

**‘A Poet Early, and Always in his Soul’: the
eighteenth-century reception of Milton’s *Poems*
(1645)**

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Declaration

I, Roberta Klimt, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Thesis abstract

This thesis explores the reception of Milton's first volume of poetry, now known as the *Poems* (1645), during their first 150 or so years of life. It is a broadly chronological study of the *Poems'* publication, citation, and critical appreciation both as a discrete volume and, more often, as broken up into its constituent parts in anthologies, miscellanies, adaptations, and translations. Running throughout this history is a thematic analysis of the eighteenth century's changing critical approach to these early Miltonic works, including notable editions of the poems, especially those from 1673, 1695, 1752, and 1785.

My project is occasioned by the absence to date of a sustained, book-length study of the reception of Milton's *Poems*. Such reception studies of Milton as do exist either chronicle receptions of his entire oeuvre, or focus exclusively on *Paradise Lost*. My critical field encompasses these existing reception histories, as well as studies primarily devoted to analysis of the *Poems* (1645). It also pays attention to scholarship on eighteenth-century poetics and its main proponents, to books about miscellany and anthology culture, and to histories of the emerging concept of an English literary canon around the middle of the eighteenth century.

The aim of my study is, first, to illuminate an area of Milton criticism that has not, proportionally at least, been much studied; secondly, to continue a relatively recent critical tendency towards privileging the *Poems* as a separate body of work, meriting scholarly attention not just as the prelude to *Paradise Lost* but as a collection in its own right, with its own themes, its own dilemmas, and its own preoccupations.

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Introduction: Milton's *'iuvenilia carmina'*

In 1633, at the age of fifteen, Abraham Cowley published his *Poetical Blossomes*. Their title-page bears the simple motto '*Sit surculus arbor*' ['let the shoot be a tree'];¹ the facing page shows a portrait of the poet as a (very) young man, and underneath it is printed a short poem likening the beardless Cowley to Phoebus Apollo:

Reader, when first thou shalt behold this boyes
Picture, perhaps thou'lt thinke his writings toyes
Wrong not our *Cowley* so will nothing passe
But gravity with thee *Apollo* was
Beardlesse himselfe and for ought I can see
Cowley may yongest sonne of *Phoebus* bee.²

Cowley's book is small, its contents referring often to their own youthfulness and lack of expertise, the fact that so far they can only promise the greatness that is to follow; the dedication to *Pyramus and Thisbe*, for instance, opens, 'My childish Muse is in her Spring; and yet / Can onely shew the budding of her Wit.'³ There may be a trepidatious note in the frontispiece poem's reference to Cowley as a potential 'son of Phoebus', subject to 'gravity' – as if he, like Phaethon, might lose control of a set of skills he is too young yet to command. Despite these possible fears, Cowley's volume confidently encompasses several genres, including love poetry, odes, tragedy, and elegy. It is thought to have been one of the most important models for the *Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin, Compos'd at Several Times*, printed in 1645.⁴

A comparison of the debut publications of these two poets results in many expected differences. Milton was thirty-seven, not fifteen, when his *Poems* were published; his volume is much longer than Cowley's (271 pages to 62), and far more various in

¹ A[braham] C[owley], *Poetical Blossomes* (1633), sig. A2^r.

² *Poetical Blossomes*, sig. A1^v.

³ *Poetical Blossomes*, sig. F1^r.

⁴ See, for example, the comment that 'Milton's own volume of *Poems* doubtless owes much to earlier prodigy volumes like Cowley's'. Leah S. Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (1996), p. 205.

language and genre, including Italian and Greek as well as the English and Latin its title advertises. Milton was also well-travelled and beginning to be well-known by the time the *Poems* came out, a renown reflected by the volume's several, multilingual encomia to its author's talent and fame on the continent as well as in England. In many ways, Milton's *Poems Both English and Latin* more closely resemble Cowley's collected *Poems* from 1656, when their author was thirty-nine – a much more compendious, heterogeneous work than the *Poetical Blossomes*, running to 394 pages, grouped into four sections: 'Miscellanies', 'The Mistress, or, Love Verses', 'Pindarique Odes', and the (Latin) *Davideis*. Milton's 1645 volume combines an air of initiatory hesitancy with one of confident bravura, its contents encompassing compositions from Milton's true youth up to those from his early middle age; but a high proportion of the poems make as much of a feature of their precocity, and articulate as many hopes and uncertainties for the future, as if they had been written by a far younger man. Of course many of them had, and they declare it, being dated either with the year of their composition or with the author's age at the time of writing. Colin Burrow calls the book 'a belated prodigy volume',⁵ identifying the contradiction by which Milton bestrides the gap between his impressively early age when many of the *Poems* were written and his age at publication, when such virtuosity, if not unremarkable, would certainly seem less prodigious. Yet several generations of readers would pass before this gap in Milton's self-presentation was properly noted in criticism of his work. Instead, throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Milton's *Poems* were almost always considered – when they were considered at all – as pure juvenilia, a categorisation that both flatters and diminishes them, and which would not even begin to be reassessed until the latter half of the twentieth century.

⁵ Colin Burrow, 'The Future Poet', in Dennis Danielson, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1999), p. 56. Hereafter *Cambridge Companion*.

This thesis examines and attempts to account for the kinds of interpretation and misinterpretation undergone by the *Poems* during their first hundred and fifty or so years of life. My study begins in 1632 with Milton's first published poem, 'On Shakespeare', and ends in 1801, when Henry John Todd's landmark edition of Milton's *Poetical Works* was published. This period of Milton's reception has been covered in histories by John T. Shawcross, James Ogden, and, most recently, John Leonard.⁶ Shawcross's two-volume *Milton: The Critical Heritage* is a meticulous catalogue of 'appearance[s] of [Milton's] name in print' between 1628 and 1801;⁷ it has furnished much of the raw material for this thesis. Writing about thirty-five years after Shawcross, James Ogden devotes roughly half of his monograph, *John Milton's Literary Reputation*, to the minor poems (as he, following Shawcross, calls them). Ogden's study is discursive, describing key moments, as he sees them, in Milton's reception history, and following no real chronological order. From the point of view of this thesis, Ogden's most important contribution is the particular attention he draws to the brothers Thomas and Joseph Warton's interventions in Milton studies in the latter part of the eighteenth century; the Wartons are utterly overlooked by Shawcross, but they play a major part in the story of the *Poems'* eighteenth-century reception. John Leonard's 2013 *Faithful Labourers*, meanwhile, confines its elegant, thematically organised observations to the field of *Paradise Lost*.

The lack of a reception study devoted solely to the *Poems* is understandable for the same reason, I venture, that one is necessary: for most of the period under

⁶ See John T. Shawcross, *Milton: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols. (1970–72); James Ogden, *John Milton's Literary Reputation* (Lampeter, 2010); John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost* (Oxford, 2013).

⁷ *Critical Heritage*, I. i. Shawcross begins at 1628 so as to include quotations from some of Milton's own poetry dated to this time, though the poems in question would not be published until 1645.

discussion, the volume was not read, analysed, or otherwise experienced as a whole, but broken up into various permutations, with certain works excerpted, anthologised, adapted or translated into forms far from their first incarnation. Keeping the original 1645 collection in mind is difficult from 1673 onwards, when their second and arguably more famous edition was published, but it becomes almost impossible after 1695, when the *Poems* were relegated to the back of the last volume of Milton's *Poetical Works*, positioned after *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regain'd*. There they would remain until 1752, when Thomas Newton produced an edition of *Samson Agonistes*, *Paradise Regain'd*, and the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, as they were by then known. This edition still connects the *Poems* with, and subordinates them to, Milton's other non-*Paradise Lost* poetry; for the whole of the eighteenth century, the *Poems'* only printing in an edition of their own would be the *Poems upon Several Occasions* published under the curatorship of Thomas Warton in 1785.

Principles and influences of this study

My project takes its cue from the fact that there has never been a sustained, book-length study of the reception of the *Poems*, although this would seem to be a useful resource for critics increasingly interested in 'young Milton' both as a person and a poetic construct.⁸ A little like Thomas Warton, who determinedly excised *Paradise Lost* from his edition of the *Poems*, I have sought to focus on the 1645 volume in this thesis to the exclusion, wherever possible, of the rest of Milton's work. In that sense my study is historicist, striving to take the *Poems* themselves, in the first instance, and then subsequent generations' treatment of them, on the terms of their own historical moment. Once *Paradise Lost* had been published – so, from the 1673 edition of the *Poems* onwards – it would exert an inevitable influence over how Milton's earlier

⁸ See Edward Jones, ed., *Young Milton: The Emerging Author* (Oxford, 2013), the proceedings of a 'Young Milton' conference held at Worcester College, Oxford in March 2009.

work was read. To be properly conscious of this factor, it has been all the more important for this study to keep *Paradise Lost* at a distance from the original text of the *Poems* – along, for that matter, with *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*. (These latter texts could, and perhaps should, be the subject of their own reception study, since over them we see *Paradise Lost* casting its shadow forwards as well as back, in ways which must have unfairly occluded much of what both works have to offer.)

