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Milton and the Art of Rhetoric

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who seek a history of rhetorical theory that teaches, delights, and moves will find it here.

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William Pallister, *Between Worlds: The Rhetorical Universe of Paradise Lost* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). ISBN 978-0-8020-9835-1; Daniel Shore, *Milton and the Art of Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). isbn: 978-1-107-02150-1

Two books published in the last few years each have much to offer on the subject of how the English poet and statesman John Milton (1608–74) employed rhetoric in his various works and particularly in his epic poem *Paradise Lost*. William Pallister reminds or perhaps informs Miltonists of the centrality of rhetoric in the Renaissance and its utility both for persuasion and morality. He argues that contemporary criticism has overlooked the formal poetic and rhetorical presentation of Milton's ideas (7–8). Pallister's particular focus is *Paradise Lost* and the rhetorical issue of future contingency, which he traces through Milton's epic poem in terms of three distinct rhetorics, of hell, of heaven, and of paradise, the paradisaical one being the most rhetorical because the most contingent.

Pallister divides his book into two equal halves. His first five chapters are heavily documented demonstrations of Renaissance rhetoric, its classical roots, and Milton's engagement with it. In chapter one, Pallister first identifies contingency and probability as key issues in deliberative rhetoric and locates their discussion in such authors as Augustine, Boethius, Ockham, Aquinas, Valla, Pomponazzi, Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin. He then demonstrates how Milton's theological concerns for free will in *Paradise Lost* are reflected in his preservation therein of future contingency. Chapter two surveys the classical rhetoricians who had written on contingency, such as Isocrates, Aristotle, and Cicero, since Milton cites these authorities in his short pedagogical tract, *Of Education* (1644) rather than any of the educational theorists of his own period. Chapter three surveys Renaissance rhetoric in terms of its focus on eloquent style and its prescribed utility in politics, ethics, poetry, and theology, and in chapter four demonstrates how Milton's own prose identifies eloquence as "none . . . but the serious and hearty love of truth" (80; *An Apology against a Pamphlet*, Yale Prose 1: 948–49), a love that Pallister associates with Milton's "humanistic faith in the power of eloquence to captivate its audience and compel them to accept Christian values" (10). Chapter five considers rhetoric's relation to Christian theology and particularly the Bible as a rhetorical text, preaching as a rhetorical art, and God as a rhetorical and especially a poetic speaker.

With this foundation laid, Pallister proceeds in the second half of his book to investigate the rhetorical nature of *Paradise Lost*. In chapter six, he takes us to the portions of Milton's epic that take place in heaven. Since there is little contingency possible in God's omniscience, the master tropes of heaven are *polyptoton* and especially *conduplicatio*, and the favored *genus dicendi* is epideixis, especially praise. Chapter seven surveys Satan's presentation as an orator in various authors before and including Milton, whose Satan is an accomplished orator, and chapter eight identifies the master trope of hell as *deinotes*, or rhetorical cleverness, by which Satan not only deceives others but "tricks himself into seeing a contingent future that no longer exists for the defeated angels" (176). Chapters nine and ten treat rhetoric in the Garden of Eden, "the hub of Milton's rhetorical universe, [where] the theological, dramatic, and discursive conditions exist for rhetoric to thrive on all levels" (197) and where it comes most into its own as a agent of moral persuasion in the psychomachia of man's inner being (198).

Pallister's text is a manifestly learned, monograph-length discussion of how Renaissance rhetoric, and particularly deliberative rhetoric, informs the greatest epic in the English language. His volume is well worthy to have won the Modern Language Association of America's Prize for Independent Scholars in 2009. Like all sublunary publications, however, it is not always perfect. Its extensive surveys in the first half are sometimes more trees than forest and might have benefitted from more signposting or grouping of material. Moreover, Milton's various prose works are quoted as evidence but rarely identified by name or date but only by an endnote designation of volume and page number(s) in the Yale Prose, as though Milton's thinking were homogenous for all times, subjects, and audiences. The quotations of various secondary critics are likewise often bifurcated from their authors, whose names are buried in the endnotes. Nevertheless, these formatting details do not seriously detract from Pallister's solid achievement in providing a useful new paradigm for analyzing Milton's rhetoric.

Daniel Shore's much leaner *Milton and the Art of Rhetoric* nevertheless lives up to the promise of its wide-ranging title, covering the various ways that Milton finds the means of persuasion available to his audience, speaker, and subject matter. As does Pallister, Shore divides his study into two equal halves, in his case an introduction and three chapters in part one and three chapters and an epilogue in part two. In his introduction, Shore identifies his study as historicist in the company of other historicizing critics and also rhetorical. He spends little time introducing rhetoric itself, apparently satisfied that most Miltonists are reasonably aware of it, though he does provide useful glosses and information on the fly, such as when he links Milton's emotion in the conclusion of one tract to Quintilian's comment that the purpose of the peroration is to excite readers' emotions (6). In the first three chapters, he demonstrates how pervasive in Milton's prose are his various claims of renunciation, such as his claiming to be speaking to no one (chapter one), or to be writing against his own will or under compulsion (chapter two), or to be voicing a self-sufficient Truth without regard for

further consequences (chapter three). By these renunciatory moves, Shore argues, Milton “instrumentalizes the otherworldly, placing it at the service of his worldly projects and aims” (15), shaping his otherwise unpredictable audience in this chaotic historic period. In Habermasian terms, Milton’s descriptions of his audience are “pragmatic responses to the problems of a rapidly emerging public sphere” (23), especially as mid-seventeenth century controls on printing were relaxed and publications proliferated.

