historically irrelevant anecdotal elements, pervaded with a rigid sense of retribution..." J. Alberto Soggin, Judges: A Commentary Trans. John Bowden. (London: S.C.M. Press, 1981) 229.

[29] Judges 14: 4.

[30] Arthos acknowledges that Samson's motivation remains mysterious throughout: the outcome is God's work. Arthos, "Milton and the Passions: A Study of Samson Agonistes," 210.

[31] The style of his life, as Martin suggests in his study of the book of Judges, is hardly one which appears to be *"consecrated"* to the service of God. James D. Martin, The Book of Judges (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1975) 157. It is part of the mystery and wonder of God's workings that Samson is always so much in God's service, rather than through any virtue of his own. As Crenshaw observes: "Samson can murder and fornicate, and God will continue to bless him. But let him cut off his hair, and God will depart from him forthwith." Crenshaw 133.

[32] Steadman MRH, 31.

[33] Judges 13: 5. Italics mine. This of course parallels Christ's mission at the end of Paradise Regained, "on thy glorious work/ Now enter, and begin to save mankind." *PR* 4, 634-5.

that Samson ruled Israel only for twenty years, half of the usual forty which was the standard Deuteronomic framework. Martin asserts that this is clearly a numerical indication that Samson's work against the Philistines was incomplete at his death. This would have added another element of political commentary to Milton's work for the contemporary reader.[34] Bearing in mind Milton's interpretation of Samson, perhaps the most significant aspect of the first part of the Judges narrative, aside from the election of Samson, is his betrayal at the hands of his own people, and their subsequent lack of action.

> Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines *are* rulers over us? what *is* this *that* thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them. And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee unto the hand of the Philistines. (...) And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.[35]

Samson says nothing about this throughout the rest of the narrative, but the reader is left to wonder why the three thousand men of Judah did not either go to Samson's aid, whether he needed it or not, or follow up their advantage after he had slaughtered a thousand of the enemy. Milton's Samson is more voluble on the subject, and speaks about the episode with a bitterness which the original Samson would have been unlikely to demonstrate:

> Mean while the men of *Judah* to prevent
> The harass of thir Land, beset me round;
> I willingly on some conditions came
> Into thir hands, and they as gladly yield me
> To the uncircumcis'd a welcom prey,
> Bound with two cords; but cords to me were threads
> Toucht with the flame: on thir whole Host I flew
> Unarm'd, and with a trivial weapon fell'd
> Their choicest youth; they only liv'd who fled.
> Had *Judah* that day join'd, or one whole Tribe,
> They had by this possess'd the Towers of *Gath*,
> And lorded over them whom now they serve;
> (*SA* 256-267)

This brings us to one of the central differences between Milton's Samson and the biblical source: the latter had no organised campaign, no inner determination to deliver his country, but rather acted against the Philistines when they had done him some personal

[34] The political force of Samson Agonistes is assessed in the Conclusion.
[35] Judges 15: 11-13.

injury or injustice, hence his remark to the men of Judah that he is only acting against the Philistines as they have acted to him. Milton's Samson, however, wanted to deliver Israel from Philistian yoke, and is bitter in his apparent defeat. When the Chorus remark that he always sought "occasion" against the Philistines (this is God's determination in the biblical source, not Samson's) but points out that "*Israel* still serves with all his Sons" (*SA* 240) Samson reacts defensively:

> That fault I take not on me, but transfer
> On *Israel*'s Governours, and Heads of Tribes,
> Who seeing those great acts which God had done
> Singly by me against their Conquerours
> Acknowledg'd not, or not at all consider'd
> Deliverance offerd: I on th'other side
> Us'd no ambition to commend my deeds,
> The deeds themselves, though mute, spoke loud the dooer;
> But they persisted deaf, and would not seem
> To count them things worth notice,
> (*SA* 241-250)[36]

This speech is overlaid with autobiographical political commentary, and the distinction from the biblical source alerts the reader to the possibility of a political message within the poem. Criticism has widely recognised this element in Samson Agonistes. Whether Milton wrote in order to rewrite or glorify the Revolution, to rebel against the Restoration in championing a fresh Revolution, or for a more complex purpose, is sufficiently unclear to have provoked discussion and inspired support for each of the above interpretations.[37] Although disagreeing with Loewenstein's contention that Milton sought to inspire a new and violent revolution, I agree in part with his argument that Samson Agonistes "is a work that looks painfully back to the past, registers the sharp disruption between the glorious past and the tragic present, and depicts a military saint who, moved by the Spirit, acts...in response to the present moment of political bondage and idolatry."[38] However, Milton's Samson does not act through any political motivation, but only through religious and personal conviction. Samson Agonistes is above all about one man's soul, and his relationship with God. Any

[36] Milton's Samson regards his Nazarite origins and his strength as being intimately connected with his purpose to deliver Israel. As he comments, why else would he be elected if not to deliver?

[37] Although widely discredited, Parker's argument for an early dating has provoked some to consider the immediate historical context of the work. Jackie Di Salvo argues in her article "'The Lord's Battells': Samson Agonistes and the Puritan Revolution." MS 4 (1972): 39-61, that it is possible to root the poem within the immediate historical context of the Civil War. She notes that in Puritan sermons of the time, Samson among other Old Testament heroes, became "the moral models for men who, in a religious and political revolution, were not only to be saints but soldiers..." 40. This adds another dimension to Milton's use of Samson certainly, but does not in itself prove anything with regard to the date of composition.

[38] David Loewenstein, "The Revenge of the Saint: Radical Religion and Politics in Samson Agonistes." MS 33 (1996): 159.

political reading of the work is informed by an awareness of Milton's political convictions, and not by the words or actions of his Samson. Samson does not consider himself to be a political agent, only a servant of God, and as his comments regarding the men of Judah show, he did not consider their moral inertness in political bondage to be any concern of his.[39] The notion of political bondage then is meaningless to Milton's Samson, but the question of idolatry which Loewenstein also raises is one which troubles Milton's Samson greatly.

It is with regard to the question of idolatry that the fields of enquiry into the classical structure of the poem, and the Hebraic consciousness of the characters and the source coalesce. Northrop Frye argues that Milton had a strong feeling for the value of the spoken word over the visual spectacle.[40] Frye illustrates the fundamental differences between pagan and Hebraic thus:

> What Milton would call paganism is a religious development focused on visual symbols. Polytheism is impossible without pictures or statues to distinguish one god from another. (...) Hebrew religion is founded on revelation, which means revelation through the ear. In the theophanies of the Old Testament, God speaks and man listens, but the status of what is visible is much more doubtful.[41]

The God of the Jews and the Christians is an invisible God, apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ, and according to the first two commandments, no image of Him should be made. Frye uses the story of the burning bush to illustrate this point: the bush is only burning to catch the eye of Moses, the important part is the spoken word of God after he has Moses's attention. "The shift of metaphors from eye to ear, in other words, introduces into religion the conception of idolatry,"[42] an issue which Milton had confronted in his prose works, and which he arguably confronts again, especially in the 1671 volume. Milton's iconoclasm is apparent in his first prose works, the anti-prelatical tracts, where he rejects the visual aspects of religion: stained glass, sculpture, and especially "the visual focus of the elevated host."[43] He attacks the visual image of the

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[39] This moral isolation can be seen also in Manoa's speech at the end of the poem. His famous lines show that Samson and his father's house considered themselves to be separate from the rest of Israel: "To *Israel*/ Honour hath left, and freedom, let but them/ Find courage to lay hold on this occasion,/ To himself and Fathers house eternal fame;" (*SA* 1714-17).

[40] Frye asserts that "Samson Agonistes is a real play, with a real plot and real characters, and it could be acted with success, I should think, in front of any audience ready to accept its conventions." B. Rajan (Ed.), The Prison and the Pinnacle: Papers to commemorate the tercentenary of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* 1671-1971 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 145.

[41] Rajan 145-6.

[42] Rajan 146.

[43] Rajan 148.

monarchy in his revolutionary tracts, of which Eikonoklastes is the most obvious example, where he sets his own image of "truth" against the false image of the martyr king. It is an issue which runs through his divorce tracts also, where he attacks the traditional view of marriage as an inescapable institution, believed to be so important that it becomes more precious than the human happiness for which it was designed: "no ordinance human or from heav'n can binde against the good of man; so that to keep them strictly against that end, is all one with to breake them."[44] The subjects of idolatry and iconoclasm come to the fore also in the epic poetry. In Paradise Regained, for example, as Frye points out, Jesus goes into the desert, "with no visual features to distract him, to engage in a mortal combat with the false word, the accuser. But Satan can only operate by summoning up a series of visual hallucinations."[45] Frye also argues that the issue of idolatry is addressed specifically in Paradise Lost:

> Adam was surrounded with a visible paradise, but what the forbidden tree primarily forbids is idolatry, the taking of the visible object to be the source of creative power, as Eve does when after her fall, she bows in homage to the tree. Since the fall, paradise has been an invisible inner state, to be brought into being by the revelation through the Word.[46]

This excerpt from Book 9, referred to above, shows Eve transferring the orisons previously offered to God to the forbidden tree:

> O Soveran, vertuous, precious of all Trees
> In Paradise, of operation blest
> To Sapience, hitherto obscur'd, infam'd,
> And thy fair Fruit let hang, as to no end
> Created; but henceforth my early care,
> Not without Song, each Morning, and due praise
> Shall tend thee, and the fertil burden ease
> Of thy full branches offer'd free to all;
> Till dieted by thee I grow mature
> In knowledge, as the Gods who all things know;
> (*PL* 9: 795-804)[47]

One of the primary purposes of Samson Agonistes is to tackle the problem of the icon and misplaced human idolatry; therefore Milton's avoidance of the pagan spectacle of a Greek tragedy is arguably a significant consideration. To this end he is constantly overlaying the classical structure of the drama with Hebraic spirituality. This is apparent

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[44] Tetrachordon, Works vol. 4, 75: 10-12.
[45] Rajan 149.
[46] Rajan 147.
[47] There is an echo in these lines of the posthumous honour which Manoa plans for Samson's tomb, and which Dalila claims for herself. The parallel lies in the bestowing of song, ministration and worship upon a wholly unsuitable object, an idolatry which diverts praise from its rightful direction, to God.

in the dichotomy between the austerity of the structure and style, and the intimacy of the language and content.[48] He is directing the reader into new realms, recreating form, structure, character, narrative technique and plot emphasis. The removal of the drama from the stage, thereby concentrating the mind upon the inner spectacle, serves to 'blind' the audience, making watchers into readers,[49] and thereby giving them an insight into the mind of the author.[50] Wood proposes that Milton employs deliberate authorial self-effacement, and suggests that this echoes the interpretational difficulties experienced by the Protestant churches after the Reformation in their study of Scripture: "The author's indirection has an important effect...does this not mime or re-enact the Christian's difficulty in reading the significance of its great pre-text, the Bible?"[51] However, attempts to read the drama as one thing or another, whether political allegory, autobiographical confession, civil manifesto or theological treatise, founder because of their relative simplicity in comparison with the work itself. To make interpretation more complicated, there is no clear authorial guidance in Milton's later prose to instruct response. Wood observes: "Milton avoids reference to Samson at moments in his later work when he might have revealed his own attitude to a figure so enigmatic and contradictory in Christian tradition, a figure who must have loomed large in his own consciousness, the hero of his only tragedy in the ancient manner."[52] I would agree with Wood's argument that Milton intended his work to be complex and ambiguous enough to support many different interpretations simultaneously:

> The truth seems to be that the author is not trying to sponsor one possible meaning for the behaviour of his protagonist but that he co-operates with the intertextual multiplicity of possible motivations for behaviour and possible divine judgments of the actions and sayings of Samson and his companions. The text has been shaped to allow for many possible responses.[53]

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[48] As Low and many other critics have observed, the different elements of the work are not incompatible, but rather mutually clarifying. Christian and classical blend effortlessly elsewhere in Milton, notably in Lycidas, the Nativity Ode, and Areopagitica, and the Old Testament merges with the legends of Heracles in Sonnet 19. It is therefore hardly surprising that this ease of cultural blending, the product of Milton's wide education, which was noted in the first chapter of this thesis, should culminate in the diverse yet unified whole of his final published poetic work.

[49] Grose has suggested that if he has blinded his audience by this method, then he has also obliterated "our memory for the purpose of achieving a fresh approach to his difficult, mysterious subject; indeed, a re-velation." Grose 147.

[50] Wood has observed that: "The dramatic form makes it easier for the author to silence his own voice and to exclude the voice of any privileged, authoritative moral commentator, such as we hear in the epics. Any narrative framing that occurs must be done by the fictional dramatic characters and all their evaluations are, it follows, subject to error. Indeed, the author makes an effort to present them from the start as being morally and intellectually flawed." 198.