Another persuasive reason to focus exclusively on the 1645 volume is the fact that it is the site of all of Milton's foreign-language 'experimentation', if we want to call it that. In recent years Milton's multilingualism has been productively studied by critics including John K. Hale, for whom it is useful to see the English of *Paradise Lost* as 'made personal and multiple, and given needed tension',⁹ by the other languages its author knew and practised; Estelle Haan suggests that Milton's English might be viewed as the 'linguistic apotheosis' of his Latin.¹⁰ Mandy Green too reads Milton in terms of his neo-Latinity, and the Latin poems as 'adumbrat[ing] aspects of Milton's vocational dilemma'; she sees the 1645 volume as 'a kind of externalised personal debate ... about the possibility of [Milton] dedicating himself to some form of exalted poetry that would strengthen a nation'.¹¹ If these analyses still privilege *Paradise Lost*, they nonetheless take Milton's Italian and Latin poems seriously as an end in themselves, and as fulfilling a function more complex than just enabling Milton to practise his foreign languages. This attitude has been influential for the terms of my study of the *Poems*.

⁹ John K. Hale, 'The Multilingual Milton and the Italian Journey', in Mario A di Cesare, ed., *Milton in Italy* (Binghamton, NJ, 1991): 549–568 (563).

¹⁰ Estelle Haan, "'Both English and Latin': Milton's Bilingual Muse", *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 21 (Nov. 2007): 679–700 (684).

¹¹ Mandy Green, 'Reaching a European Audience: Milton's Neo-Latin Poems for Charles Diodati, 1625–39', *The European Legacy*, vol. 17, (2012): 165–184 (168).

Considering the reception of the idea of Milton as multilingual (begun by the fact of his publishing ‘Poems both English and Latin’), we see in the fluctuations of critical interest in the Italian and Latin poems a reflection of broader attitudes to Italianism and Latinity both within and outside Milton studies. While Milton’s Italian contemporaries enthusiastically approved of his multilingualism, saying so in their encomia to the *Poemata*, for many years this was not a common point of view. One reason why the Italian and Latin poems so often find themselves pressed into the service of merely biographical narratives could be that the early eighteenth century was a period during which Neo-Latin literature was obsolescent and Italian literary studies unfashionable, so critics lacked the apparatus to analyse the poems effectively. Even Johnson, for instance, admits that he ‘cannot pretend to speak as a critic’ of Milton’s Italian poems.¹²

As a rule, with the exception of parts of Chapter I, I do not expressly analyse the poems themselves or attempt to mine them for previously undetected nuances, though it is possible that some new, or different, light is shed on the texts by an evaluation of their different editions and interpretations. It is my hope that the main impact of this study will be twofold: first, to illuminate an area of Milton criticism that still has not, proportionally to other areas at least, been much studied; secondly, to continue the relatively recent critical tendency towards privileging the *Poems* (1645) as a separate body of work, which merits critical attention not just as the prelude to *Paradise Lost* but as a collection in its own right, with its own themes, its own dilemmas, and its own preoccupations.¹³

¹² Samuel Johnson, *Life of Milton* (1779), in Roger Lonsdale, ed., *The Lives of the English Poets*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 2006), vol. I, p. 279. Hereafter *Lives of the Poets*.

¹³ The New Critics seem to have anticipated this trend in the middle of the last century, a notable step in that direction being Cleanth Brooks and Edward Hardy’s edition of *Poems of Mr John Milton* (New

The first fifty years: editions and earlier

Editions of the *Poems*, however well or poorly they serve them, are just one part of the volume's story. Running alongside its official publication history are several other narrative threads, which my thesis takes up while attempting to keep the ghost, as it were, of the original 1645 edition in mind. For this reason my Chapter 1 starts with the poems' 'pre-publication' history: it suggests that each of Milton's poems to receive separate printings before 1645 – namely, 'On Shakespeare', *A Mask*, 'Lycidas', and *Epitaphium Damonis* – visibly attempts to shape its own reception, in ways that foreshadow the terms of these poems' enshrinement in the 1645 volume. The chapter closely reads these four works, and suggests that, as the first pieces Milton chose to publish, they tell us something important about the concerns that go into shaping the *Poems* as collected in 1645: concerns about the relationship between author and work, author and reader, reader and work, between the works themselves, between the author and his own future. In this connection I draw particularly on poststructuralist works such as Jonathan Goldberg's *Voice Terminal Echo* (1986), Donald F. Bouchard's *Milton – a structural reading* (1974), and John Guillory's *Poetic Authority* (1983), for their still-fresh insights into Milton as anxiously expressing his influence by forebears including Spenser and Shakespeare, seeking Horace-like to build his own monument in verse, but nervous about how this will work.

Only after establishing some of these pre-publication anxieties do I analyse the self-presentation of the *Poems* (1645), proposing the volume as Milton's best answer, albeit an answer self-consciously imperfect, to worries which have already long

York, 1951). More recent examples include C. W. R. D. Moseley's *The Poetic Birth* (Aldershot, 1991), and Stella P. Revard's *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair* (Columbia, MO, 1997).

preoccupied him, and questioning some of the book's ostensibly confident assumptions and declarations about itself. Informed by more modern scholarship such as Stephen B. Dobranski's *Milton, Authorship and the Book Trade* (1999), I consider the 1673 edition of the *Poems* separately, questioning why and by whom it was put together – especially since the 1645 edition does not appear to have sold well or to have made much impression on its readership. I consider the volume's 1673 retitling, to *Poems, &c., upon Several Occasions By Mr John Milton: Both English and Latin, &c. Composed at several times*, as an indication of the second edition's more acknowledged 'severalness' against the 'English and Latin' dualism striven for by the first. The chapter concludes by examining the *Poems*' relegation, in the *Poetical Works* of 1695, to double-column presentation, behind *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* (all of which are printed in single columns), with their order altered so that 'Lycidas', 'L'Allegro', 'Il Penseroso' and *A Mask* are now at the head. In the absence of much critical commentary on the *Poems* during this first phase of their life (though what little there was, I discuss in the interstices between sections of the chapter devoted to the editions themselves), I consider *Poems* (1673), and the *Poetical Works* (1695) as the first important acts of reception of the *Poems* (1645), editions which forefigure and shape their assessment by readers and critics of the eighteenth century.

Occasional treatments, 1700–1750

My second chapter considers the effect, in the first half of the eighteenth century, of the *Poems*' relocation within the *Poetical Works* and their internal re-ordering. The occasionality emphasised by the volume's 1673 title, *Poems composed upon Several Occasions*, preserved in 1695's wording, can be seen to lead to oddly occasional treatments of the poems themselves in the years that follow. These take place in the

course of biographies of Milton, where the *Poems* are brought in evidence, in miscellanies, where they are included as examples of this or that type of poetry, and, most successfully, on the London stage, when the most popular among them are converted into musical entertainments. Milton's early critics, all of whom focus almost exclusively on *Paradise Lost*, tend to cite individual poems as pieces of direct biographical documentation, to corroborate details of Milton's travels, his speculated love affairs, his relationship with his father, and so on. When such biographers do engage critically with the early works, they do so by reading them as necessarily inferior experiments as part of a poetic apprenticeship, leading up to the crowning achievement of *Paradise Lost*. Arguably, the *Poems* institute this reading themselves, with their frequent mention of a greater work to follow; this promise is fulfilled by the appearance in due course of *Paradise Lost*, apparently indicating a wholehearted embrace by Milton of the poetic *cursus* whose culmination is the epic. Undoubtedly, too, the emphasis placed by the volume on Milton's youth when many of the *Poems* were composed, if not when they were published, might have worked a little too well in suggesting to later readers, already overwhelmed by admiration for *Paradise Lost*, that they could afford to overlook works declaring themselves to be purely preparatory.

It is worth noting that when Milton addresses his own poems as '*iuvenilia carmina*' in '*Ad Patrem*',¹⁴ he may be using, or at least invoking, the Latin definition of the adjective '*iuvenilis*', which could refer to someone between the ages of 21 and 40.¹⁵

This nicety might well have been overlooked by critics such as John Toland, who

¹⁴ '*Ad Patrem*', l. 115. In *Milton – the Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (Harlow, 1968, rev. ed. 1997), p. 158. Hereafter *CSP*. All further references will be to this edition, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁵ See 'juvenile, *adj.* and *n.*'. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/102272?redirectedFrom=juvenile> (accessed September 01, 2015). Note under Etymology: 'Latin *iuvenilis* referred to a more advanced age than its English repr.; *iuvenilis* being a young man or woman, beyond the stage of adolescence, i.e. between 21 or 25 and 40.'

sweep the *Poems* up as ‘Juvenil Pieces’, taking the word only in its English sense and thereby erasing some of the complexity of what the poems have said about themselves. But if these biographers do not seem to recognise the distance between Milton’s self and his self-presentation in the *Poems*, they on the other hand exploit that distance by their ambivalent use of the idea of his youth, both to excuse perceived failings in, but also preternaturally to extol, those early poems to which they do pay attention. *Paradise Lost* is always the touchstone for these comparisons, by exemplifying the greatness to which the *Poems* cannot live up, but which they nevertheless can be shown to prefigure. I discuss this paradox, and the idea of Milton that emerges from it, in the first part of my second chapter. During this period, only ‘L’Allegro’, ‘Il Penseroso’, ‘Lycidas’, and *A Mask* were regularly written about as literary works in their own right (a circumstance it is tempting to ascribe to their foregrounding in the 1695 edition and all subsequent editions till 1752); these four works, too, were included more frequently than any other of Milton’s *Poems* in the miscellanies popular in the 1730s, ’40s and ’50s, which I discuss in the second part of Chapter 2. Thanks principally to the Digital Miscellanies Index, an online resource which went live in October 2013, as well as to pre-existing reception studies of Milton, I was able to identify which miscellanies contained which of the *Poems*, and to consult all of them online, and many in physical form too.¹⁶ While the same four works keep recurring, there are occasional anomalies; the range of miscellanies into which the *Poems* are slotted – cheerful, elegiac, popular, jocular – is a striking reflection of the various lines along which the 1645 collection could, in theory, be divided up at this time. *A Mask*, ‘L’Allegro’, ‘Il Penseroso’, and ‘Lycidas’ also all led a parallel life in musical theatre, from the 1730s onwards; I examine these in the third part of Chapter 2.