In the second half of his book, Shore argues that Milton’s later poetry does not renounce rhetoric but rather “preserves it for continued criticism and judgment” (16). In his fourth chapter, Shore counters thirty years of critical insistence that Milton is an iconoclast; rather, we are shown, he foregoes breaking the idols and instead leaves them on display as examples of discredited judgments. In chapter five, he goes into much more detail about *gestio* than most Renaissance writers, claiming that Milton reproduces, in his commentary on the diabolical speakers in *Paradise Lost*, Cicero’s well-known fits of trembling before a speech, which speaks to self-creation in rhetoric. In chapter six, Shore argues that *Paradise Regained*, Milton’s “brief epic” on Christ’s Temptation in the Wilderness, should be read as Milton’s “attempt to construct a new rhetoric of exemplary action” (125), an *imitatio Christi* that seals the central fissure in humanist rhetoric, mending the gap between the good and the useful, *honestas* and *utilitas*, in the example of Christ. In what Shore calls the “Epilogue” but which nevertheless reads more like a chapter and is even the same length as one, he proposes a rhetorical solution to numerous critical difficulties with Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*, a Hellenized drama of a Hebrew subject, by reading it as a carefully framed *threat* of violence rather than either a celebration of terrorism or the narration of how some inner-focused hero of faith achieves perfection.

Shore’s book is both immensely readable and intellectually supple. It is no surprise that a version of chapter one received in 2006 the Milton Society of America’s James Holly Hanford Award for a distinguished article. Shore’s argumentative ethos is also attractive. Even in his frequent disagreements with fellow Miltonists, he usually balances any criticism by describing and praising their contributions. His main target is the “otherworldly” reading of Milton by Stanley Fish (2), who argues that Milton’s texts are “testimony” rather than rhetoric and thus unengaged with the world.

I probably should add that I am not yet convinced by Shore’s claim that *Paradise Regained* represents a rhetorical *imitatio Christi*, since Shore’s main authorial analogues, the late-medieval Thomas à Kempis and Milton’s royalist contemporary Jeremy Taylor, would hardly be congenial to Milton’s religious or political convictions. By contrast, Shore’s chapter-length “Epilogue” on *Samson Agonistes* is so convincing an argument that I wonder if Shore’s desire for textual symmetry is well placed. Rather than insisting on the two halves of his book having three chapters each, why not recognize the “Epilogue” as a proper chapter and add a brief conclusion?

But once again, most of the drawbacks I see have to do with organization rather than content. Both of these books make valuable contributions to the study of Milton and rhetoric. I have already found them useful in

my own undergraduate teaching, especially Pallister's idea that there are master tropes for heaven, hell, and paradise and Shore's denial that Milton engages in iconoclasm, and I have recommended the full texts to my graduate students. Historians of rhetoric at any institution that regularly teaches Milton or his period would do well to order copies for their libraries and also to consider acquiring copies for themselves.

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The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82); Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 267 pp. ISBN 978-1-107-00747-5; Jenny C. Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare's England*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012. 249 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-4965-9; Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 202 pp. ISBN 978-0-8122-4378-9; Garry Wills, *Rome and Rhetoric: Shakespeare's Julius Caesar*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011. 186 pp. ISBN 978-0-300-15218-0

Once upon a time (or so the story goes), the study of language and rhetoric in Shakespeare and Renaissance literature was dominated by considerations of style, and style meant especially figurative language. Since then, a generation or two of critics including Joel Altman, Marion Trousdale, Thomas Sloane, Wayne Rebhorn, Frank Whigham, Victoria Kahn, Lorna Hutson, Peter Mack, and Lynne Magnusson have shown the importance for early modern literature and culture of a richer conception of rhetoric, one which understands rhetoric as a vital contributor to a wide range of intellectual, political, and social processes and agendas. In view of this work, one could be forgiven for suspecting that the prominence of figuration in the latest crop of books on rhetoric and the literature of Shakespeare's England means that literary criticism is doing the time warp again. As we will see, however, this is not quite your grandparents' rhetorical criticism, though the intervening years have changed less than one might have expected.

The first of the four books under review here, Raphael Lyne's *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition* argues that rhetoric in Shakespeare is a means not only of presentation and persuasion but also of thought. By "rhetoric" Lyne means primarily tropes, or figures of thought. He grounds this argument in recent research in cognitive linguistics, which probes the relationship between language (especially metaphor) and cognitive processes in the brain, and he devotes a chapter to surveying both this work and a wide range