[51] Wood 198.

[52] Wood 203.

[53] Wood 202. Sherman H. Hawkins accounts for the lack of explicit Christian references in the work in his essay, "Samson's Catharsis." MS 2 (1970): 228, arguing that explicit Christian references in the poem would have blurred the larger meaning of the work: Samson's tragedy is that of all men, and not only Christians or Jews.

Furthermore, Milton has retained much of the literary intertextuality which characterized Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. As in the earlier epics Milton rejects the traditional elements of classical heroism, imbuing his characters with a greater spiritual and theological significance, and often assigning the attributes of chivalric heroism to subjects or characters of inadequate morality.[54]

In his own retelling of an already old and often retold story, Milton has endeavoured to avoid the traditional elements both of the Judges narrative itself, and of the exegetical tradition which had built the character of Samson into something which bore only a passing resemblance to the biblical original. The development in character of the Samson myth is as complex as Milton's poem. The biblical hero is honoured in Hebrews 11[55] as one of those who lived by faith, joining the ranks with Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Noah, Moses and David.[56] All of these characters had complicated, personal relationships with God, which involved sacrifice. The Samson of Judges has little in common with these, but the Samson of Samson Agonistes fits perfectly. The metamorphosis of this robust hero into the type of a Christian saint involved the sweeping of much of his character under the carpet of original sin and human frailty. Samson's fall had four origins:[57] he was allured and besotted by a woman, he was human and thus could not resist sin, he lived among gentiles, thereby betraying his Jewish origins, and he became proud about his feats of strength, attributing them to his own virtue rather than to the will of God. It says much about the early Pauline church, and about the problems which it faced and sought to tackle, that Samson's lust poses more of a problem than his career of mass murderer. Interestingly too, the vexed question of his suicide does not appear to have altered attitudes to his status as a hero of faith.[58] Certainly, this aspect of his career worried the Church Fathers: could he be held up as an example for all true believers? Augustine claimed that it was not for us to imitate the

[54] This allows Milton to introduce ironies of perspective: "For the Hebrews Dalila is an impious traitress; for the Philistines she is a heroine - the pious deliverer of her people and the zealous champion of her god. For the Philistines, Samson is a murderous rebel and a robber; for the Israelites, he is a heroic liberator." Steadman, MRH 156.

[55] And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Hebrews 11: 32-34.

[56] Hermeneutic literature grew up around the Judges narrative of Samson's exploits, and this excerpt from Hebrews, "anticipated the terms of this hero's acceptance by Christianity as an exemplar of faith." (Krouse, 31).

[57] Josephus, Antiquities Trans. Lodge (London: 1640). As quoted Krouse 38: 18.

[58] John Donne argues in Biathanatos that Samson committed suicide in order "To deliver his people and to get a perpetuall name." He argues that it is suicide, because God did not expressly tell him to do it; he may have been "invited by the Spirit", but was not commanded as such. John Donne, Biathanatos. Ed. E.W. Sullivan. (Newark: Delaware U.P., 1984) Part 3, Dist. 5, Section 8: 141 and 103.

actions of the saints indiscriminately, and added in Samson's defence that his suicide was impelled by God.[59]

Christian interpreters have frequently honoured Samson as a saint. In the fourth century, Athanasius described David, Samson and Samuel as saintly, and Augustine said that Moses, Daniel and Samson were our fathers, who rose up against false gods. By the seventeenth century, attitudes towards the allegorical and typological interpretation of biblical figures such as Samson had been changed radically by the Reformation. Reformed attitudes to biblical interpretation, however, created certain ambiguities: on the one hand there was a reaction against Papal authority, in the form of the delineation of specific areas of interpretation; and on the other hand, Calvin, for example, was aware that there were as many interpretations of the Bible as there were readers of the Bible, necessitating some guidance from the Church if "strange doctrines" were to be prevented from rising "out of the construction of a doubtful text."[60] The hermeneutic and patristic traditions had already laid down allegorical explanations for biblical characters and events. Calvin, however, supported a fundamentally historical approach to scriptural interpretation, advocating a concern with the historical context of both authors and events, wherein the spiritual and moral meaning of each sacred story lay, and promoting an understanding of each as an intrinsic part of the nature of the ways of God and man in the past. Each event in context, therefore, has a particular moral point to teach. Milton too believed in a line of progress in the dealings of God and his chosen people: first the Jews, and then their successors the early Christians, and finally, the English Protestants. In the seventeenth century, a tendency developed to interpret contemporary events in the light of biblical and historical precedents. The Old Testament lent itself readily to this type of analysis, forming a detailed historical record of human affairs and divine policy.[61] Muskin notes this tendency:

> To appreciate the moral drama with its prophetic, Old Testament emphasis, we need to return to the intense scripturalism of both Milton and his fellow militant Puritans during the struggles of the Puritan Revolution. And to recognise the overall direction of a work which markedly differs from the epics, we need to re-enter a world in which

[59] De Civitate Dei. As quoted Krouse 37: 15. Note also Luther's caution that the acts of Samson were not for imitation, and Joseph Hall's similar point, both quoted in Chapter 4.

[60] Bishop Joseph Hall, Revelation Unrevealed 200-201. As quoted Richard McCabe, Joseph Hall: A Study in Satire and Meditation (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1982) 225.

[61] Such interpretation inspired the writing of commentaries such as Hall's Meditations, whose dramatic narration of biblical accounts brought history to life. His work has been described by Richard McCabe as "a sensible, reflective account of the enduring and recurrent problems of the chosen race" and his readership: "They regarded themselves as the new Jews, and what they were seeking was a providential account of God's people journeying often slowly and laboriously towards the promised land." McCabe, 243-4 and 244.

> ancient Israel's history had become England's experience, a world in which the example of Hebrew heroes became precedent for political action, a world inhabited by Milton, the Puritan revolutionist, from 1640 to 1660.[62]

Biblical commentators have variously interpreted Samson, and it is the diversity of individual response which has contributed most to the tradition of the Samson legend. Initially, the literal interpretation of the Judges narrative necessitated an explanation of Samson's sexual exploits, relating his fall and redemption in a way which presented him as a saint: a figure whose fate argued for the virtue of chastity, and the evils of a marriage between a Christian and an infidel. Allegorical interpretation of his life portrayed him as a redeemer of his people, and with the visual impact of the manner in which he died: arms outstretched in a cruciform position, bearing in mind also the element of self-sacrifice, he was elevated further in the Christian mind to a prefigurement of Christ. Literal interpretation rendered his reputation as a ruler and liberator of his people popular and widespread,[63] whereas allegorical interpretation proved useful to the commentators who wanted to Christianise Samson, and in the words of Krouse: to make "the entire history of the world...one long, unbroken anticipation of the Advent."[64]

The allegorical school of thought led to many contrived and forced parallels to Christ, and the main points of comparison are as follows. Samson's birth was foretold by a heavenly messenger, as was Christ's, and both were unusual, in that Samson's mother was barren, and Christ's was a virgin. Samson tried to deliver his own oppressed people, as did Christ. Samson's assistance from the Holy Spirit enabled him to tear a lion apart, as Christ was similarly able to overcome Satan, who "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."[65] The Philistines always plotted against Samson, but could achieve nothing until his Nazarite link was suspended. Similarly, the Pharisees could achieve nothing against Christ, despite their plots, until he willingly submitted his divine power to mortal death. Samson and Christ both fought their battles, physical and spiritual respectively, without the help of human agents, and with the Spirit of God. Delilah's kisses beguiled Samson, and in pretending affection, betrayed him to his captors. Judas also used a kiss and pretended affection to betray Christ. Both Delilah

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[62] Muskin, "'Wisdom in Adversity': Davidic Traits in Milton's Samson Agonistes" 234-5. She also writes: "To understand what appeal a rough champion could have had for a blind poet beyond mutual blindness, we need to go back to the rough days of Milton's own hard-hitting prose during the Puritan experiment when he praised fighters against Philistines." 234.
[63] As Krouse says of his reputation, he became a person "whose historicity was as unquestionable as Julius Caesar's." 34.
[64] Krouse 40.
[65] 1 Peter 5:8.

and Judas earned a reward of silver in the biblical texts for their treachery.[66] Samson was taken and willingly bound by his own people, and handed over to his enemies, as was Christ: just as the ropes could not hold Samson, the bonds of death could not hold Christ.

Augustine provided the most detailed allegorical exploitation of the Samson story in his Sermo de Samsone[67] where he argues that "Samson in his strength signifies Christ the Son of God, in his weakness, Christ the Son of Man;" the riddle of "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness"[68] signifies the Resurrection, Samson's bride being given away to his companion signifies the leading away of the Church from Christ by heretics, Samson's strength lying in his hair signifies Christ's being "sustained by the prophecies of the Old Testament, and Samson's hair growing again prophesies the conversion of the Jews." Samson's going into a harlot in Gaza suggested Christ lying in the bonds of death, and his taking of the gates of Gaza to Hebron, the harrowing of Hell. In Contra Faustium, Augustine explained further that Samson's slaying of the lion prefigured Christ's founding of His Church among the Gentiles, and that the honey found in the carcass of the lion signified "the sweetness of the gospel in a harsh world." Isidore of Seville claimed that the first foretelling of Samson's birth by the angel corresponds to the Old Testament prophecies of Christ's birth, and that the second visit of the angel to Manoa's wife signifies the Annunciation. Also, Samson prefigured Christ in death in that he triumphed over more in dying than he had in life. Notably however, Samson dies in order to kill his enemies, even although he did this in order that the Jews might live in freedom, whereas Christ died so that the whole of mankind might live. Also, and perhaps most importantly, both from the point of biblical exegesis, and from the point of understanding Samson Agonistes, Samson died in vain. Israel failed to lay hold of the occasion, and Milton's England similarly failed: Christ could not be argued to have failed in death.

If the allegorical interpretation has not already failed to convince, it certainly breaks down here, especially in consideration of Milton's use of the biblical source. Even if one were to argue that no mere mortal man could possibly take the place of Christ, one is still forced to acknowledge that their motivation, intention and achievement could scarcely be further apart. Thus it is in Milton's poem. Milton's

[66] Milton alters Dalila's reward to gold, the ultimate symbol of wealth and corruption.
[67] Augustine, quoted Krouse 41-2.

Samson is a blend of Hebraic and Hellenic influences: surprisingly enough for a Christian poet, there is no tangible reference to Christianity, or to the New Testament. At no point in Samson Agonistes is there any mention of life after death, for example. After Samson's death, the Chorus and Manoa acknowledge that weeping would be out of place and unnecessary, but not for any retrospective Christian reason: the purity of the Hebraic source is carefully preserved by Milton, here as elsewhere:

> Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
> Nor much more cause, *Samson* hath quit himself
> Like *Samson*, and heroicly hath finish'd
> A life Heroic, on his Enemies
> Fully reveng'd, hath left them years of mourning,
> ...To Israel
> Honour hath left, and freedom, let but them
> Find courage to lay hold on this occasion,
> To himself and his Fathers house eternal fame;
> And which is best and happiest yet, all this
> With God not parted from him, as was feard,
> But favouring and assisting to the end.
> (*SA* 1708-1720)

However, the question of redemption is central to the entire poem, and as such, the relationship of the work to Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained is clear. Hawkins has engaged with this point in his article "Samson's Catharsis," arguing that "Milton's tragedy is a mimesis of the redemptive process at work in the life of the individual and the race, an action not of men, but of man."[69] I would agree therefore with the arguments of Wittreich that Milton has not only altered the biblical source, but has also departed significantly from the exegetical tradition.

In a work of so many apparent contradictions and paradoxes, it comes perhaps as no surprise that while Samson seeks to perfect his relationship with his God, thereby drawing away from the rest of humanity, he is unable to proceed without the interaction of the other characters in the drama: it is through man that he learns to draw nearer to God.[70] Milton's Samson has travelled far from his biblical roots: while the biblical Samson "lounges about the Philistine countryside killing and destroying and burning crops and sleeping with their women...with no hint of any organization behind him,"[71]

[68] Judges 14: 14.
[69] Sherman H. Hawkins, "Samson's Catharsis," 227. He also notes that Samson relates directly in his sin to Adam, and in his suffering to Christ, 227.
[70] See Chapter 7 for an examination of the roles of the other characters in this process.
[71] Rajan 156.

Milton's Samson is a morally and spiritually different man, palpably guided by God. In effect, Milton has taken an imaginative leap into the mind of a legendary Old Testament hero: the bald biblical account, in excluding Samson's mental processes, lends itself readily to this treatment. In expanding the character of Samson, Milton has been obliged not only to read between the lines of Scripture, but also to redraw the limits of the character, thereby subjecting the biblical account to the same alchemical treatment which he had applied to the processes of history in his prose.

Chapter 7

Samson Agonistes: Regeneration, restitution, and the repossession of the paradise within.