¹⁶ See <http://digitalmiscellaniesindex.org>.

John Dalton's musical version of *Comus* from 1738 enjoyed a high profile in its own time, and has been relatively well-known since, as an influential adaptation which for some years outshone the original *Mask* in the public imagination. This adaptation was the subject of a Master's dissertation by Thomas Tyrrell at the University of Cardiff in 2013, which provides useful background for, and much productive analysis of, *Comus* as a theatrical entertainment. But the production had a precursor far less famous: an operetta called *Sabrina*, with libretto by the Italian musician and Miltonist Paolo Rolli. This Italian-language adaptation, published in parallel text in 1737, alters the plot of Milton's *Mask* almost completely, turning it into a love story between two couples, with interference from Comaspe, the 'semideo nocivo' ['naughty demi-god']. Rolli, a member of the Roman *Accademia degli Arcadi*, which intended to reform Italian literature according to the principles of pastoral poetry, uses his adaptation to emphasise what he sees as the connections between Milton's work and the lyric poetry of the Italian Renaissance. Though unpopular when it was performed, and now almost forgotten, Rolli's *Sabrina* is remarkable for its creative and generous interpretation of Milton's Italianism, which was mostly a source of difficulty if not dismay for other scholars at the time. Dalton's 1738 *Comus* also departs substantially from Milton's text, adding several characters, including the figure of Euphrosyne, borrowed from 'L'Allegro'; Dalton also, as Tyrrell notes, humanises and glamorises Comus and his crew so as, in essence, to update the drama of *A Mask* into a dilemma between chaste virtue and libertine sociability. 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', meanwhile, were set to music by Handel in 1740, the libretto written by Charles Jennens, whose greatest amendment to the text was the inclusion of a third character, 'il Moderato', to embody a compromise between the other two figures. Later, in 1763, 'Lycidas' had a musical outing too, with much of the poem's metrical

eccentricity smoothed away and its subject-matter sanitised. This version was neither successful nor popular. All these adaptations show us something about the distance between contemporary entertainment and even the best-liked of Milton's poems. They also, perhaps, even by their failures, demonstrate what is distinctive and irreducible about the works they attempt to reconfigure.

The emerging canon, 1750–1780: anthologies, Newton, and Johnson

My Chapter 3 moves into the latter half of the eighteenth century, which sees Milton's *Poems* increasingly defined as part of the English literary canon. Thomas Newton's decision, after the success of his 1749 edition of *Paradise Lost*, to edit the *Poems* alongside *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* plays an important part in this process. Newton's criticism surveys the work of previous Miltonists, and his exegesis makes a point of drawing on the Trinity Manuscript, first brought into Milton scholarship by Zachary Pearce in his *Review of the Text of Paradise Lost* in 1733. This manuscript scrutiny has the effect both of elevating Milton (by considering his drafts worth studying in the first place) and demystifying him; in a less dramatic precursor of Charles Lamb's famous dismay at seeing the poems in draft, Newton considers it 'curious', 'an agreeable amusement', to see Milton's 'first thoughts and subsequent corrections', even marvelling at his occasionally lackadaisical punctuation.¹⁷ Newton also re-orders the *Poems* according to his best guess at their true chronology, relying on Milton's own dates only where no other evidence can help him. Newton's is a variorum edition, with commentaries commissioned from other critics like Robert Thyer and William Warburton, who are particularly attentive to Milton's relationship with Shakespeare; Newton himself is at greater pains to demonstrate his author's indebtedness to Spenser. His historicising focus on variant drafts, combined with a

¹⁷ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Thomas Newton, 2 vols. (1749), vol. I, lx. Hereafter *PL* (1749).

concern for Milton's source material and interest in evaluating the work of prior commentators, signals a more sustainedly canonical attitude to the *Poems* than any demonstrated hitherto.

The works foregrounded by Newton in his edition are also those that appear most frequently in the poetic anthologies that begin to proliferate in the second half of the eighteenth century, which I discuss in the second part of Chapter 3. These compilations differ from the miscellanies looked at in Chapter 2 in that they are prescriptive rather than descriptive, aiming to shape, not simply to reflect, the public taste. Sometimes expressly aimed at children, on other occasions geared towards readers who 'either want leisure, skill, or fortune, to choose for themselves',¹⁸ these anthologies negotiate on their readers' behalf between two connected, but distinct, ideas of 'taste', for the definition of which I follow James Noggle in his book *The Temporality of Taste* (2012). Noggle suggests that 'taste' can apply both to what strikes the individual as good, a judgement instantaneous and personal, and what is sanctioned by the *consensus gentium*, an opinion more gradually formed, relying on a work's longevity as well as its broader popularity. Not strictly scholarly enterprises, these anthologies are nevertheless intended to be educational; some of them even recommend that their contents be learned by heart and repeated, as exercises of memory and elocution. Of Milton's *Poems* featuring in such compilations, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' are overwhelmingly the most frequently chosen. One reason for this might be their favourable treatment by Newton, who calls them 'the best of Milton's productions in rime';¹⁹ another factor must be Samuel Johnson's opinion of

¹⁸ Oliver Goldsmith, ed., *The Beauties of English Poesy*, 2 vols. (1767), volume I, i.

¹⁹ *Paradise Regain'd a Poem, in Four Books. To which is added Samson Agonistes and Poems upon Several Occasions*, ed. Thomas Newton (1752), p. 360. Hereafter *Poems* (1752).

them, which is anomalously clement given his more or less wholesale dismissal of Milton's other early works.

The final part of my third chapter, then, considers Johnson's relationship with Milton's *Poems*. Johnson comes closer than many of his forebears to viewing the poems as a coherent volume with a logic of their own – a logic he, however, distrusts. Like Toland, Dennis, or Richardson, Johnson sees the *Poems* as juvenilia; unlike those early biographers, he is irritated rather than impressed by Milton having collected works he claims to consider premature, incomplete ('The Passion', for instance), or otherwise imperfect. Johnson's task in writing Milton's *Life*, along with those of the 51 other authors whose biographies formed part of his commission, fundamentally sat ill with him since, as Richard Terry puts it, he was 'unable to stifle the discriminations naturally arising to his own judgemental intellect.'²⁰ This problem is much in evidence during the *Life of Milton*, where Johnson expresses his frustration with those who, admiring Milton for the sake of *Paradise Lost*, mistakenly exalt the shorter poems simply for having been written by the same author, without stopping to distinguish between parts of Milton's oeuvre.

Johnson's impatience at a lack of readerly discrimination is connected with his other major objection to Milton's *Poems*: their defiance, as he sees it, of genre constraints. Johnson's attitude to this issue of generic decorum is complicated; he shares with Milton, I suggest, a simultaneous mistrust of and reliance on the idea of being able to distinguish works of art by genre in the first place – but, unlike Milton, he deals with this conflict by pugnaciously denying it. Johnson's treatment of 'Lycidas' exemplifies this approach: he takes the text to task for its pastoral form – which he calls 'easy,

²⁰ Richard Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past* (Oxford, 2001), p. 250.

vulgar, and therefore disgusting’ –²¹ but also for the moments at which it departs from the usual matter or structure of pastoral. This results in a critique that is illogical, but fervent, and also very personal – a description that could be applied to all Johnson’s criticism of the *Poems*, which starts with his own impressions and moves outwards, under increasingly threadbare cover. A great part of this has to do with Johnson’s overall critical style, observable in other of the *Lives of the Poets*, but some of it clearly grows out of the *Poems*’ particular vulnerability to biographical readings. Christine Rees’s *Johnson and Milton* (2010) often reads Johnson’s dislike of this or that poem as biographically motivated; for instance, as I discuss, she sees his disapproval of ‘Lycidas’ as connected to the loss of his wife. While I too consider Johnson’s reaction to be personal, it is in a sense more intellectual than biographical, that his cast of mind met with unconquerable problems in the teasing generic and linguistic unevenness of the *Poems*.