Samson Agonistes is fundamentally a work of conflict. Appropriately for an agon, it consists of a number of contests between the other characters and the will of Samson. Each character in the poem tries to move Samson in a specific direction, and each character succeeds in stirring him to action, but not to the action which they had proposed.[1] This chapter explores these conflicts in the light of Samson's spiritual development, using the structure of his interaction with the other characters to illustrate the regenerative process. Milton's urging of the reader to regenerate is arguably the underlying principle of the prose work, and the raison d'être of the final poems. Through Samson's spiritual reconstruction, Milton's perennial concerns may be observed, and the impetus of the prose; to change the reader through the inspiration of reason and choice; is continued. Each of the confrontations forces Samson to choose between right and wrong, and this ties the temptations of the poem into the pattern of temptation in the final poems as a whole.[2] When the poem opens, Samson is in the depths of despair: apart from the moments in the temple when he bows his head in prayer or thought, withdrawing into himself although surrounded by the Philistines, this is the only time that he is alone in the course of the drama. Curiously, the constant presence of other characters only serves to heighten the sense of isolation which surrounds him. The reader is reminded of the lines in Paradise Lost:

> I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd
> To hoarce or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes,
> On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues;
> In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
> And solitude; yet not alone,"
> *PL* 7: 24-28.

Naturally the post-Restoration plight of the blind and politically isolated Milton informs the poetic representation of Samson at many levels. The interludes with the other characters, episodes of confrontation which are necessary to rouse him from his apathy, and to inspire in him a realisation of what he must do, only show his growing isolation. His withdrawal into himself has been explained as being Protestant in essence, deriving

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[1] Arthos argues that "the work thus proceeds as a delineation of feelings, as a succession of stages in an argument, and as a rhetorical exploitation of ideas and feelings in order to show how all finally serve a particular moral." Arthos, "Milton and the Passions: A Study of Samson Agonistes," 211.

[2] Atkinson has explored this aspect of Samson Agonistes in his article, "The Structure of the Temptation in Milton's Samson Agonistes," arguing that each temptation contains three individual temptations. 286.

from the stress which the Reformed faith put upon the importance of the individual's relationship with God, unsupported by priest or other human mediation.[3] Steadman has pointed out that Samson's behaviour is essentially Calvinist in origin: the absence from action enables the individual to resolve matters within his own mind, demonstrating the value of faith over works. Then, when faith has been strengthened, so works follow naturally as a product of the resolution of inner turmoil: hence his action in the temple.[4]

Samson's isolation is emphasised by his appearance always either alone, or with one other character: Samson and the Chorus, Samson and Manoa, Samson and Dalila, Samson and Harapha, Samson and the Public Officer, and so on. It would, as Low comments, be interesting to know what Manoa would have had to say to Dalila, but Milton does not allow our concentration to leave Samson for a moment. Even once he is dead, the other characters talk only of him and of his deliverance, a double irony: his deliverance could refer to his attempted deliverance of Israel, or to his own deliverance from bondage by God: the bondage of life in prison, and the bondage of sin. The concept of deliverance itself resonates with echoes from Milton's earlier works, in addition to the obvious relationship with Paradise Regained. Samson's isolation mirrors the separate nature of his Nazarite origin, as he becomes more and more divorced from his people and from the Philistines, in his journey towards God. Low has described the drama as "Samson's progressive separation from all humanity,"[5] and observes that for Samson, the only way back to God is also the way to the temple and to his own death. Samson's early career had been the harnessing of his strength and will by God, in a significant correlation with Milton's own view of his vocation: the second part of Samson's life, the part which Milton covers in his drama, is Samson's harnessing of himself, his use of his faith to grow in understanding towards God, and this arguably relates to the active re-forming of the self which Milton desired his readership to attempt.[6]

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[3] Low 39.

[4] Obviously Milton's drama is broader in scope than this narrow prescription of Calvinist example, but the emphasis, tone, and influence of the work are undeniably Protestant.

[5] Low 41.

[6] It has been suggested by Barker in his essay "Calm Regained through Passion Spent" that the modern reader is tempted to equate Samson's isolation with an imagined isolation of the author: "...that we assume Milton to have written his last published work in...blinded isolation...despairingly closing the door on all merely mundane and human relations, in favour of a transcendent spiritual and poetic relation to something immutably absolute. Thus we read the tragedy as a representation of the transfiguration of despairing isolation into the spiritualized isolation necessary to the relation with the transcendentally eternal which alone can provide compensation for pain and calm within." Rajan, The Prison and the Pinnacle (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 35. The isolation of Samson may have much to do with Milton's political situation, but its resemblance to the isolation of Christ in Paradise Regained holds just as much of a key to the author's intentions as may be found in the autobiographical similarities.

Samson Agonistes opens with a soliloquy from Samson upon the evils of his current position. This lament over the gulf between his current state and what he has been previously, is more bitter and ironical than harrowing. It is not until the fuller expression of self-contempt at lines 67-90, where Samson agonises over the loss of sight and daylight that the reader is suddenly and painfully made aware of the depths to which he has fallen, and of the corresponding disillusion and despair from which Milton arguably suffered:

> O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
> Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,
> Dungeon, or beggery, or decrepit age!
> Light the prime work of God to me is extinct,
> And all her various objects of delight
> Annull'd, which might in part my grief have eas'd,
> Inferiour to the vilest now become
> Of man or worm; the vilest here excel me,
> They creep, yet see, I dark in light expos'd
> To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,
> Within doors, or without, still as a fool,
> In power of others, never in my own;
> Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.
> O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse
> Without all hope of day!
> (*SA* 67-83)

The contrast between this portrayal of blindness and the moral satisfaction of being one of God's blinded and chosen servants exhibited in the Second Defence could hardly be more stark, and illustrates the difference Milton encountered between public success and public failure. There is a sense that Samson's agony in being so public a failure reflects a similar emotion in Milton, who responded strongly to detractors and personal attack in his earlier writing.[7] In using his own experience of the misery of blindness, Milton has achieved a level of pathos and emotion which guarantees the attention and sympathy of the reader. Here, as elsewhere in his work, the judicious use of personal experience gives the impression that these beautiful and powerful words are the result of an enriching process which flows from Samson to Milton as well as from Milton to Samson, as Milton endows his theme with the cumulative experience of his life.

The parallel interlude to Milton's own exposition of Samson is introduced in one

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[7] Particularly in the Second Defence: see Lieb, Milton and the Culture of Violence chapters 7 and 8.

terse biblical verse: "But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house."[8] The entire passage of Milton's drama, until the actual departure of Samson for the temple is contained in the understated allegorical image of verse 22: "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven."[9] Milton takes it upon himself to demonstrate how it "grows" in outlining the spiritual growth of Samson. The theme of growth and healing, which is freighted with theological significance in Milton, is highlighted in the drama by his recurrent use of disease imagery. Samson himself speaks of being subject to the stings of deadly hornets, and describes himself as a sepulchre, a moving grave. The Chorus offers "Salve to thy Sores," noting that "apt words have power to swage/ The tumors of a troubl'd mind,/ And are as Balm to fester'd wounds" (*SA* 184-6), and in this image of the curative power of language, encapsulate one of Milton's primary motivations: the poet as physician to the soul of the reader. The extent of the disease imagery in Samson Agonistes is illustrated in a dramatic speech by Samson at lines 606-627, where his self-loathing and spiritual pain is vividly described:

> O that torment should not be confin'd
> To the bodies wounds and sores
> With maladies innumerable
> In heart, head, breast, and reins;
> But must secret passage find
> To th'inmost mind,
> There exercise all his fierce accidents,
> And on her purest spirits prey,
> As on entrails, joints, and limbs,
> With answerable pains, but more intense,
> Though void of corporal sense.
> My griefs not only pain me
> As a lingring disease,
> But finding no redress, ferment and rage,
> Nor less than wounds immedicable
> Ranckle, and fester, and gangrene,
> To black mortification.
> Thoughts my Tormentors arm'd with deadly stings
> Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,
> Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
> Dire inflammation which no cooling herb
> Or medcinal liquor can asswage,
> (*SA* 606-627)

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[8] Judges 16: 21.
[9] Judges 16: 22.

It is clear from this passage that Samson is aware of his spiritual dimension, and is experiencing a conviction of sin, and desire for expiation which belongs traditionally, though not exclusively, to the Christian tradition. He has given an earlier indication that he is moving from self-regard and bitterness to a more spiritual shame at the disrepair of his relationship with God. This is prompted by Manoa's questioning of God's treatment of his elect:

> Alas methinks whom God hath chosen once
> To worthiest deeds, if he through frailty err,
> He should not so o'rewhelm, and as a thrall
> Subject him to so foul indignities,
> Be it but for honours sake of former deeds.
> (*SA* 368-371)

Samson replies in a way which shows a realisation of his own responsibility:

> Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father,
> Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me
> But justly; I my self have brought them on,
> Sole Author I, sole cause: if aught seem vile,
> As vile hath been my folly, who have profan'd
> The mystery of God giv'n me under pledge
> Of vow,
> (*SA* 373-379)

This in itself shows the progress which Samson has made from the opening of the drama. Less than two hundred lines previously, Samson complains of the mismatch of strength and wisdom entrusted to him by God, and the Chorus responds by urging him to "Tax not divine disposal" (*SA* 210). The echo of this in "Appoint not heavenly disposition" shows Samson's realisation that God is not to blame, and perhaps more importantly for his developing relationship with his God, that the ways of God are not accessible to the understanding of man. The spiritual nature of Milton's Samson, the author's most important divergence from the biblical narrative, is highlighted after Manoa points out that Samson has been the occasion of greater glorification for Dagon.[10] This realisation has already made itself clear to Samson as his opening words show: and his choice of language is evocative more of Christian liturgy than of the Old Testament:

> Father, I do acknowledge and confess
> That I this honour, I this pomp have brought

[10] Dagon's name has been linked not to the Hebrew "dag" meaning fish, but to "dagan" meaning wheat: if he was a harvest deity, then the irony of Samson helping to bring him glory by grinding in a corn mill is indeed bitter. This adds a linguistic dimension to Milton's Samson's complaint that he is bringing honour to infidels and shame to Jehovah.

To *Dagon*, and advanc'd his praises high
Among the Heathen round; to God have brought
Dishonour, obloquie, and op't the mouths
Of Idolists, and Atheists; have brought scandal
To *Israel*, diffidence of God, and doubt
In feeble hearts, propense anough before
To waver, or fall off and joyn with Idols;
(*SA* 448-156)

Samson considers this to be his "chief affliction, shame and sorrow,/ The anguish of my Soul, that suffers not/ Mine eie to harbour sleep, or thoughts to rest." (*SA* 457-459)

This is arguably the principal motivation of Samson and of the poem. The relationship between the individual and God was the issue of paramount importance for Milton, and this was his main purpose in writing. Political and social considerations must be subsumed to this message in Samson Agonistes, as Milton's utilisation of a narrative which was so pertinent to his time was primarily to communicate a subtler message. He did desire a revolution in his readership, a rebellion against bondage with ease, but not necessarily a physical bondage. The strenuous liberty which he had preached throughout his career in prose related to the individual conscience, and Samson Agonistes is the culmination of his urging of the reader to lay hold on whatever occasion presents itself, in order to regain an inner paradise through their relationship with God.

Samson's spiritual journey within the poem creates an impression of movement, so that it comes as something of a surprise to realise that Samson is physically static throughout the action of the work: he is led in at the beginning, and led out to go to the temple towards the end, at which time the reader/spectator remains in the same place with the Chorus and Manoa. This lack of physical movement heightens the tension of Samson's mental development, concentrating our minds upon his spiritual change. It performs another function also: it concentrates the reader upon Samson, the still centre around which the other characters come and go, bringing their own ideas and suggestions, from which Samson continually learns and disentangles himself. Although Samson's action is intellectual and internalised, it does not proceed in a vacuum. In the way that Milton rejects the self-absorbed obsession with the state of the individual soul which characterised Puritan or Calvinist thought, and embraces the liberty of the spirit which engages actively with its social and political context, Samson Agonistes may be seen to relate directly to one of the central messages of Areopagitica. Samson progresses and cures himself through speech and interaction, and the external stimuli

prompt him to resolve the inner conflict.[11] In this way the Chorus and the characters are catalysts in Samson's and in God's resolution, through the vital power of language and communication, so central to Milton's ethos. I agree with Radzinowicz's interpretation of this: "To formulate and to define is to begin to think purposefully. As Samson speaks, the divisions within himself are placed in a new context. He is encouraged to speak of them, and in expressing them, he can begin the process of readjusting and balancing them which will lead to their integration."[12]

The Chorus

Milton's characters are substantially altered from the biblical source, and allow Milton to guide the development of his central character in a particular direction while also making observations on subjects which he had discussed in prose throughout the course of his life. If the poem may be seen as being directed to a certain extent into the public arena by the author, then it is to the Chorus, therefore, as the main representative of the public within the drama, that we must first turn our attention. Belsey has argued that "the Chorus...merely reiterates the ethical doubts of the human reader,"[13] and John Huntley suggests that "they are neither vicious nor saintly, but represent the vast ambivalent mass of mankind which neither knows what it feels nor feels what it knows."[14] Huntley also suggests that the Chorus moves towards a position of knowledge at the close of the poem; however it could be argued that they represent the vulgar rabble which Milton castigated in Eikonoklastes and throughout the rest of the prose. They are easily convinced by various contradictory opinions, and convey only extraneous and platitudinous ideas. For all their shortcomings, however, more than one critic has pointed out that the Chorus are inclined to echo the sentiments of the reader, and to "articulate the misgivings we ourselves have felt."[15] This last point raises the question: are the Chorus meant to represent Everyman's theological approach to the

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[11] Marcia Landy has commented upon Samson's recovery of self through language in her article "Language and the Seal of Silence in Samson Agonistes." MS 2 (1970): 175-94. She suggests that self-definition on a verbal level allows Samson to attain insight.
[12] Radzinowicz 29.
[13] Catherine Belsey, John Milton: Language, Gender, Power. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 95. Bennett has classified the Chorus as royalists, and as representatives of the Old Law which Samson transcends. Joan S. Bennett, "Liberty under the Law: The Chorus and the Meaning of Samson Agonistes." MS 12 (1978): 141-63. Martz notes that they are given flat rhymes by Milton to emphasise their inferior wisdom. He notes particularly their comments about women at lines 1025-60 which are not consistent with Milton's own views: "We are warned...by the weakness of the verse, by the one-sided quality of the view, and by the exaggeration of man's proper power over women." Martz, Poet of Exile 285.
[14] John F. Huntley, "A Revaluation of the Chorus's Pole in Milton's Samson Agonistes." MP 64 (1966): 139.
[15] Fish, "Question and Answer in Samson Agonistes" 247.

mystery of divine understanding? Their assumptions within the drama are often imbued with heavy dramatic irony, as the reader perceives the limitations of human understanding in comparison with the divine omniscience. In this there is an expression of Milton's disappointment in the fallibility of man. His long epic tells not of success but of failure, and although Christ succeeds in his brief epic, Christ is not subject to human fallibility. Samson fails in his understanding, advanced in his fading trust by the limited understanding of the Chorus and the well-meaning, but theologically suspect attentions of Manoa. The Chorus has a limited understanding of the issues which Samson is struggling to resolve: they do participate in his grief, but they fail to learn from this as he does.[16] The reaction of Samson to violence is very different from the reaction of the Chorus, as it could be argued that Samson acts with his inner eyes fixed firmly upon God. The attitude of the men of Dan, however, is "herocentric" rather than theocentric, and their minds are fixed upon immediate political problems, such as a desire for peace under Philistian rule, rather than upon the eternal questions which perplex Samson. Their view of Samson's plight is the comfortable view, and as far as biblical precedent is concerned, their nearest relations are Job's comforters.[17] They continually attempt to impose upon him, counselling him, and exhorting him to patience. As Rees points out in his article upon the similarities between Milton and Aristotle: "While Samson's enemies are set on his humiliation, even his friends dare not expect to achieve more than his preservation, and it is to these respective ends that their actions are directed."[18]

This applies as much to the machinations of Dalila and the empty boasts of Harapha as it does to the misguided and self-orientated care of Manoa: Dalila wants to intercede for him, Harapha to provoke him, and Manoa to deliver him. The other characters are as guilty of ignoring the wishes of God as Samson himself was in his actions before the start of the drama, attempting to influence his destiny, rather than listening to his own convictions. Samson's only infallible adviser and true friend turns out to be God, and this only after the apparent betrayal which led to his present circumstances. The acquisition of clarity of vision and the understanding of the value of right reason are Samson's prerogatives in the drama: none of the other characters learns in the way that he does. Manoa has some understanding at the close of the drama that

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[16] "Samson paradoxically displays his wisdom in recognizing his intellectual limits and his own past folly." Steadman, MRH 73.
[17] See reference to Job's comforters in discussion of Paradise Regained, Chapter 5.
[18] Rees 16.

Samson has repaired his relationship with God, and that to mourn would therefore be unsuitable as well as unnecessary; but his concern is only for the honour of his own family, and his comment that "*Samson* hath quit himself/ Like *Samson*," (*SA* 1709-10) is profoundly ironic to the reader, who believes that Samson has left self behind in his final moments. Any glimmer of understanding in the other characters is a dim reflection of Samson's inner light: he alone grows. The triumph of reason and knowledge is apparent not only in the prose works where Milton states clearly the value of reason over passion, especially in Areopagitica, but also in the other major poems.[19] However, the spiritual dimension of growth is also elucidated in Milton's earlier works, and it is for this end that Milton advocates the use of reason. The triumph of right reason is one of the central tenets of Milton's philosophy for man, and consequently his wish that man should achieve liberty and inner freedom through the exertion of reason and will over passion and temptation forms an important part of the core of Samson Agonistes. Another significant aspect of Milton's vision was the value of intelligent doubt over blind faith, and this is illustrated in the contrast between the blind acceptance of the Chorus's theology, and Samson's anguished and self-analytical doubt: the untroubled theology of one is made to appear greatly inferior to the tortured despair of the other.

Manoa

Manoa speaks with the traditional voice of Hebraism, attempting to foresee future events in the light of his own understanding. He assumes that God will return Samson's sight and former glory before seeking any further occasion against the Philistines, and in the passage quoted above where he taxes Samson with bringing honour to Dagon, it his own name and house for which he grieves most:

> So *Dagon* shall be magnifi'd, and God,
> Besides whom is no God, compar'd with Idols,
> Disglorifi'd, blasphem'd, and had in scorn
> By th'Idolatrous rout amidst thir wine;
> Which to have come to pass by means of thee,
> *Samson*, of all thy sufferings think the heaviest,
> Of all reproach the most with shame that ever
> Could have befall'n thee and thy Fathers house.
> (*SA* 440-447)

[19] "The plot of Paradise Lost hinges on the Tree of Knowledge and its epistemological and moral implications for man's reason and will - in Paradise Regain'd the hero vanquishes his antagonist's 'hellish wiles' by 'wisdom'." Steadman, MRH 44.

Like the Chorus, Manoa fails to grasp the importance of Samson's change throughout the drama, and thus his speeches are often characterised by dramatic irony. When Samson claims that God will arise and defend His name against the idolatrous Philistines, striking Dagon's worshippers with amazement and confusion, Manoa answers:

> ...these words
> I as a Prophecy receive: for God,
> Nothing more certain, will not long defer
> To vindicate the glory of his name
> Against all competition, nor will long
> Endure it, doubtful whether God be Lord,
> Or *Dagon*. But for thee what shall be done?
> (*SA* 472-478)

Manoa's bumbling theological approach is characterised by a desire to impose his own will upon that of Samson, and in a secondary context, upon the will of God. This is potentially very damaging to Samson, as in this guise of adviser and loving father who desires freedom for his son, Manoa represents a very real temptation.[20] Kenneth Muir has argued that the triple temptation of the flesh, the world, and the devil, treated in Paradise Regained, is repeated in Samson Agonistes:

> Manoa offers his son liberty and peace, and since he seems to have no more chance of following his vocation as God's champion, this represents the temptation by necessity, the temptation of the flesh. Dalila...uses the arts of fraudulent persuasion. This is the temptation of the world. Harapha represents the temptation of the Devil. As in *Paradise Regain'd* he tempts by violence and fear. Samson rejects the three temptations and so regains his strength and dies gloriously.[21]

It is arguable that the temptation of the flesh belongs to Dalila, rather than to Manoa: it is she who has caused Samson to place passion above reason in the past, and so represents lust. Harapha represents the world more than the devil, in that he tempts Samson to return to his old ways, as Dalila does. He attempts to make Samson react in the way that he would have done when his position in society was very different from his current plight. His temptation to chivalric honour turns Samson back towards pride as Dalila turns him back towards lust. Manoa is the only one who tempts Samson forwards towards the future, showing him a new style of life which fits with his current state

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[20] Whether Manoa's irritation with his son, a vocational son, who lacks any structured employment, and who has wasted his opportunities, has any autobiographical significance behind its portrayal can only be a matter of speculation. Certainly the words of Ad Patrem bear some resemblance in tone to the sentiments of Samson when he attempts to defend his situation to Manoa. The very existence of Ad Patrem shows that Milton's father was doubtful of his son's chosen path in life.

[21] Kenneth Muir, John Milton (London: Longman, 1955) 182. See discussion of triple temptation in Paradise Regained in Chapter 5.

rather than attempting to return him to a past state. Admittedly he dreams that Samson's sight will be restored and that Samson will therefore find an occasion against the Philistines, and perhaps yet fulfil God's prophecy, but this is because he has no understanding of God's ways and purpose. He assumes that Samson is powerless in his current state, and herein lies his greatest temptation to a despairing and self-doubting champion. All of the temptations in Samson Agonistes represent the subjection of reason, but Manoa's temptation is the most dangerous, because it seems to be the most intelligent solution upon the surface: he appears to be making sense, but in fact he is representing Satan, albeit unwittingly.[22] It is Manoa who taxes divine disposal and argues most cogently against God's purpose, with plausible arguments.[23] In essence his temptation is to despair, as he urges Samson to despair of God's purpose for him, forget his divine calling, and abandon his agon. In tempting Samson to be as other men, all three characters are attempting to interpose their own desires between Samson as a man, and Samson as an agent of God's purpose. God has decreed Samson to be a Nazarite; separate from mankind, thus Samson's own downfall occurred when he tried to be as other men.

Manoa's attitude to God comes from his standpoint as the representative of the law, and his status as a representative of the old dispensation contrasts sharply with Samson's as a type of release from that style of covenant. Manoa appears to believe that Israel is better to have "an irresponsible deity than one who is incomprehensible and hence unimpeachable."[24] This accords with the view of the Chorus: that the difficulties of understanding God's treatment of His elect are too great to be surmounted, and that the believer should project his own limited understanding onto the problem, and consequently they create confusion and thwart the will of God.[25] There is a sense that Milton's emphasis upon the futility of man's attempts to understand the divine plan are rooted in the political and theological uncertainty which clouded the lives of those who

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[22] This recalls Satan's temptations in Paradise Regained, which sound plausible, and are "baited with charity". See Chapter 5.

[23] See Atkinson, "The Structure of the Temptations in Milton's Samson Agonistes" for an alternative reading of these temptations. His triadic structure represents Manoa as tempting Samson to abandon his faith in human action; Dalila tempting by empathy, in asking him to condone her sin, she is tempting him to condone his own past sin by association; and Harapha tempts Samson to accept the impossibility of action in the present circumstance. "The antagonist tempts the agonist to inaction." (291) All therefore are trying to dissuade Samson from action, to subvert his role as an agonist, and to separate him from God's purpose. 286-91. In his study, The Sinews of Ulysses, Lieb also suggests that the temptations of the other characters are temptations to weakness: Dalila wants him to be weak so that she can control him, (125-7) Manoa's false possibility of escape entails avoiding his agon, (124) and Harapha, who represents weakness and cowardice unwittingly prompts Samson into action (127-132).

[24] Fish, "Question and Answer in Samson Agonistes" 245.

[25] Steadman remarks, "Manoa's efforts to secure his son's freedom...emphasize the limitations of human foresight in comparison with divine Providence and the infinite disproportion between divine and human power." Steadman, MRH 104.

had opposed the monarchy: poetic justice could be relied upon at a time when the dispose of providence must have seemed unsearchable indeed.

Dalila

It is hard for the reader to dismiss the autobiographical content of Dalila's character, which combines with political argument to form a commentary upon many of the issues which Milton tackled in his prose: particularly the divorce debate and nationalism. Rowse claims that Milton believed Samson's marriages to have been founded in weakness: "Samson's fate flowed from his disastrous marriage, and Milton puts it down to his weakness: he had married out of his own people, among the enemy, undermined by female charm. Milton had come to think weakness the worst of evils, from which the rest arose."[26] Milton has already altered Scripture in making Dalila Samson's wife.[27] Apart from an acknowledgement of the centuries of exegesis which had attempted to defend Samson's weakness by describing Delilah as a wife or a concubine[28] (they were not in agreement) Milton arguably had a more political reason for regarding Dalila as a wife: as such she would substantiate his earlier work on divorce. His own experience contributed perhaps to the following lines of Samson Agonistes:

> That wisest and best men full oft beguil'd
> With goodness princip'l'd not to reject
> The penitent, but ever to forgive,
> Are drawn to wear out miserable days,
> Entangl'd with a poysnous bosom snake,
> (*SA* 759-763)
>
> Tax not divine disposal, wisest Men
> Have err'd, and by bad Women been deceiv'd;
> And shall again, pretend they ne're so wise.
> Deject not then so overmuch thy self,
> Who hast of sorrow they full load besides;
> (*SA* 210-214)

After Samson's encounter with Dalila, the Chorus comments upon the ease with which men can be deceived in their first impressions of a wife:

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[26] Rowse 261.