Thomas and Joseph Warton

My fourth and final chapter concerns the work on Milton’s *Poems* of the poet-critics Thomas and Joseph Warton. It centres around the edition of the *Poems upon Several Occasions* published by Thomas Warton in 1785, the first edition since 1673 to treat the *Poems* as a work in their own right, distinct from the rest of Milton’s shorter poems as well as from *Paradise Lost*. Like Johnson, although with a different result, Warton takes an approach to Milton’s early poetry that is highly personal, both in the sense of privileging these poems as the most personal of Milton’s works, and of reading them through the prism of his own personal preoccupations. Warton’s edition provides copious notes to all the *Poems*, including the *Poemata*, which Newton had omitted to annotate on the grounds that these Latin works could be ‘read only

²¹ *Lives of the Poets*, p. 278.

by the learned', anyway, and such readers could fend for themselves.²² Warton follows Newton in emphasising Milton's medieval, as opposed to classical, source material; he goes further, though, by enumerating the Old and Middle English roots of many of Milton's words and suggesting that, 'comparatively, the classical annotator has here but little to do'.²³ If Milton's classicism is minimised, then references to *Paradise Lost*, which had been a mainstay for every other respondent to the *Poems* up to this point, are almost completely absent from this edition. A kind of positive discrimination by Warton, intended to keep the reader's focus squarely on the early works, this practice is also a reflection of his belief that the *Poems* are best analysed as a collection in their own right.

Warton's critical project grows out of a belief in himself, his brother, and their late father Thomas Warton the Elder as the institutors of a 'school of Milton' in English poetry. According to Warton, before this development, the poems were neither admired nor imitated, since the 'school of Pope' held sway instead.²⁴ In their own poetry the Wartons draw extensively on the vocabulary and atmosphere of works like *A Mask* and 'Il Penseroso', emphasising the role in such poems of remote places, ruined buildings, artefacts long unviolated but also unappreciated. Notably, this is just how Thomas Warton characterises Milton's early poems, as having been 'totally disregarded, at least by the general reader', forced 'to remain in their original state of neglect and obscurity',²⁵ and fit for only a specialised and specially sensitive audience. This narrative of course necessitates several omissions and elisions on Warton's part, since the *Poems* certainly had received some attention before he or his family came

²² *Poems* (1752), iv–v.

²³ John Milton, *Poems upon Several Occasions*, ed. Thomas Warton (1785, rev. 1791), xx–xi. All further references, unless otherwise stated, will be to the first edition, hereafter shortened to *PSO* (1785).

²⁴ *PSO* (1785), x–xi.

²⁵ *PSO* (1785), iii.

along; and Pope, indeed, a whole generation before, had been inspired by just the lonesome, antique English quality which Warton claims as his diocese. Nonetheless, no critic had privileged the *Poems* so sustainedly before, nor attempted to canonise this unfamiliar version of Milton – the Old English poet, romantic in his affiliation with the landscape, attuned to ancient British history and mythology – rather than the august author of *Paradise Lost*. There is, too, something radical about going against Milton’s own suggestion of the forward momentum of his career by reaching back into his past for the best of his work; and about going against the contemporary critical ‘narrative of continuous improvement’, as Jonathan Brody Kramnick identifies it, by venerating an ancient rather than a modern poetic style, instead of believing Britain’s literary output to be growing steadily, linearly better.²⁶

After the Wartons, before the New Critics: the next 150 years

Whether because Warton’s approach was a little too personal and eccentric, or because the prevailing narrative about Milton and his work was too powerful, the effect of the 1785 *Poems upon Several Occasions* (along with their second edition in 1791) was not as remarkable as might have been hoped. As the coda to my thesis discusses, some of Warton’s etymological investigations and close textual analysis do find their way into Todd’s 1801 *Poetical Works*, which, although it reabsorbs the *Poems* into the rest of Milton’s corpus, gives them plenty of space and ample annotation. But there was no great reassessment of the privileged position enjoyed by *Paradise Lost* in Milton studies, and no reconfiguration of the 1645 Milton as anything substantial other than an epic poet in training. Some seeds of interest had undeniably been sown: the *Poems* had their admirers in the early nineteenth century before Romanticism, as we know it, so comprehensively cleaved to *Paradise Lost*. In

²⁶ Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 3.

particular, there is an upsurge of interest in translations of Milton's foreign-language poetry; in 1808, for instance, for the first time, a translation produced by William Cowper and posthumously published by his friend William Hayley takes Milton's Italian and Latin poems together as a unit.²⁷

For the most part, though, Milton's 1645 volume would spend most of the next hundred and fifty years as a curiosity, rather than an object of serious study. It was only taken up again – or the English poems among the collection were taken up, anyway – by the New Critics in the middle of the twentieth century. This new attention led to more mainstream consideration of the collection as a coherent whole: Louis L. Martz, writing in 1965, suggests that 'the entire volume strives to create a tribute to a youthful era now past',²⁸ following in 1997, Randall Ingram builds on Martz's work to offer the *Poems* as a record of Milton's transferral, 'gradually and grudgingly', from oral poesis to print culture.²⁹ Still more recently, Stella P. Revard has produced a new edition of the *Poems* that replicates their original order and presentation,³⁰ a decision that implicitly privileges the 1645 printing over that of 1673 – unlike, say, John Carey in his *Complete Shorter Poems* (1997). These trends, combined with a growing interest in the idea of 'young Milton', however we define the parameters of that youth, means it altogether seems time to look more closely at the *Poems'* reception history, charting their route to the critical legitimacy they have, as a volume, only lately begun to enjoy.

²⁷ *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton*, ed. William Hayley, trans. William Cowper (1808).

²⁸ Louis L. Martz, 'The Rising Poet, 1645', in *The Lyric and Dramatic Milton*, ed. Joseph H. Summers (New York, NY, 1965), pp. 3–33 (p. 5).

²⁹ Randall Ingram, 'The Writing Poet: The Descent From Song in *The Poems of Mr John Milton, Both English and Latin* (1645)', *Milton Studies* 34 (Pittsburgh, PA, 1997): 179–197 (180).

³⁰ John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Stella P. Revard (2009). Hereafter *CSP* (2009).

Chapter 1: 'Foredating his beginning' –¹ *Poems* (1645), 1632–1695

Milton collected his *Poems* for publication in 1645, but this was not his first experience of appearing in print; between 1632 and 1639 he had already published versions of 'On Shakespeare', 'Lycidas', *A Mask*, and *Epitaphium Damonis*. All these works were either commissioned or occasioned by specific events – a Folio, two deaths, and a performance in the house of a patron – and all express self-consciousness and uncertainty about the fact of having to be published at all. Whether addressing a great writer with a mixture of envy and admiration, mourning a friend with literary ambitions, or dramatising the possibility of abstemious intellectual retreat, Milton's poetry in these years is highly ambivalent about itself and its place in the world. These doubts have not melted away by the time the *Poems* (1645) are published; rather, they persist and proliferate, making these first four publications an essential key for understanding what the 1645 volume says about itself.

'On Shakespeare' (1632)

The first of Milton's poems to be published was 'An Epitaph on the admirable Dramatick Poet, William Shakespeare', the second of four tributes, not including Ben Jonson's dedication (reprinted from the First Folio), that were prefaced to the Second Folio of Shakespeare's plays in 1632. Milton's contribution is anonymous; it would go on to be printed in an edition of Shakespeare's *Poems* (1640), signed with the initials 'I.M.',² but it remained anonymous when the Third and Fourth Folios were published (1663 and 1685 respectively), and even moved further down the billing, as it were, in those editions, becoming the sixth among seven encomia, which

¹ Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo – Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* (1986), p. 127.

² William Shakespeare, *Poems* (1640), sigs. K8^r–K8^v.

by 1685 had shrunk to double-column presentation.³ Printed confirmation that the poem belonged to Milton came only with the work's inclusion, under the new title 'On Shakespeare', in the *Poems* (1645); there, it is dated 1630 rather than 1632, and by a few small but potentially significant variants distinguished from the version in the Folio.⁴ Milton's piece is a curiosity among memorials of Shakespeare in that it never refers to its subject as a playwright; the poem is altogether remarkable for this quality of evasion, managing both broadly to follow the pattern of the other three elegies alongside which it was originally printed – lamenting Shakespeare's loss but reflecting that his literary legacy will assure his immortality – and to dissent from that pattern, marking itself out as the work of a distinct, if temporarily anonymous, poetic voice.

Milton's premise is that Shakespeare requires no physically, visually impressive memorial – 'The labour of an Age, in piled Stones' – because he has 'built himself a lasting monument' in 'our wonder and astonishment'.⁵ This conceit accords with, and then importantly diverges from, the logic of the other three poems prefacing the Second Folio. The first of these, also anonymous, echoes Jonson's injunction, 'Reader, looke / Not on his picture, but his Booke';⁶ setting out to compare the 'Effigies of my worthy Friend, the Author Master William Shakespeare, and his Workes',⁷ the poet tells these effigies' imagined viewers that to get a real idea of Shakespeare, they should not look at pictures of him (such as that on the frontispiece of the volume), but read his plays: 'Spectator, this Lifes Shaddow is; To see / The

³ William Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* (1663), sig. b5^r; (1685), sig. A3^v.