[27] See Joyce Colony, "An Argument for Milton's Dalila." YR 66 (1977): 563. "Milton promises her a further role as "the famousest/ Of Women" (line 982), and this role he feels she can perform best, not as the harlot of history, but as the wife of poetic invention." See also 563-5 for the attractions which Dalila would hold as a wife, rather than merely as a harlot.

[28] Note Milton's reference to Delilah as a harlot in Paradise Lost: 9, 1060: "so rose the Danite strong/ Herculean Samson from the harlot-lap/ Of Philistean Dalilah," although the reference may be to the trading of his love and trust for silver.

...to wisest men and best
Seeming at first all heavenly under virgin veil,
Soft, modest, meek, demure,
Once join'd, the contrary she proves, a thorn
Intestin...
A cleaving mischief, in his way to vertue
Adverse and turbulent, or by her charms
Draws him awry enslav'd
With dotage, and his sense deprav'd
To folly and shameful deeds which ruin ends.
(*SA* 1034-1043)

These lines are remarkably similar to Milton's earlier writings on divorce, as a comparison with the following excerpts from the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce shows:

> ...for all the warinesse can be us'd, it may yet befall a discreet man to be mistak'n in his choice, and we have plenty of examples. The sobrest and best govern'd men are least practiz'd in these affairs; and who knowes not that the bashfull muteness of a virgin may oft-times hide all the unlivelines and naturall sloth which is really unfit for conversation; nor is there that freedom of accesse granted or presum'd, as may suffice to a perfect discerning till too late:[29]

It is difficult, even for the cautious reader, to avoid an imaginative correlation between the words of Milton and the words of Samson. They are close in tone and wording, but also Milton and Samson were both betrayed by their wives, but both had already betrayed themselves in the weakness of that choice.[30] Milton describes "mis-matching with an Infidell" as the worst example of a marriage, and gives examples from the Old Testament of men who suffered at the hand of impious or irreligious wives:

> ...if they shall perpetually at our elbow seduce us from the true worship of God, or defile and daily scandalize our conscience by their hopeles continuance in misbelief, then ev'n in the due progresse of reason, and that ever-equall proportion which justice proceeds by, it cannot be imagin'd that this cited place, commands lesse then a totall and finall separation from such an adherent; at least that no force should be us'd to keep them together: while we remember that God commanded Abraham to send

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[29] Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 394: 16-23.

[30] Both wives were enemies from the outset, infidels: Mary Powell's family were Royalists, and Dalila was a Philistine. Although sounding overstated to us, to Milton the comparison would have been an obvious one. For a man who had dedicated his life, his one talent which it was death to hide, and his eyesight, to the republican cause, marrying an ardent Royalist could have been no easy choice. To be then proved so terribly and obviously wrong so soon after the marriage must have been a blow of great magnitude: small wonder that Samson's speeches are so heartfelt in their despair and self-chastisement.

away his irreligious wife...[31]

He also describes a mis-matched marriage in terms which show that the image of Samson was already in his mind in connection with this particular area of domestic liberty. He refers to the sexual side of a mentally and spiritually unsuitable marriage where "both love and peace, both nature and Religion" desire to be separated, as having "to grind in the mill of an undelighted and servil copulation."

Dalila is, however, a more complex creation than at first might appear, and Milton's use of allegory is sufficiently universal to avoid the representation of a specific figure. Helen Damico argues that the ambience of Samson Agonistes is masculine, and that Dalila interrupts this, representing the opposition of strength and weakness, and in her scene with Samson, represents the action of the poem in miniature.[32] She is certainly a powerful catalyst for Samson, provoking him out of his lethargy, and as such: "she is the fulcrum which lifts the plane of action from the tragedy of Samson's failure to the triumph of his restoration."[33] Dalila is a heroic figure whose every movement recalls either the argumentative ability of Satan, the flawed feminine strength of Eve, or the magical attractions of Circe,[34] and Samson identifies her thus:

> ...I know thy trains
> Though dearly to my cost, thy ginns, and toyls;
> Thy fair enchanted cup, and warbling charms
> No more on me have power, their force is null'd,
> So much of Adders wisdom I have learn't
> To fence my ear against thy sorceries.
> (*SA* 932-937)

The Circean imagery connects backwards through Milton's prose works, and Loewenstein has noticed the progression of this image of the Circean sorceress of Samson Agonistes from:

> ...the sorceress and "Idolatresse" who has ensnared the Samson-like husband of Doctrine and Discipline and against whom he so bitterly inveighs. Dalila's arts, furthermore, resemble "the Circaean cup of servitude"(3, 468 [Yale]) and "deception, spic'd and temperd to [the people's] bane" (3, 582 [Yale]), which the iconoclastic polemicist associates with the arts of tyranny and superstition throughout Eikon Basilike, arts which have likewise transformed Salmasius, according to Milton, into "a foul Circean beast" (4, 518 [Yale])...Indeed insofar as Eikonoklastes is a text about the dangers of a people enchanted by

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[31] Divorce, Works vol. 3 part 2, 409: 4-13.
[32] Helen Damico, "Duality in Dramatic Vision: A Structural Analysis of Samson Agonistes." MS 12 (1978): 91-116.
[33] Joyce Colony, "An Argument for Milton's Dalila." YR 66 (1977): 575.
[34] "Milton's imagery places her squarely in the tradition of Circe," Steadman 133. Behind this lies the guile of Comus, Circe's son.

> Circean arts, as well as the iconoclasm that passionately casts down the theatrical image of such ideological and historical servitude, Milton's great polemic sets the stage both for Samson's fierce response to Dalila and for his vehement act of image-smashing later in the drama.[35]

Dalila's words of "feigned religion" and "smooth hypocrisy" form the precise mid-point of the drama:

> ...at length that grounded maxim
> So rife and celebrated in the mouths
> Of wisest men; that to the public good
> Private respects must yield; with grave authority
> Took full possession of me and prevail'd;
> Vertue, as I thought, truth, duty so enjoyning.
> (*SA* 865-870)

Barker observes that her words are clearly an implication that "patriotism is not enough." As such she comments not only upon the failure of the Protectorate, or the disillusion of Milton,[36] but also upon Satan's self-assumed deliverance and false claims to self-sacrifice in Paradise Lost,[37] and finally upon the choices of Christ and Samson. Barker continues: "clearly Dalila's self-defence has the effect of throwing into relief...the radical errors of Samson's earlier, self-centred and indeed egomaniacal patriotism."[38] This deliberate ambiguity, where Dalila expresses the same vital and fierce defence of her country that Samson displays for his, is apparent when Dalila likens herself to Jael at lines 980-996. Samson however, contrasts his patriotism with hers:

> ...if aught against my life
> Thy countrey sought of thee, it sought unjustly,
> Against the law of nature, law of nations,
> No more thy countrey, but an impious crew
> Of men conspiring to uphold thir state
> By worse then hostile deeds, violating the ends
> For which our countrey is a name so dear;
> Not therefore to be obey'd.
> (*SA* 888-895)

As this is the difference between Dalila and Jael, so too with Dalila and Samson. In the violent ambivalence of Samson's destruction of the temple, the all-important question is that of motive or intention. Like Samson, Jael is determined to serve her God, and acts

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[35] Loewenstein 134.

[36] Hill's political reading of this speech of Dalila's notes that it was a priest of Dagon who urged her, and Philistine priests and lords perish at the temple. The only imaginable reason for Milton to emphasise this is "to condemn the clergy and aristocracy whom he regarded as the principal enemies of God in restoration England." The Experience of Defeat 314-15.

[37] "...while I abroad/ Through all the Coasts of dark destruction seek/ Deliverance for us all: this enterprize/ None shall partake with me." *PL* 2: 463-66.

[38] Rajan, Prison and the Pinnacle 42.

with inspiration rather than the inclination which characterises Dalila's decisions.[39] There is, however, an uneasy suspicion in the mind of the reader that at this stage in the drama, Samson is unaware of the full implications of his comments: in effect the above passage says that my political beliefs are valid because they are mine. The further implication is that anyone attacking this ideal is morally wrong and therefore need not be obeyed. This is consistent with the earlier prose, especially with Milton's defence of regicide. Moreover, the freedom of choosing through reason, so strongly and eloquently argued in Areopagitica, is present here too. Samson is expressing that inner liberty and responsibility of directing his own life towards his God, which Milton wanted for all men.

Harapha

The introduction of Harapha indicates that Milton has another agenda to address, as he does not appear in the biblical text. Harapha of Gath obviously recalls the later Philistine champion, Goliath of Gath. Perhaps also, it is no coincidence that Goliath, the arrogant Philistine champion, who considered his strength to be unbeatable, and who was himself vanquished by a young shepherd with neither battle skills nor weaponry, has been termed "the Philistines' Samson."[40] Thus Milton's treatment of Harapha can be seen to accord with Samson's own earlier life. We can assume, in watching the posturing of this proud giant, that we are seeing a reflection of the "petty god" who walked about like an angel, admired by all, fearing nothing: "the glory late of Israel". There is also another aspect to Harapha's evocation of Goliath. The fact that Goliath was beaten by David is significant, not just in the sense of the weak overpowering the strong, but also as David was a member of the tribe of Judah. In evoking the distant echo of David as a successful Judaean, who does deliver Israel from Philistian yoke, Milton evokes Christ, also of the line of Judah: the one who will ultimately deliver not only Israel, but all of mankind.[41]

Harapha's lineage, important in its own right as a commentary upon the human institutions of hereditary succession, (such as the divine right of the monarchy, or the apostolic succession of the clergy), has literary relevance. The interpretation of Harapha

[39] The question of divine prompting is addressed later in this chapter.
[40] Crenshaw 123.
[41] Lieb notes that David's success lay in his trust in God. Milton and the Culture of Violence 249-50.

as a parody of chivalric knighthood is supported by the tone of the dialogue between Samson and Harapha, as their language recalls much of the traditional code of honour between knights, such as line 1087 where Harapha talks of the "camp or listed field," referring to the lists where tournaments would take place, and Samson's comment at line 1237: "Go baffled coward," where the word "baffled" has another dimension, as it is also a chivalric term, dating from the sixteenth century, and meaning, as Carey observes, "subjected to public disgrace."[42] Chivalric overtones[43] are also apparent in Samson's description of Harapha's weaponry, where Samson's language is loaded with Saxon distaste for Norman lordship:

> Then put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy Helmet
> And Brigandine of brass, thy broad Habergeon,
> Vant-brass and Greves, and Gauntlet, add thy Spear
> A Weavers beam, and seven-times-folded shield,
> I only with an Oak'n staff will meet thee,
> (*SA* 1119-23)

Harapha's "gorgeous arms" have been seen as a commentary upon the "Norman yoke" theory, describing the elaborate armoury of the Norman as opposed to Samson's Saxon weapon, the oaken club, traditionally the weapon of the English lower classes.[44] Milton subscribes elsewhere in his work to the "Norman yoke" theory: as Christopher Hill has observed in his study of Milton and the English Revolution, Milton wrote in his Commonplace Book, beside favourable references to Alfred and to Edward the Confessor, that he longed for an Alfred "to rid us of this Norman gibberish." Hill continues:

> In Of Reformation he associated prelates with the Norman Yoke. The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates picked up his earlier reference to 'their gibberish laws,...the badge of their ancient slavery'. In Eikonoklastes he bewailed men's readiness 'with the fair words and promises of an old exasperated foe...to be stroked and tamed again into the wonted and well-pleasing state of their true Norman villeinage'. This looks forward to lines in Samson Agonistes:
>
> > My Nation was subjected to your Lords.
> > It was the force of Conquest; force with force
> > Is well ejected when the Conquer'd can.

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[42] CSP 384. Much of their language also refers to the accepted code of honour for duelling gentlemen, in the seventeenth century, an area of familiarity to Milton, as he was an accomplished swordsman.

[43] These link Harapha with Satan in Paradise Regained where the temptation of the banquet scene draws upon the chivalric tradition, see Pope and Lewalski, discussed in Chapter 5, and also with the rebel angels in Paradise Lost who play heroic games.

[44] Also behind this image lies the secondary idea of the staff of faith: the pilgrim's staff, traditionally made of oak.