⁴ On this question see, for instance, Robert Metcalf Smith's *The Variant Issues of Shakespeare's Second Folio and Milton's First Published English Poem: A Bibliographical Problem* (Bethlehem, PA, 1928), p. 33. 'On Shakespeare' is dated 1630 in the Trinity Manuscript, too.

⁵ 'Epitaph on Shakespeare,' ll. 2, 8, 7. *Shakespeare's comedies, histories and tragedies* (1632), A5^r. Hereafter 'On Shakespeare'. *CSP*, pp. 126–27.

⁶ *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* (1623), sig. A1^r.

⁷ *Shakespeares comedies, histories and tragedies* (1632), sig. A5^r.

truer image and a livelier he / 'Turne reader'.⁸ Leonard Digges's contribution describes Shakespeare's 'Stratford monument' as perishable, while only his works, as enshrined in this volume, are eternal: 'This Booke, / When Brasse and Marble fade, shall make thee looke / Fresh to all Ages'.⁹ This emphasis is to be expected in the context of the Folio, which sought to capture and preserve otherwise ephemeral plays for the purposes of reading and studying as well as future performance. But Milton approaches from a different angle, taking the preservation of Shakespeare's works for granted, dismissing the need for a physical memorial (which he has hyperbolised from the relatively humble Stratford bust and engraving into the putative 'starre-y-pointing pyramid'), and locating Shakespeare's 'lasting monument' not in his published plays, but in the mind of those reading them. This alteration has the effect of making the reader's imagination lapidary, instead of the work.

The other elegists in the 1632 volume characterise reading Shakespeare after his death as a living, vivid, emotionally various experience, in some sense a way of conjuring the dramatist up again after his death; readers are instructed to 'observe his Comick vaine, / Laugh, and proceed next to a Tragick straine, / Then weepe'.¹⁰ Milton describes the same experience as a kind of petrification, with Shakespeare as the Medusa, accusing him: 'thou our fancy of itself bereaving, / Dost make us Marble with too much conceiving'.¹¹ Although, as John Carey advises, the idea of mourners being turned to marble was a contemporary poetic commonplace,¹² it is

⁸ 'Upon the Effigies of William Shakespeare', ll. 1–3. *Shakespeares comedies, histories and tragedies* (1632), sig. A5^r.

⁹ L. Digges, 'To the Memorie of the deceased Author, Master W. Shakespeare,' ll. 5–7. *Shakespeare's comedies, histories and tragedies* (1632), sig. A6^r.

¹⁰ 'Effigies', ll. 3–5. *Shakespeares comedies, histories and tragedies* (1632), sig. A5^r.

¹¹ 'On Shakespeare,' ll. 13–14. The original line is 'Fancy of her selfe bereaving'; I quote the 1645/73 version, which is also that followed in contemporary editions of Milton's poems.

¹² See John Carey's note to 'On Shakespeare', *CSP*, p. 126.

not mourning, strictly speaking, that Milton is describing here, as an examination of his syntax in the run-up to that damning accusation makes clear. He writes,

For whilst to the shame of slow-endeavouring art,
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book,
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving.¹³

Milton's lines are notably equivocal about both Shakespeare and his audience: the playwright's 'easy numbers' are said to 'flow' – 'easy' because they come freely to Shakespeare, and 'flow[ing]' because he was supposed to have been a fluent writer –¹⁴ and to 'shame' other, slower authors. Yet 'easy' also carries the implication of flimsiness on Shakespeare's part, as well as suggesting that little 'endeavour' is required to interpret his work; the description of his book as 'unvalued' could mean both 'invaluable' and un-, or under-appreciated,¹⁵ which would lend a sardonic note to the idea that his lines are 'Delphic'. Milton's choice of vocabulary opens up the possibility that Shakespeare's admirers see him as an oracular genius only because they are too easily impressed.

According to the logic of these lines, Shakespeare has not 'bereaved' his readers of their 'fancy' by dying; he bereaved them of it while he was alive, by producing works which struck the public with such awe that they were, effectively, turned to stone. 'Too much conceiving' is also equivocal: somehow it is both Shakespeare's fault, for conceiving too many plays with excessively imaginative content, and the fault of his

¹³ 'On Shakespeare', ll. 9–14.

¹⁴ It was not until 1640 that Ben Jonson's *Discoveries* were published, in which Jonson observes that Shakespeare 'never blotted out [a] line' while composing, and that this was not an unalloyed virtue, since he 'flow'd with that facility, that sometime it was necessary he should be stop'd.' (*The Works of Benjamin Jonson, London*, 3 vols. (1640–41), vol. III, p. 97–98.) Nonetheless, we might take these remarks as evidence that ideas like these were in circulation at the time Milton was composing 'On Shakespeare'.

¹⁵ See *OED* for 'unvalued, *adj.*': 'extremely great or valuable' (1.a); and 'Not regarded as of value' (2.) *OED* online. June 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/219275?redirectedFrom=unvalued> (accessed July 30, 2015).

audience who are not intellectually sprightly enough for the feats of imagination they are being asked to perform. Yet this does not square with the earlier characterisation of Shakespeare's poetry as 'easy'. It becomes clear that the 'us' who are made marble 'with too much conceiving' has both to include, and in some ways to except, this poem's speaker, who addresses his subject as 'my Shakespeare' in line 1, and who, manifestly, has not been stunned into silence, no matter the potentially paralysing extent of his 'wonder and astonishment'. The speaker wavers between counting himself among Shakespeare's admirers and scorn for those admirers, between respect for and even envy of Shakespeare's speedy composition, and contempt for anything that comes so easily. We could see the poem's closing couplet as harbouring all these impulses: 'And so Sepulcher'd in such pompe dost lie / That Kings for such a Tombe would wish to die'.¹⁶ The gloomy pairing of 'lie' and 'die', as if death inevitably equals distortion, combined with the uncomfortably monarchistic image of Shakespeare sepulchred in such pomp that even a king would be jealous, leaches much of the praise out of these lines.

'On Shakespeare' is a jealous poem: jealous of a specific version of Shakespeare that its speaker wishes to guard from a potentially unsophisticated public, and envious of Shakespeare for his ready talent and devoted admirers. It is a personal poem too, less for what it can be said definitively to prove about Milton's attitude to Shakespeare than for its fearful projection of an authorial future, its questions about how and if the speaker will ever be able to follow Shakespeare as a writer. Some of these uncertainties could perhaps be resolved in print: part of being 'Delphic' is making oral pronouncements that are committed to memory and written down by others – which is one way of looking at what the Folio does for Shakespeare; and also the

¹⁶ 'On Shakespeare,' ll. 15–16.

closest this poem comes to an open acknowledgement of the material difference between Shakespeare's major medium, the stage, and the printed page.

We might see Milton's collection and curation of his own early poetry in 1645 as an attempt to enshrine his work at a certain point in its development, evidence of a wish to avoid his legacy being overblown, 'unvalued', or otherwise misconceived. This ambivalence about Shakespeare's afterlife does not cancel out Milton's obvious influence by his forebear, which scholars have detected particularly in the early works collected in the *Poems*. It simply provides a useful instance of Milton himself engaging in an act of reception, evincing many of the personal preoccupations that critics would soon enough bring to bear on him; it also offers an insight into why, by the time he publishes poetry under his own name, Milton is so fractiously, but firmly, focused on what his own reception will be. In any case, by the time of its inclusion in the *Poems* (1645), with the date '1630' and some small changes in wording setting it apart from the Folio version,¹⁷ it is clear that 'On Shakespeare' has played a vital role in Milton's poetic self-construction, not least, in his choice to be a lyric, and then an epic, poet instead of a dramatist and, whatever his doubts about monumentality, to fix his works in published form. That this decision was still in the making when 'On Shakespeare' was first composed and printed is borne out by the fact that the next of Milton's compositions to be published was his only full-length dramatic work, *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*.

¹⁷ In the 1645 *Poems* 'lasting monument' (l. 8) becomes 'live-long monument'; 'each part' (l. 10) becomes 'each heart'; and 'our fancy of her selfe bereaving' (l. 13) becomes 'our fancy of itself bereaving'. *CSP*, p. 127.

A Maske (1637)

Milton's *Maske*, which had been performed in 1634, was published, anonymously as 'On Shakespeare' had been, in 1637. This edition, a quarto, was probably printed by Augustine Mathewes (this, on the basis of bibliographical investigations by W. R. Parker in 1936),¹⁸ and it was published by Humphrey Robinson. Its title page provides copious details about the circumstances of its performance:

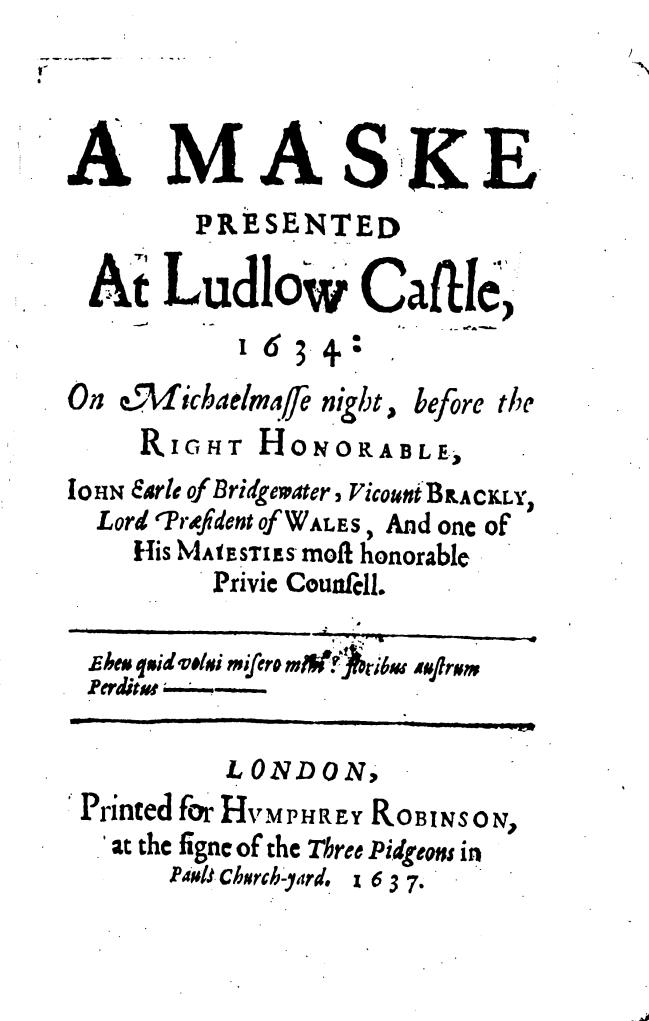


Image reproduced from Early English Books online. STC (2nd ed.) / 17937.

¹⁸ W. R. Parker, 'Contributions toward a Milton Bibliography', *The Library* XVI (1936): 425–38. Cited in S. E. Sprott, *A Maske – the earlier versions* (Toronto and Buffalo, NY, 1973), p. 24.

There exists a copy of the masque dated 1634, known as the Bridgewater Manuscript, whose scribe is not known (it is thought to have been a presentation copy); and the Trinity Manuscript contains a draft version, also dated 1634.¹⁹

Before the play-text in the 1637 publication is printed a commendatory letter by Henry Lawes, music master to the children of the Earl of Bridgewater, to whom the masque was dedicated, and who, like those children, participated in its original performance: he played Thyrsis / the Attendant Spirit. Lawes writes of the work,

Although not openly acknowledg'd by the Author, yet it is a legitimate off-spring, so lovely, and so much desired, that the often copying of it hath tir'd my pen to give my severall friends satisfaction, and brought me to a necessitie of producing it to the publick view.²⁰

Lawes' hyperbolic, almost certainly untruthful, statement about having had to copy out the masque himself misled earlier critics to speculate that he was the Bridgewater Manuscript's scribe. S. E. Spratt convincingly disproves this by analysis of the manuscript's handwriting and spelling.²¹ In any case, it seems natural to link the absence of Milton's name on the title page, Lawes's testimony of his reluctance to acknowledge the work, and the motto quoted on the front of the book, '*Eheu quid volui misero mihi! floribus austrum / Perditus*' ['Alas, what misery I, lost, wished on myself when I let the south wind blow on my flowers'].²² This epigraph is an excerpt from Virgil's second eclogue, when the shepherd Corydon berates himself for pursuing the young, beautiful Alexis, on whom he has lavished gifts of flowers, fruits, and, implicitly, poetry, realizing that his overtures have gone unappreciated.²³ The pearls-

¹⁹ John Carey meticulously enumerates these differences in the *CSP*. When quoting from *A Maske* I use Carey's edition, but comment on manuscript variations where those obtain to my argument.

²⁰ John Milton, *A Maske* (1637), sig. A2^r.

²¹ See *A Maske – the earlier versions*, pp. 14–15.

²² Virgil, Eclogue II, ll. 58–59, in *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA, 2006), p. 34.

²³ Shawcross connects the lovelorn homosexual theme of the eclogue to Milton's relationship with Charles Diodati. See John T. Shawcross, *John Milton – the Self and the World* (Lexington, KY, 1993), pp. 55–56.

before-swine implications of this have for many years, most recently by James Ogden, been interpreted as implying Milton's 'doubts about publication',²⁴ with Milton reluctant to let the harsh, dry clouds of public opinion disturb his delicate works. It is hard to take seriously reports of Milton's desire to disown the masque when he included it in compendia of his work in 1645 and 1673; but his posture, at least, of reluctant publication in 1637 can be seen to have resurfaced when the *Poems* (1645) were published, with *A Mask* as their (arguable) centrepiece.²⁵

Like 'On Shakespeare', and like many of the poems that would be collected in 1645, *A Mask* tussles noticeably with the demands of its genre, and the history of its medium. The complexity of Milton's dialogue (especially considering that most of it was to be spoken by children between the ages of 8 and 15), along with the inward, spiritual battleground on which the plot centres, makes it unusual among masques, which tended to be primarily visual, highly stylised and ceremonious entertainments. Milton's masque is self-consciously literary from its original play-text onwards, and full of allusions to Spenser and Shakespeare –²⁶ neither of whom wrote stand-alone masques in the manner, for instance, of Ben Jonson, but who had both engaged with the genre as an inset form: Spenser in his *Faerie Queene* with the Masque of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Masque of Cupid, and Shakespeare with the Wedding Masque in Act IV, scene i of *The Tempest*. *A Mask* is also frequently taken as a prime instance of Milton's experimentation with the pastoral mode, and his engagement, to that end, with Italian as well as English literary history. Patrick Cook, for instance, compares

²⁴ *John Milton's Literary Reputation*, pp. 10–11.

²⁵ Hereafter, following the 1645 spelling, I shall refer to this work as *A Mask* (without the final 'e').

²⁶ John Guillory points out that, speaking numerically, there are more Shakespearian than Spenserian allusions in *A Mask*, but acknowledges the weight of the heavily Spenserian plot. See John Guillory, *Poetic Authority – Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (New York, 1983), *passim* and p. 74.

the masque with Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (1573), calling our attention to 'an abundance of parallels', including

[t]he creative fusion of masque and pastoral drama; a framing heavenly descent; the union of woods and river; a thematics of honour, chastity, and sexual assault; mythological references to Diana and her nymphs, to Bacchus, and to Daphne's metamorphosis.²⁷

The possible Italianism of *A Mask* is worth bearing in mind, especially in the context of the 1645 volume, which foregrounds its author's knowledge of the Italian language and his association with the Italian literati, including Giovanni Battista Manso, who had been Tasso's patron. But if *A Mask* draws on the pastoral tradition both English and Italian, it also reworks that tradition by placing its emphasis on the process of growing up. Sending three children, played by three children, into the forest to run the gauntlet of a host of supernatural terrors before they can be reunited with their parents, Milton takes the volitional element out of the pastoral, at least for his *dramatis personae* (we might think of the way in which a trip to the forest constitutes a moment of irresponsible, if necessary, retreat in works like Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* or even Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, after which characters return to the real, social world to take on their responsibilities). As the Lady and her brothers try to distinguish between human and non-human revellers, between true and false guides, between real members of, so to speak, the pastoral community and members of Comus' dastardly crew, they are undergoing a process Milton would later describe as the challenge all postlapsarian humans must face, that of 'knowing good by evil'.²⁸ The challenge is heightened by the fact that its

²⁷ Patrick Cook, 'Eroticism and the Integral Self: Milton's *Poems, 1645* and the Italian Pastoral Tradition', *The Comparatist*, vol. 24 (2000): 123–145 (130).

²⁸ John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644), in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven, CT, 1953–1982), vol. II, ed. Ernest Sirluck (1959), p. 514. Hereafter *CPW*. For Stanley Fish, this is the task of *Comus* (as he calls it) for its audience too: 'reading (or viewing) the mask provokes us to cognitive acts of discrimination in the course of which we discover what something is by first discovering what it is not.' *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 148.

participants are children, subject to the necessity of demarcating the wicked from the merely adult.

The Second Brother conceives of the pastoral world as comfortingly orderly, suggesting to the Elder Brother, when they are lost and unable to find their sister:

Might we but hear
The folded flocks penned in their wattled cotes,
The sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops,
Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock
Count the night-watches to his feathery dames,
'Twould be some solace [...].²⁹

This passage is suffused with the vocabulary of containment, enclosure, and demarcation: the 'flocks', already grouped, are further 'folded' and 'penned' into 'cotes'; the 'stops' of the 'oaten reed' are mentioned, that let its player sound different notes; the 'village cock' marks the passing of time. But the image is sociable and reciprocal: the sheep have each other, the music has listeners, and the cockerel has a host of 'feathery dames' for company. Solitude is briefly valorised in this scene as the state in which one is most apt to be visited by spiritual inspiration: so, when the Elder Brother reminds his sibling that 'Wisdom's self / Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude', the Second Brother briefly agrees that 'musing Meditation most affects / The pensive secrecy of desert cell, / Far from the cheerful haunt of men, and herds'.³⁰ Taken to its logical conclusion, this would resemble the fate dreamt of by Milton's 'Penseroso' character – the 'hairy gown and mossy cell, / Where I may sit and rightly spell / Of every star that heaven doth shew'.³¹ But, here, the position is only held briefly: the Second Brother straight away suggests that the only reason Meditation 'sits as safe as in a senate-house' in 'desert cell' is because that cell's probable occupant – an old hermit with his 'weeds', 'few books', 'beads', 'maple

²⁹ *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1645/ 1673 version), ll. 341–47. *CSP*, p. 197.