(*SA* 1205-7)[45]

Harapha's association with Norman lordship identifies him with the royalist cause, as does his comment that Samson's nation was "subject to our lords." Samson's response, quoted above, is Milton's old argument for regicide, and for political freedom established through the exercise of reason over tradition. Harapha's arms also connect him firmly with the biblical descriptions of Goliath, supposedly Harapha's son in Milton's drama. Just as we may assume that Harapha's name is connected with the Hebrew word for giant, "Raphah," so too we may assume that this "giant of Gath" is meant to remind us of Goliath.[46] His weaponry holds its own clues: the Bible mentions that Goliath's brother carried a spear whose staff was "like a weaver's beam."[47] Moreover, Goliath himself is described thus:

> And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing his shield went before him.[48]

Finally, Harapha and Goliath both share the same scorn for their Hebrew opponents, Samson in his helpless blindness and chains, forming a parallel to David's youth and lack of experience. Both heroes refuse to carry traditional weaponry, and are mocked, Samson for his oaken staff, and David for his "stave". As Goliath retorts: "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?"[49] There are other sources behind this image: Heracles is also represented with an oaken club, and in the Iconologia of Heracles, the fourth emblem shows the hero slaying a dragon which is coiled around an apple tree, symbolising the victory of reason over concupiscence. The club is made of oak, traditionally a symbol of strength and goodness, in order to communicate the ideas of firmness and force.[50] However, the emphasis upon Harapha's lineage also performs the function of linking Milton's giant with the giants of Genesis. Adam's vision of giants, in Paradise Lost, shows the warlike interpretation of giant character, put forward in the Bible:

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[45] Hill, MER 100-101.
[46] Lieb has noted the connection between Harapha and those giants who battled against heaven and lost. Milton and the Culture of Violence 247.
[47] 2Samuel 21: 19.
[48] 1Samuel 17: 5-7.
[49] 1Samuel 17: 43.
[50] See John Mulryan, "The Heroic Tradition of Milton's Samson Agonistes." MS 18 (1983): 217-34 for a discussion of Hercules.

He lookd and saw wide Territorie spred
Before him, Towns, and rural works between,
Cities of Men with lofty Gates and Towrs,
Concours in Arms, fierce Faces threatning Warr,
Giants of mightie Bone, and bould emprise;
Part wield thir Arms, part courb the foaming Steed,
Single or in Array of Battel rang'd
Both Horse and Foot,
(*PL* 11: 638-45)

This interpretation of the biblical giants in Genesis and Deuteronomy is supported also by Calvin, who draws attention to their violent character, claiming in his commentary upon Genesis that they "practised great violence and tyranny," being stronger than other men, "and relying on their might and power, exalted themselves unlawfully, and without measure."[51] Harapha himself claims his descent from these giants: "I am of *Gath*, / Men call me *Harapha*, of stock renown'd / As *Og* or *Anak* and the *Emims* old" (*SA* 1078-80). The angel Michael explains to Adam that the giants are born of sons of God and daughters of men, recalling the giants of Greek mythology, who threatened heaven in their warlike arrogance:

...These are the product
Of those ill mated Marriages thou saw'st;
Where good with bad were matcht, who of themselves
Abhor to joyn; and by imprudence mixt,
Produce prodigious Births of bodie or mind.
Such were these Giants, men of high renown;
For in those dayes Might onely shall be admir'd,
And Valour and Heroic Vertu call'd;
To overcome in Battle, and subdue
Nations...
(*PL* 11: 683-692)

This description is based upon Genesis chapter six, verse four: "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."[52] Calvin also puts forward this point:

> Nevertheless, under the magnificent title of heroes, they cruelly exercised dominion, and acquired power and fame for themselves, by injuring and oppressing their brethren. And this was the first nobility of the world. Lest any one should too greatly delight himself in a long and dingy line of ancestry; this, I repeat, was the nobility, which raised itself on high, by

[51] Calvin, Commentary on Genesis Trans. Rev. John King, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Company, 1847) 244.
[52] Genesis 6:4.

pouring contempt and disgrace on others.[53]

Such is the interconnectedness of Milton's works and ideas, that this elucidation of Harapha's character leads the reader from his arguments on regicide, to a reiteration of his views on mismatching with an infidel; describing the daughters of wickedness as bred only to dance, to sing, and to please the eyes of men:

> To these that sober Race of Men, whose lives
> Religious titl'd them the Sons of God,
> Shall yield up all thir vertue, all thir fame
> Ignobly, to the traines and to the smiles
> Of these fair Atheists...
> (*PL* 11: 621-625)

Thus the messages of the prose are drawn into the messages of the verse, and Harapha comments not only upon Dalila, but upon Satan. The link between the giants and Satan is pointed out by Calvin: "Their first fault was pride; because, relying on their own strength, they arrogated to themselves more than was due. Pride produced contempt of God, because, being inflated by arrogance, they began to shake off every yoke."[54] It could also be argued that Harapha's bravado corresponds to Satan's in Paradise Lost, particularly in his desire for fame (visible too in the ironic and overstated patriotism of Dalila), his concern for his reputation, and his obsession with deeds of high valour. The brutish heroism of such men of renown is in sharp contrast to the fortitude of the men of God, represented in Christ and in Samson, although there is a sense that in meeting Harapha, Samson is in some way meeting and rejecting an older part of himself. Moreover, underlying this is the idea that Milton rejected the earlier adulation he had for Cromwell, which was superseded by the realisation that military skill is inferior to obedient trust, demonstrated by Christ, and reflected in those who stand and wait.

It is the Harapha episode which finally prompts Samson to acknowledge the source of his strength, perhaps in defiance of Harapha who also assumes, as Samson has before him, that his strength hangs in his hair. It is relevant to compare the way in which David and Samson acknowledge the source of their power. David defies Goliath by calling upon the strength of his God, and rejecting arms:

> Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee

[53] Calvin, Genesis 246.
[54] Calvin, Genesis 246.

> into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.[55]

So too, Samson defies Harapha, calling upon the power of his God, and giving one of the most important turning points of the drama, in his explicit avowal of the power of his God, and thus, by implication, of his own position as God's champion:

> My trust is in the living God who gave me
> At my Nativity this strength,
> (...)
> ...if *Dagon* be thy god,
> Go to his Temple, invocate his aid
> With solemnest devotion, spread before him
> How highly it concerns his glory now
> To frustrate and dissolve these Magic spells,
> Which I to be the power of *Israel*'s God
> Avow, and challenge *Dagon* to the test,
> (*SA* 1140-1151)

This comparison between David and Samson has been highlighted by Muskin. She suggests that Milton has adopted the biblical figure of David in order to endow his hero with intellectual and spiritual value:

> Yet in all the Hebrew Bible, from Moses through the great prophets, only one person has both the weaknesses of the original Samson and the strengths which Milton has provided. The only character who sins and repents, has a failing for the fair sex, fights Philistines, endures being a man alone, outlawed, and persecuted by his own people, and yet at the same time is a man of rare nobility, integrity, and prayer, is David.[56]

The exit of Harapha parallels the exit of Dalila, in that to both, Samson makes the same warning: to Dalila, when she asks to approach and touch his hand he says "Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake / My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint" (*SA* 952-53), and to Harapha:

> Go baffl'd coward, lest I run upon thee,
> Though in these chains, bulk without spirit vast,
> And with one buffet lay thy structure low,
> Or swing thee in the Air, then dash thee down
> To the hazard of thy brains and shatter'd sides.
> (*SA* 1237-41)

However, in rebuffing Dalila, he is rejecting weakness, whereas in dismissing Harapha,

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[55] 1Samuel 17: 45-46.
[56] Muskin, "'Wisdom in Adversity': Davidic Traits in Milton's Samson Agonistes" 236. The words "is Milton" could arguably be substituted for the words "is David."

he is rejecting human strength, in favour of divine strength. Samson has publicly stated that his strength is from his God, and more importantly, has at last realised that God is forgiving, that His ear is open, and His eye ever gracious to receive the suppliant.

The Public Officer

By this stage in the drama, Samson has made significant spiritual progress from the despair which threatened to consume him earlier in the work. At first Samson talks of "oft-invocated death," and asks why he should desire life, when all he wishes for is a hasty end to all his pains. He maintains, in a speech rich in dramatic irony, that he is near to death:[57]

> That these dark orbs no more shall treat with light,
> Nor th'other light of life continue long,
> But yield to double darkness nigh at hand:
> (...)
> My hopes all flat, nature within me seems
> In all her functions weary of her self;
> My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest.
> (*SA* 591-98)

> Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
> Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless;
> This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
> No long petition, speedy death,
> The close of all my miseries, and the balm.
> (*SA* 648-51)

The entrance of the Public Officer comes at a time when Samson has managed to make the leap of intelligence towards understanding that God is loving:

> All these indignities, for such they are
> From thine, these evils I deserve and more,
> Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
> Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon
> Whose ear is ever open; and his eye
> Gracious to re-admit the suppliant;
> (*SA* 1169-73)

As yet, however, he has not made the corresponding leap of faith, to trust in what he has managed to believe, as he comments to the Chorus after the exit of Harapha:

> But come what will, my deadliest foe will prove
> My speediest friend, by death to rid me hence,

[57] Notably this is before the entrance of Dalila, therefore before his interaction with the other characters which rouses him.

The worst that he can give, to me the best.
Yet so it may fall out, because thir end
Is hate, not help to me, it may with mine
Draw thir own ruin who attempt the deed.
(*SA* 1262-67)

Furthermore, the Public Officer arrives just after the Chorus have been extolling the virtues of patience, "the exercise of saints." As a result, Samson appears to be more genuinely exhausted and disillusioned than at any other point in the drama, when he first answers the Officer. It is at this juncture that he finally relinquishes his hold upon the impression which he has been attempting to sustain in public since the original entrance of the Chorus. His weary dismissal, and statement "I cannot come" is followed by a more extended excuse which displays complete exhaustion and lack of spirit, where Samson asks if they do not have enough in the way of freak entertainment without dragging him "with shackles tir'd,/ And over-labour'd at thir publick Mill,/ To make them sport with blind activity?" (*SA* 1326-28). At this point Milton makes Samson a more truly pathetic figure than he has been hitherto. He has defended himself against the interference of his countrymen, his father, his wife, and the champion of a god who rivals his own: more than this he has won a victory over his own nature. The turning-point has been made, but it remains for Samson to set his own feet upon the upward path. Milton achieves a delicate balance in the following scene, between the impression in the mind of the reader that Samson acts in his own resolve, and the impression that God impels Samson towards the final action of the drama, now that Samson has repented and become an instrument of divine will. In effect, there is an element of ambiguity: is Samson rousing himself, or are his rousing motions divinely prompted? There is perhaps an element of both in the final part of the drama, reflecting Milton's conviction that regeneration and reformation were active choices which the individual could make for himself.

Samson's progress may be measured in his response to the Public Officer's seemingly innocent remark: "Regard thy self, this will offend them highly." (*SA* 1333) In his opening soliloquy, Samson bemoans his situation, encompassed round by further evils, and expresses fear of his inhuman foes. He claims to be like one who is dead, but without the privileges of peace and security which come with death, and uses the memorable phrase: "My self, my Sepulcher, a moving Grave," (*SA* 102). In answer to the Public Officer's advice to consider himself: advice which the other characters have

all sought to give him in one way or another, he responds with the line: "My self? my conscience and internal peace" (*SA* 1334). These two lines encapsulate the movement which has occurred through the drama: the question mark shows the reader that Samson has woken from his lethargy, and has at last isolated true self-knowledge. This line signals the awakening of his self-respect, and from the stronger and more self-regarding defiance which follows, it is an obvious step to the volte-face which will lead him to the temple. His last refusal to the Public Officer, however, has a note of pride which shows him still to be perhaps "self-displeased for self-offence, more than for God offended," and holding to the letter of Hebrew law in order to save himself from further humiliation: he still has to take another step towards the divine purpose.

Samson's defence of his refusal to perform at the temple, delivered to the Chorus, centres at first upon the heart of God's purpose, his returning strength:

> Shall I abuse this Consecrated gift
> Of strength, again returning with my hair
> After my great transgression, so requite
> Favour renew'd, and add a greater sin
> By prostituting holy things to Idols;
> A *Nazarite* in place abominable
> Vaunting my strength in honour to thir *Dagon*?
> (*SA* 1354-60)

This is redolent of classical tragedy in its irony: the reader knows the ending of the story before it has begun, so there is no possibility of suspense, but extensive scope for dramatic irony.[58] It is tempting for the Christian reader with hindsight to argue that Samson has not yet reached a full understanding of God's purpose for him, and to regard his reasoning as flawed, bound by the law rather than the spirit: an imperfect vision. Yet Milton has specifically cast his drama in the Old Testament mode, and the theological logic which prevails is primarily Hebraic, with selected Christian nuances.[59] Certainly there is a profound Christian emphasis in certain areas of the work, but this testifies rather to the scope and power of the work, rather than to any specific Christian message. Milton arguably sought to portray a type of relationship between God and man which transcended the boundaries of any one religion, in a timeless understanding

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[58] See Gordon Teskey, "Balanced in Time: Paradise Regained and the Centre of the Miltonic Vision." UTQ 50 (1981): 269-83. Teskey notes that as in Greek tragedy, dramatic tension is never about what will happen, but about "the way in which an absolutely certain outcome will happen. The certainty of the outcome creates dramatic irony while uncertainty about how it will occur creates dramatic tension." 276.

[59] Christ also operates within Hebraic parameters in Paradise Regained, as his use of the Old Testament and the law demonstrates.

between the individual believer and God.

The first exit of the Public Officer is followed by a question from the Chorus about Samson's motives. His claim that to attend the festival of Dagon would be to prostitute holy things to idols is taken up in a query which goes beyond the intentions of the speakers. The Chorus replies: "Yet with this strength thou serv'st the *Philistines,*/ Idolatrous, uncircumcis'd, unclean" (*SA* 1363-4). In fact, the prostitution of holy things to idolatrous purpose was accomplished in Samson's original sin. Then, his prostitution was a spiritual one, although in the biblical source, where Delilah is classified as a harlot, it also carries a sexual dimension. Here, as elsewhere in the drama, the layers of meaning expand beyond the understanding of the characters who enunciate them, back through the earlier parts of the work, and beyond, into the very source material itself. Samson's defence of his actions in the mill relate directly to Milton's prose arguments on civil liberty: a subject owes a certain amount of obedience to a civil power which is in authority. This idea extends from the Old Testament into the New, and then onwards from the teachings of Christ to the early Reformers, and so into seventeenth-century political theory. Samson's response, however, is to argue that his service to the Philistines is not in their idol-worship, but in honest labour for his own food. While Milton endorses the sentiment, it is arguable whether he intends the reader to approve Samson's use of holy law. In a sense, his point illuminates the shortcomings of an old dispensation which has been superseded, at least to the Christian mind, by a new covenant which promotes judgement through the spirit rather than the law. It is just that flexibility of reaction, coming with the application of conscience to different situations, which Samson lacks at this point in the work. This is the step which he has to take, from the security of the law into the freedom of the spirit: a step which of necessity takes him from the Old Testament into the New.[60]

As Radzinowicz has observed it was not unusual to use Old Testament figures to represent contemporary Christian points in the Reformation: more than anything else, the Old Testament reveals the ways of God to man, and although it yields example through typology, this history is more of a "continuous prophecy" than a mere prefigurement of the Gospels. Milton desired, through the purging of passion, and the

[60] Stollman remarks that Milton's Christianising of Samson is "more than an allegorical echo but less than a typological construction," and argues: "Milton's interpretation is one which makes Samson compatible with Christian doctrine and at the same time Hebraically

education of the reader in God's intended purpose, to be a modern collaborator with the prophets, guiding his people towards a fuller understanding of the ways of God to man. Samson's realisation comes with his affirmation of God's power and inscrutability of purpose:

> Yet that he may dispense with me or thee
> Present in Temples at Idolatrous Rites
> For some important cause, thou needst not doubt.
> (...)
> Be of good courage, I begin to feel
> Some rouzing motions in me which dispose
> To something extraordinary my thoughts.
> (*SA* 1377-1383)

The rousing motions have provoked much in the way of critical debate. Do they correspond to the inner promptings which caused Samson to choose his Philistine wives? Are they genuine? Are they simply a divine sanction for Samson's destruction of the Philistine temple: an impulse from God, moving his champion towards a heroic action?[61] As Wood has observed, "By the end of the Puritan revolution, the most partisan of believers were forced to reflect ruefully on the claims of those who insisted they had been motioned by God."[62] Milton himself says of divine illumination, that "no man can know [it] at all times to be in himself, much less to be at any time for certain in any other."[63] Cromwell also cast doubts upon the validity of impulses of faith: "I know a man may answer all difficulties with faith, and faith will answer all difficulties really where it is, but we are very apt, all of us, to call that faith, that perhaps may be but carnal imagination, and carnal reasonings."[64] In Paradise Lost, Milton attacks those who pretend to have been moved by the spirit:

> Who all the sacred mysteries of Heav'n
> To thir own vile advantages shall turne
> (...)
> ...and with these to joine
> Secular power, though feigning still to act
> By spiritual, to themselves appropriating
> The Spirit of God...
> (*PL* 12: 509-19)

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decorous. Samson is 'between the pillars'...of the Old and the New Testament." Stollman, "Milton's Samson and the Jewish Tradition," 196.

[61] Wood 199.

[62] Wood 200.

[63] As quoted Wood 200.

[64] Woodhouse, 1974, 8 (Wood, 200).

Milton's horror of feigned divine impulsion is partially explained by Wood, in his description of the contemporary political situation: "By 1660, a multitudinous host of fools, charlatans and fanatics had claimed divine impulsion for their excesses and even apparently blasphemous and outrageous behaviour. Knowing the truth of another human being's claim to have been motioned by God was entirely problematical."[65] It was awkward for the Reformed Churches to condemn any particular sect which might claim divine motion, as the whole philosophy of the Reformed faith was constructed upon the principle that the individual had a right to interpret the Scriptures according to his own internal light. The individual's response, therefore, could hardly be criticised, if this freedom were to be respected. As Calvin pointed out, the individual could no more judge of another's righteousness than he could of his own. The unsearchable dispose of providence, portrayed so clearly in Samson Agonistes, appeared to be no less unsearchable in the light of Reformation.

The inscrutability of the divine purpose is evident in Samson's final resolution before the return of the Public Officer, as he glimpses his destiny in words which recall Sophocles:[66] "If there be aught of presage in the mind,/ This day will be remarkable in my life/ By some great act, or of my days the last" (*SA* 1387-1389). This remark combines the elements of irony and prophecy in proportions which demonstrate clearly Samson's human lack of understanding. In the Trachiniae, "Hercules realises that the oracle which foretold release from his labours meant death to him, not final prosperity."[67] Thus the riddling of the pagan oracle can be seen to correspond at a certain level to the unsearchable dispose of providence. Samson's response to the more threatening second message of the Public Officer both obscures and illuminates his newly achieved sense of purpose. The threat of force which the officer uses, provokes the same response in Samson which Harapha's taunts produced, and his first comments are cast in the same proud mould of physical confidence which characterised his earlier speeches: "I could be well content to try their art, / Which to no few of them would prove pernicious." He modifies his tone slightly in the lines which follow, echoing the regal self-consideration of Shakespeare's Cleopatra in his determination not to be trailed through the Philistine streets "like a wild beast". This image is an interesting one, as the

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[65] Wood 200.
[66] This point has been made by J.C. Maxwell, PQ xxxiii (1954) 90-1, as quoted CSP 388.
[67] CSP 389.

animal imagery throughout the drama has indicated that Samson has progressed from his early career, through his shame and degradation to a new strength.[68] This heraldic progression is completed in the images of the dragon, the eagle and the phoenix, but as Carey points out, the dragon corresponds to the snake imagery, used earlier to describe Dalila.[69] Just as the tempest imagery serves Samson and Harapha, and the sea images incorporate Samson and Dalila, this appropriation of Philistine imagery contributes an additional level of meaning which connects Samson's patriotism and vengeance with the nationalism of the Philistines. Similarly, the fire imagery which surrounds Samson throughout the drama, commencing with the fire of the burnt offering and the ascension of the angel in flames; through the binding of Samson in ropes which were to him as "threds/ Toucht with the flame," (*SA* 262); "Heav'ns fiery rod" which pointed out the fountain when he was thirsty and called upon God; and the shield of fire which the Chorus invokes to protect him in the Philistine temple; is not only used to describe the hero. Samson alludes to the fire, and his inability to identify with it after his fall, in the line "O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon," (*SA* 80), but as Carey observes, the exclusiveness of the image is called into question as: "the apparently 'extinguished' Samson rouses his own 'fiery virtue' into 'sudden flame' (1688-92). He is warned not to add fuel to the 'flame of the Philistine lords, and himself speaks of the priests and worshippers of Dagon 'fired' with zeal and 'unquenchable' (1419-22)."[70] As Carey continues, this reveals an equivalence between the religious fervour of the Philistines and that of the protagonist. Coupled with the earlier identification of patriotic feeling between Samson and Dalila, this evinces a sense of moral complexity in the work which is absent from much of Milton's earlier writing. Eikonoklastes, in its relationship to the equally stylised Eikon Basilike, could not entertain the notion of moral diversity and equality across the political or religious divide, yet in Samson Agonistes, as in Of True Religion, Milton's final work, there is a sense that the writer has achieved ethical maturity.

Samson's final speech to the Chorus emphasises above everything else, that he

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[68] The development of animal imagery in the drama has been noted by Carey, who describes his elevation: "Samson, a 'lion' before his fall (128, 139), is caught in Dalila's 'snares' (230, 409, 532, 931), 'gins' and 'toils' (933), becomes a farmyard animal, 'a tame wether' (538), in his subjection to her, and is 'Put to the labour of a beast' (37) among the 'asses' (1162) at the mill. But the first words he speaks to Dalila - 'Out, out hyaena' (748) - transfer his animal baseness to her, and in the Harapha episode the 'chafed wild boars' and 'ruffled porcupines' (1138) - wild and heraldic creatures - show him rapidly regaining his animal nobility." CSP 339.

[69] Snake imagery has traditionally been used in describing women: many early pictorial representations of the Fall of Man show the serpent with a woman's face.

[70] CSP 340-1.

will not comply with anything "Scandalous or forbidden in our Law" (*SA* 1409). He closes with the lines: "Happ'n what may, of me expect to hear/ Nothing dishonourable, impure, unworthy/ Our God, our Law, my Nation, or my self," (*SA* 1423-5). In this summing up, Samson has incorporated his whole development from the opening of the drama, when his honour was most important to him, through his repentance and desire for purity, and his regard for his father, his people and his God, to the ultimate ordering of his priorities: his God, the Law of his God, his nation, and lastly himself. This progression shows not only that he has successfully learned to put his God before everything else, but that he has discovered a measure of self respect, totally different from his earlier arrogance, and a proper evaluation of God's champion. The guiding hand which Samson asks for at the opening of the drama is given in the lines from the Chorus:

> Go, and the Holy One
> Of *Israel* be thy guide
> To what may serve his glory best, & spread his name
> Great among the Heathen round:
> (*SA* 1427-1430)[71]

Ironically, Samson's destiny has led him to satisfy the purpose of his God at the time when the reader is aware that he is just about to do so, and at a time when he thought that he had lost this chance for ever. His end is described to us through the narrative of the messenger:

> He patient but undaunted where they led him,
> Came to the place, and what was set before him
> Which without help of eye, might be assay'd,
> To heave, pull, draw, or break, he still perform'd
> All with incredible, stupendious force,
> None daring to appear Antagonist.
> (*SA* 1623-8)

Samson's death is described carefully, and in considering his motivation, the reader remembers Milton's comment in the Argument, that what Samson had done to the Philistines, he had also done "by accident to himself":[72]

> ...with head a while enclin'd,
> And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd,
> Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd.
> At last with head erect thus cryed aloud,

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[71] These words of the Chorus echo Samson's earlier lament at lines 448-53.
[72] CSP 344.

Hitherto, Lords, what your commands impos'd
I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
Not without wonder or delight beheld.
Now of my own accord such other tryal
I mean to shew you of my strength, yet greater;
As with amaze shall strike all who behold.
(*SA* 1634-45)

The most important point about this speech of Samson's is the emphasis upon his own will. He has ceased to perform the will of the Philistines, and has even grown beyond the rousing motions which showed the influence of the Spirit upon his actions: this act which is to follow is to be performed of his own accord. In this, Samson shows that he has grown through his doubt and despair, and through his heavenly guidance: he is once more acting for himself, but this time, he is standing erect, righteously at peace with his own soul, and supported by the guiding hand of God.[73]

The Hebrew Messenger and Samson's Death

After Samson leaves with the Public Officer, the other characters are thrown into sharper relief, giving the reader an opportunity to evaluate the extent of their change through the course of the work. Firstly, Manoa appears with lively and youthful steps, poignantly ironic in his hope of releasing his son from captivity. Death will release Samson, as he has himself so often hoped in the course of the poem. Manoa's speeches before the arrival of the Hebrew messenger are littered with dramatic irony, such as his plans for Samson's release and retirement, ransomed by Manoa's entire fortune if necessary, and in particular, his determination not to leave without his son: "No, I am fixt not to part hence without him" (*SA* 1481). The heavy irony of this line is fully apparent only at the end of the drama, when Manoa and the chorus go to the temple in order to collect Samson's body: he does then return to his father's house with Manoa, but only as a corpse. His conviction that the regrowth of Samson's hair is a matter of portent carries more irony:

And I perswade me God had not permitted
His strength again to grow up with his hair
Garrison'd round about him like a Camp
Of faithful Souldiery, were not his purpose
To use him further yet in some great service,

[73] The reader is reminded of the crucial lines in Paradise Regained where Christ says: "...also it is written,/ Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood./ But Satan smitten with amazement fell" (*PR* 4: 560-2).