³⁰ *A Mask*, ll. 374–75, 385–87. *CSP*, p. 199.

³¹ 'Il Penseroso', ll. 169–71. *CSP*, p. 151.

dish', and 'grey hairs' – is much less likely to be accosted than a beautiful, 'single helpless maiden'.³² The suggestion is that an unattractive, ageing recluse is the only sort of person who would be let alone to sequester himself away from spiritual corruption.

Logically, if the Lady had never strayed off the beaten path and been parted from her brothers, she would not have been susceptible to Comus' advances; nonetheless, alone or in company, she is never tempted to give up her chastity. But even when her brothers return she cannot be freed; only Sabrina, summoned by the Attendant Spirit, can save her and give the siblings safe convoy to their father's home (where pastoral pleasures await – 'All the swains that there abide, / With jigs, and rural dance resort').³³ Even before her capture, the Lady's attitude to the pastoral world is more cautious than that of her brothers: when she hears the 'sound / Of riot, and ill-managed merriment' she imagines a crowd of drunken, rowdy, 'late wassailers', whom she does not especially wish to meet, but whose help, she reflects, she might need if she is to escape 'the blind mazes of this tangled wood'.³⁴ That this noise is actually being made by Comus and his crew, and that Comus, disguised as 'some harmless villager',³⁵ will soon whisk the Lady off to his palace for the temptation scene, is less pertinent to the logic of the masque than the Lady's exaggerated sense of her self-sufficiency, as unrealistic in its way as her brothers' patronising, naive idealisation of rural society.

Chastity in *A Mask* is virtuous, therefore, but on its own it is not salvific; Comus and his wand escape intact; the wild landscape is just barely banished by the Attendant

³² *A Mask*, ll. 389–391, 401. *CSP*, pp. 199, 200.

³³ *A Mask*, ll. 950–51. *CSP*, p. 228.

³⁴ *A Mask*, ll. 171–71, 178, 180. *CSP* pp. 189, 190.

³⁵ *A Mask*, l. 166. *CSP* p. 189.

Spirit's final song – 'Back, shepherds, back, enough your play, / Till next sunshine holiday' –³⁶ which quickly enough moves to a lengthy evocation of the Elysian fields to which the Attendant Spirit is shortly to return. This is not like many Renaissance pastorals, with their clear distinctions between the real world, the 'second world' of frame narration, and the 'green world' of the pastoral idyll.³⁷ If anyone enacts the 'return to reality' typically found in such works,³⁸ it is no human character, but the Attendant Spirit, who is both frame narrator of and participant in the plot of *A Mask*, and has a world of his own to go back to when the action of the story is over. Some of this focus on the supernatural can be accounted for by the masque structure, which foregrounds its own artificiality and, perhaps, obviates the need to remind its reader or audience that what they are seeing is not real; but it also suggests Milton's ambivalence about both his medium and his mode. It is in this connection that we might note a recurrence of the motif of turning to stone, which let Milton express a conflicted admiration for literary precedent and the possibility of posterity in 'On Shakespeare'.

Medusa first appears in *A Mask* under an epithet (the 'snaky-headed Gorgon'), when the Elder Brother is trying to reassure the Second Brother that their sister will not be harmed because she is chaste. He asks,

What was that snaky-headed Gorgon shield
That wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin,
Wherewith she freezed her foes to congealed stone?
But rigid looks of chaste austerity,
And noble grace that dashed brute violence
With sudden adoration, and blank awe.³⁹

³⁶ *A Mask*, ll. 957–58. *CSP*, p. 229.

³⁷ See Harry S. Berger, *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), especially 'Renaissance Imagination: Second World and Green World', pp. 3–40.

³⁸ Andrew Marvell, 'Upon Appleton House', xcvi. *Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (1972), p. 79.

³⁹ *A Mask*, ll. 446–51. *CSP*, p. 203.

Minerva's repurposing of the Medusa's head is a metaphor for the goddess' 'chaste austerity'; it is also, literally, the Medusa's head, effective not because it symbolises chastity but because it turns people to stone. For the Elder Brother it provides something like a precedent or an exemplar, a comforting story he can tell his sibling in which chastity prevails, as they hope it will in this case. The Second Brother, altogether more literal (hence his scepticism about the hermit in his mossy cell), is not convinced; he is prepared to believe in 'the strength of heaven' more readily than in the strength of chastity. Moreover, as if to prove that the metaphor is just a metaphor, transferable from myth to myth, Comus threatens a similar petrification, and then an arboreal variation of it, once he has hold of the Lady:

Nay lady sit; if I but wave this wand,
Your nerves are all chained up in alabaster,
And you a statue, or as Daphne was
Root-bound, that fled Apollo.⁴⁰

The Lady's reply, telling Comus, 'Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind' (in lines not present in the original performance of the masque, but found in the Trinity Manuscript, and published in 1645),⁴¹ is a purely interior emphasis – a metaphor too – since, mind intact or not, her 'corporal rind' remains materially trapped until she can be freed by outside forces.⁴²

Comus' allusion to Daphne and Apollo fits in well with the *carpe diem* motif of his attempted seduction of the Lady – which is also, of course, a trope of much love poetry by Milton's contemporaries. Being turned into a laurel, Daphne may avoid ravishment by Apollo, but that is also the end of her life as a person. She lives on as a tree, and ends up an evergreen symbol of poetic achievement, but this is existence of a different order from a fulfilling, albeit end-stopped, human life. This is the

⁴⁰ *A Mask*, ll. 658–61. *CSP*, p. 213.

⁴¹ See John Carey's note to ll. 661–65, *CSP*, p. 213.

⁴² *A Mask*, ll. 662, 663. *CSP*, p. 213.

sadness at the heart of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and it is a version of the *vita activa* / *vita contemplativa* conflict that Milton dramatises, jokingly and more seriously, throughout his early compositions. But it also touches the question of publication, of whether and how to attempt to secure one's poetic afterlife in print, a process which, for all that it makes permanent the otherwise ephemeral, also fixes in time works that were formerly fluid and capable of change. 'On Shakespeare' could be said to tackle this issue by repositioning it, so that it is not the playwright who is ossified by being published, but his readers, as formerly – and, thanks to the Folio, continually – his audiences. *A Mask* is one of a very small number of Milton's works that did first circulate in manuscript, apparently against its author's will; but manuscript circulation and print publication are two different things, and Milton's repeated choice, throughout his life, of the latter mode over the former suggests he did not fear being frozen so much as being forgotten. Being published is the only way to avoid that; but a legacy can only be achieved with the co-operation of readers present and future.

'Lycidas' (1638)

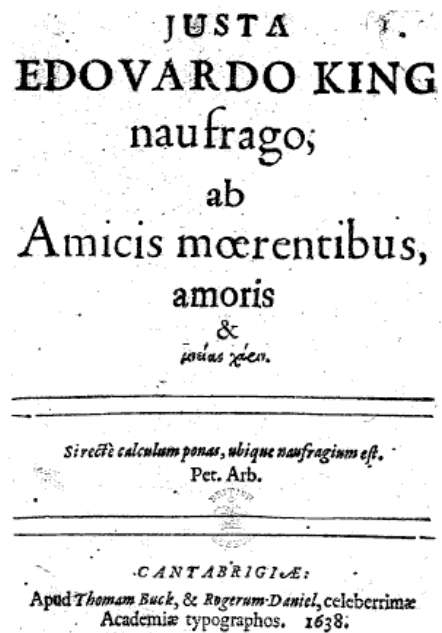
This tense negotiation between authorship and readership continues into 'Lycidas', the next of Milton's works to be printed, and the first to bear his name upon its first publication – in fact, it bore his initials. 'Lycidas' is the last entrant in a volume published in Cambridge in 1638, commemorating the death by drowning of Edward King, a Fellow of Christ's, Milton's own college. The volume is multilingual: its first half, entitled *Iusta Edouardo King Naufrago*, comprises twenty-three poems in Greek and Latin, while the other, *Obsequies to the Memory of Edward King*, consists of thirteen poems in English. Milton's poem stands out in this collection for its complicated form (its jagged verse is heavily influenced by the structure of the Italian *canzone*, with stanzas of uneven length), and heterogeneous subject matter, including much

political and religious commentary. These qualities go unremarked here, where the poem is simply titled 'Lycidas'; in the Trinity Manuscript it is described as a 'monody' and its occasion explained; and in the *Poems* (1645), where it is printed last among the English lyrics, a retrospective headnote suggests it was, incidentally, prophetic:

In this monody the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. *And by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted Clergy then in their height.*⁴³

On one level, the headnote is necessary to contextualise 'Lycidas' in a volume whose purpose is not to memorialise the deceased Edward King, but to introduce Milton, very much alive, on to the poetic scene. It is also, though, a directive about the spirit in which 'Lycidas' should be read. 'By occasion' is studiously casual, as if to say that Milton just so happened to hit upon this prediction while aiming only to write a poem of mourning for his friend; but by calling attention to this aspect of the poem, already a fairly egregious interpolation, Milton lets us know that, if it comes to it, he would prefer his polemic to be over-interpreted than overlooked.