Not to sit idle with so great a gift
Useless, and thence ridiculous about him.
And since his strength with eye-sight was not lost,
God will restore him eye-sight to his strength.
(*SA* 1495-1503)

Manoa's assumption that Samson cannot perform God's will without the use of his eyes, encapsulates his lack of understanding. Manoa's grasp of the divine plan has been tenuous throughout the work, and his own plans constantly run at a tangent to God's purpose. As Samson has been growing closer to God in a deepening understanding of His will, Manoa has been moving in a different direction, obsessed with his own designs and solutions, rather than considering Samson's destiny. The Chorus also assume that the restoration of Samson's eyesight would be a prerequisite for any renewed assault upon the Philistines, claiming that to the God of Israel, nothing is impossible. Like Manoa, they are seeking some external sign, a proof that God is with their champion, and supporting their cause, and underlying this is arguably an authorial comment to the supporters of the Good Old Cause: arguably a reproof rather than a reassurance. Samson has realised that the internal growth is the important concern, and stands alone in the drama with this realisation: the other characters concentrate upon ephemeral details, such as Harapha's distaste for an unwashed and ragged hero, Dalila, whose "inward gifts / Were left for haste unfinished," (1026-7) and the Philistines themselves who were over-confident enough to invite their destroyer right into their very midst, falsely secure in the assumption that a blinded Samson could do them no harm. In this, Milton identifies the Hebrew Chorus with the Philistine lords, allowing both to believe in the mere externals of God's purpose. The inscrutability of this purpose, and the other characters' continuing inability to penetrate the wisdom of heaven, enables Milton to concentrate his communication of purpose through the clarity of Samson's spirituality. Through him, the reader is guided through the designs and beliefs of the author.[74]

The troubled question of the conclusion to Samson's life returns with the reaction of the Hebrew messenger. His opening speeches reveal the horror of the violence which Samson has perpetrated:

O whither shall I run, or which way flie
The sight of this so horrid spectacle
Which earst my eyes beheld and yet behold;

[74] These are more closely examined in the Conclusion.

For dire imagination still persues me.
(*SA* 1541-1544)

This impression of horror comes not from a Philistine who would understandably be shocked and traumatised, but from a Hebrew: one who is in subjection to a hated conquering race.[75] As such, the emphasis upon the horror of Samson's vengeance is rendered doubly pointed by being voiced by a fellow Danite. In Manoa's concern with the manner of his death, Milton makes the proper Old Testament concern with suicide appear to be an unnecessary and irrelevant preoccupation with the letter of the law: Samson has died in total communion with and obedience to his God, and any scrutiny by Manoa and the Chorus of his motives seems inappropriate and clumsy. It could be argued that in doing this, Milton is highlighting the equally inappropriate curiosity of centuries of Christian exegesis, which had struggled to isolate the motives behind Samson's apparent suicide. Certainly the narrative of Judges would appear to be unambiguous: "Let my soul die with the Philistines," but Milton has in effect added the silent afterthought "if that be thy will," to the rather stark biblical phrase. Milton has not avoided the issues of despair, doubt, and desire for death: rather he has emphasised them in making his protagonist exclaim more than once that he desires death, the close of all his miseries, and release from an existence which has become too tortured to be borne. Yet Samson does not release himself from life, and Milton is adamant upon that point. The hero's end is not one of rage and vengeance, for all its violence: in his quiet communion with God, as he bows his head a while and prays or resolves his mind, he is preparing himself to be an instrument of God's purpose. There is no thought in the mind of Milton's Samson of avenging himself for the loss of his eyes: that would be to trivialise the moment of absolute subjection to the will of God. There is another assertion that Samson did not desire to die with the Philistines, but bowed to necessity, in the lines of the Chorus:

Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd
The work for which thou wast foretold
To *Israel*, and now ly'st victorious
Among thy slain self-kill'd
Not willingly, but tangl'd in the fold,
Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
Thee with thy slaughter'd foes in number more

[75] Christopher Grose suggests that the messenger is Milton's "spokesman for the truth about what governs the narrative scene in this play." Christopher Grose, "'His Uncontrollable Intent': Discovery as Action in Samson Agonistes." MS 7 (1975) 73.

Then all thy life had slain before.
(*SA* 1661-1668)

The Semi-chorus emphasise the spiritual depravity of the Philistines, pointing out their drunkenness and gluttony with glee, and delighting in their mistaken fervour in worshipping Dagon, ignoring God, and asking Samson into the temple to destroy them. In this there is arguably a reference to the public sports and festival pastimes reinstated after the Restoration, pastimes which Milton had supported if under the control of magistrates, but not under the jurisdiction of the Laudian Church.[76] Their comment upon the internal blindness of the Philistines enables the Chorus to make the leap of understanding towards Samson's clarity of vision: one which if they cannot understand, they can at least recognise:

But he though blind of sight,
Despis'd and thought extinguish't quite,
With inward eyes illuminated
His fierie vertue rouz'd
From under ashes into sudden flame,
(*SA* 1687-1691)

There is a reference to reprobation in the lines which precede this speech, where the Chorus voices sentiments from the first chapter of Romans:

So fond are mortal men
Fall'n into wrath divine,
As thir own ruin on themselves to invite,
Insensate left, or to sense reprobate,
And with blindness internal struck.
(*SA* 1682-1686)

The verse from Romans reads: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;"[77] and the reference to internal blindness recalls other verses which claim that God blinds the blind and hardens the stony-hearted. The call of election is bestowed upon believers as an internal illumination of the spirit, and as such can be seen to apply to Samson, whose internal vision contrasts with the blindness internal described.

Manoa puts an end to the lamentations of the Chorus by pointing out that Samson has acquitted himself fittingly for a hero, fully revenged upon his enemies, and leaving them with years of mourning. There is a sense in this speech that Manoa's

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[76] See Leah S. Marcus, The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes. (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1986).
[77] Romans 1: 28.

understanding of the situation has fallen wide of the mark: a sense which is underlined by his hope that Israel will lay hold on this occasion. The reader knows with hindsight that not only did Israel fail to lay hold on the occasion, but that a few generations later, the tribe of Dan had disappeared altogether. The political implications are simultaneously unmistakable and subtler than might at first appear. The traditional readings which maintain that Milton either advocates a new revolution, or looks back in sorrow upon the failure of his countrymen both have a place in the argument of this thesis, which views Milton's purpose to be that of inspiring a spiritual revolution within his reader.

Manoa's final speech shows the extent to which he has remained untouched by the events of the drama: his bustling activity is not diminished, but is rather transferred to the business of organising a suitable funeral for Samson, and in his concentration upon the honour of his house, and the behaviour of his son, he has only one throw-away remark to bestow upon the primary force behind Samson's life: "And which is best and happiest yet, all this/ With God not parted from him, as was feard,/ But favouring and assisting to the end." (*SA* 1718-1720) After this, he returns to boasting of the fit ending which has come after so much pride and shame. In this, Manoa appears to be leaving the drama in a mental state close to that of Samson before his fall, when he felt his labours to be self-accomplished, rather than divinely wrought: Manoa makes the same mistake in assuming that the honour falls to "his father's house." It is to his heavenly father that the honour belongs, and as a result, the phrase "home to his father's house" has an ironic overtone, as Milton plays off the Christian hindsight of the reader against the Hebraic consciousness of the character.

The Chorus is left to utter the final speech in the drama. As Carey has noted, it is classical in style and content, and contains an added acknowledgement of their own lack of vision:

> All is best, though we oft doubt,
> What th'unsearchable dispose
> Of highest wisdom brings about,
> And ever best found in the close.
> Oft he seems to hide his face,
> But unexpectedly returns
> And to his faithful Champion hath in place
> Bore witness gloriously;
> (*SA* 1745-1752)

This sentiment from the Chorus dissipates the sense of doubt which has pervaded the entire drama, largely through the direct despair of Samson, but supported by the unconvincing demurs from the other characters whenever the wisdom and justice of God were called into question. It is only with the rousing motions of Samson that the atmosphere of mistrust in the divine scheme is ultimately dispelled, and this final speech from the Chorus closes the divide between limited human understanding and boundless divine wisdom. In the case of the Chorus, however, this is not accomplished by drawing near to the divide as Samson does, but by acknowledging their own inability to trust, and lack of comprehension: to them the unsearchable dispose of providence is as unsearchable at the end of the drama as it was at the opening. They have learned to trust that all will be resolved according to divine will, but unlike Samson, they have not reached an intimate relationship with God. The reader is tempted to assume, indeed, that none of the other characters is even aware that the God whose laws they strive to obey may be known on a personal and spiritual level as Samson has known Him. It is this relationship which Milton is highlighting as the important one in the drama, and in emphasising the cathartic, restorative and educational aspects of tragedy, Milton is endeavouring to communicate to his readers the same internal peace which his characters enunciate:

> His servants he with new acquist
> Of true experience from this great event
> With peace and consolation hath dismist,
> And calm of mind all passion spent.
> (*SA* 1755-8)

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that Milton's belief in his vocation as poetic legislator of his nation impelled him no less in the final poems than in the polemic prose, and that the convictions which he had voiced in prose are clearly restated in the 1671 volume. His communication of what he believed to be vital spiritual truth led him into a realm of controversy which he never left, and into the part which he sought to play in the re-forming of the Reformation in England. This part involved the assuming of a heroic persona, and the defining of self which informed his portrayal of Christ and Samson as much as the rhetorical self-fashioning of the polemic. The talent which it was "death to hide" may have been his poetic genius, but his "great task-master" presided no less over the prose years, guiding Milton's awareness of his duty as a preacher and a prophet to his times. This duty required him to warn and admonish his people, while his instinct for epic poetry led him to praise and celebrate the heroism of which he wanted to believe them capable.

The nature of the response which he struggled to inspire demanded that he should continually reiterate his attempts to change his readership, and through them, the course of future events. To this end he rewrote history, altering the perceptions of the historical events which he had narrated for the glorification of his countrymen. His fervent belief in the potential of reason and liberty convinced him that others sought to construct the same New Jerusalem on English soil that he did. Undoubtedly many did, but his idealism diverged constantly from the reality of political expediency, financial necessity, and human frailty. His growing awareness of the fallibility of human nature directed the subject matter of his final poems, but the argument of this thesis has been that these poems did not therefore constitute a retrospective intellectual exploration of the failure of Englishmen to build a godly society, but rather represented a continuation not only of the messages of the prose, but also of its purpose. Milton desired to change his readership still, and to rouse their virtue in whatever way he still could. The political hopes for a commonwealth within which godly pursuits might flourish may have left Milton; but his hopes for spiritual regeneration, which the commonwealth he had envisaged would have fostered, were undiminished. These hopes are more immediately apparent in the 1671 volume than in the prose, perhaps because in the poetry the political dimension of his work had been subsumed into the artistic. As I have shown with regard to his polemic discourse, the power of language as a weapon was significant for Milton, and his reworking of the aesthetic throughout his career demonstrates the

supreme facility which he had in all literary forms. That his chief desire and strongest calling were in poetry, renders it unsurprising that the communication of his dearest concerns are clearest in that medium. Milton's aspirations to be a poet and a prophet are apparent throughout his career, but of all his works, it is in Samson Agonistes that he approaches this position most closely. Radzinowicz observes:

> As at certain moments in history one man, one great poet, may see farther than his generation, Milton in Samson Agonistes undertook to be a prophet to his times as well as a historian of them. Samson Agonistes, rooted in Milton's understanding of history, goes beyond the reflection of public tragedy to the diagnosis of national failure and the prophecy of the conditions necessary for a successful republic.[1]

His belief in the vital importance of the paradise within underpins all his writing, and the theme of being united with God's purpose, which is the informing principle of this vision, is repeated and reworked. It becomes more discernible as his writing progresses, and in the final poems, it becomes the only communication which Milton needs to make. In this sense, the purpose of his life narrows in focus towards Samson Agonistes, as Milton himself seems to feel that this is the only true requirement for a godly life. His own desire, voiced early in his life, before his writing career began, may thus be seen as being fulfilled:

> And may at last my weary age
> Find out the peacefull hermitage,
> The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,
> Where I may sit and rightly spell
> Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew,
> And every Herb that sips the dew;
> Till old experience do attain
> To something like Prophetic strain.[2]

[1] Radzinowicz 69-70.
[2] Il Penseroso, Works vol. 1 part 1, 46.

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