⁴³ *CSP*, p. 243. Emphasis mine, to reflect the fact that the second sentence was added in 1645.



The title page of the original 1638 commemorative volume. Image from Early English Books Online. STC / 761:03

‘Lycidas’ generic affiliations, like those of *A Mask*, are pastoral: the poem is populated by shepherds, swains, hills, flocks of sheep, satyrs and fauns, cowslips and daffodils. The speaker is a shepherd lamenting the loss of his dear friend Lycidas;⁴⁴ the obvious analogue for the speaker is the poet himself, although, biographically, the extent of the intimacy between Milton and King has been questioned.⁴⁵ The identity of the speaker is revealed in only the final eight lines of ‘Lycidas’, when the whole of the foregoing poem is revealed to have been surrounded by, as it were, invisible speech marks, and another speaker comes in to tell us, ‘Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills’.⁴⁶ The pastoral apparatus of the poem could be said to be one device, the frame narrator another, by which any direct

⁴⁴ ‘Lycidas’, l. 186. *CSP*, p. 256.

⁴⁵ Norman Postlethwaite and Gordon Campbell see this scepticism as unfounded, writing, ‘It is one of the peculiarities of Milton studies that generations of editors of ‘Lycidas’ and biographers of Milton have argued that Milton and King were not close friends, despite the fact that the claim to friendship asserted by Milton in the headnote in the Trinity Manuscript is repeated in the printed editions of 1645 and 1673, and supported by the statement of Milton’s nephew Edward Phillips.’ Norman Postlethwaite and Gordon Campbell, ‘Edward King: Milton’s *Lycidas*: Poems and Documents’, *Milton Quarterly*, vol. 28 (1994): 77–84 (80). Hereafter *MQ*.

⁴⁶ ‘Lycidas’, l. 186.

correspondence between Milton and the speaking shepherd is obviated; but the intertwinement of Lycidas' fate with that of the speaker is so entire, and so entirely about poetry, as to seem personal to Milton's own poetic career. We may go so far as to believe, with Burrow, that Lycidas' death 'seems to be exorcising by surrogate the death of the poet himself';⁴⁷ we can clearly see the speaker fantasising, at least, about his own death in the course of mourning Lycidas, and doing so in ways that tellingly recall the lapidary fantasies of 'On Shakespeare' and *A Mask*, connecting the thought of that death with thoughts about his own poetic afterlife.

The speaker tells us early in the poem that his subject was a poet too – 'he knew / Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme' –⁴⁸ and that this means he is especially deserving of an accomplished elegy. To that end, the speaker asks the 'sisters of the sacred well' to 'begin' providing him with inspiration;⁴⁹ but there is more than one way to read the lines that follow:

Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,
So may some gentle muse,
With lucky words favour my destined urn,
And as he passes turn,
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.
For we were nursed upon the self-same hill [...].⁵⁰

One way of reading this is that the speaker, having asked the muses to 'sweep the string' in accompaniment of the 'Doric lay' he is shortly to sing Lycidas,⁵¹ proceeds to think about his own funeral procession, his own funerary urn, his own sable shroud, and to hope that 'some gentle muse' will inspire some future poet to praise him, in death, as he is praising Lycidas. This is to suppose, however, that it is the

⁴⁷ *Cambridge Companion*, p. 57.

⁴⁸ 'Lycidas', ll. 10–11. *CSP*, p. 244.

⁴⁹ 'Lycidas', l. 15. *CSP*, p. 244.

⁵⁰ 'Lycidas', ll. 17–23. *CSP*, pp. 244–245. N.B. This edition mistakenly prints 'bid fair peace to be [instead of *be to*] my sable shroud'.

⁵¹ 'Lycidas', l. 189. *CSP*, p. 256.

speaker's own death being imagined, that the 'destined urn' is his own funeral urn (strange funerary paraphernalia for a Protestant, although in keeping with much of the poem's classical imagery), that the 'he' passing by in line 21 is the 'gentle muse' of line 19 (unlikely, since muses are traditionally feminine; John Carey suggests that 'muse' here means 'poet', which does not entirely convince),⁵² and that the 'sable shroud' is the shroud covering the speaker's own future dead body (inconsistent with the presence of a funeral urn, if the shroud is to be taken literally as a covering for a corpse, it is also unusual for its colour: as Carey points out, 'Shrouds were white or grey; M. is the first to make one black').⁵³ Such a series of logical inconsistencies invites another reading.

I want to suggest that there is a deliberate conflation of the imagined moment of the speaker's own death with the imagined fate of this poem in particular, and the future of the speaker's poetic career in general. This interpretation requires that we take the 'he' passing in line 21 to be Lycidas, so the 'gentle muse' does not have to be a (male) poet, but can be a female muse again, 'favour[ing]' the speaker in his composition of Lycidas's elegy, and 'bid[ding] fair peace' not to the deceased Lycidas, but to the speaker, who is wearing black mourning clothes, and therefore 'shroud[ed]' in sable. According to this interpretation, the 'destined urn' is not, or not only, funereal; it might also represent the speaker's fate, evoking the urn of the goddess Necessitas (Necessity) in Horace's *Odes* III. i, a poem preoccupied with the relation between someone's achievements and his reputation, and the ability of the general public to appreciate excellence – hence the poem's famous opening line, '*Odi profanum vulgus et arceo*' ['I hate the vulgar populace and I avoid them'], a sentiment which can be seen

⁵² *CSP*, p. 244. Footnote to l. 19.

⁵³ *CSP*, p. 245. Footnote to l. 22.

to resurface elsewhere among the *Poems* (1645). In Horace's ode, Necessity has an urn, in which she shakes about the fates of all men, high and low alike:

*aequa lege Necessitas
sortitur insignis et imos,
omne capax movet urna nomen.*

[With equal law Necessity sorts the distinguished and the low, and shakes every name in her capacious urn.]⁵⁴

Asking to be left in peace for his own destiny to unfold, the speaker is hoping that he, unlike Lycidas, will not be interrupted on his poetic path; as Bouchard writes, 'What profoundly disturbs [the speaker] ... is that death threatens to not only destroy this ambition, but the very difference which sustains him. For what characterizes death is its arbitrariness and, specifically, its failure to respect the poet's difference.'⁵⁵

These worries about the indiscriminancy of death cause the speaker to ask:

What boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless muse,
Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?⁵⁶

This is a way of questioning whether there is any point in living the *vita contemplativa*, abstaining from sensual pleasures and the thrum of the world, if death – the 'blind Fury' armed with 'th' abhorred shears' – can come at any time and carry one off.⁵⁷ J. Martin Evans reads this biographically, suggesting it is an expression of Milton's own doubts, as an unmarried, scholarly young man, about whether he is living his life correctly: if the chaste and disciplined Edward King could die by sheer bad luck, rendering his loss 'morally meaningless',⁵⁸ the same could surely happen to him. For Evans, Milton's choice of the name 'Lycidas' for King's pastoral analogue is

⁵⁴ Horace, *Odes* III. i, ll. 1, 14–16. In *Odes*, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 140–141.

⁵⁵ Donald F. Bouchard, *Milton – a structural reading* (1974), p. 33.

⁵⁶ 'Lycidas', ll.64–69. *CSP*, pp. 247–48.

⁵⁷ 'Lycidas', l. 75. *CSP*, p. 248.

⁵⁸ See J. Martin Evans, 'Lycidas', *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 39–53, especially pp. 43–44.

significant, since Lycidas is the protagonist of Virgil's ninth eclogue, who declares his belief in the salvific power of poetry, only to be told by his interlocutor, Moeris, that '*carmina tantum nostra valent, Lycida, tela inter Martia, quantum Chaonias dicunt aquila veniente columbas*' ['our songs are worth as much, Lycidas, among the weapons of war, as they say the Doves of Chaona are when the eagle comes'].⁵⁹

Virgil's Eclogue IX ends with Moeris reminding Lycidas that they had better cease their singing and take it up another time, since there is work to be done. Such *vita activa* pragmatism is certainly present in Milton's 'Lycidas', but there it is countervailed by the suggestion that poetry is, or can be, its own kind of work. We have already seen this complication of the distinction between the active and the contemplative life in *A Mask*; it is present in other of Milton's early works, including *Elegia sexta*, written to Charles Diodati almost a decade before the composition of 'Lycidas' but not published until 1645. There, Milton discusses the austere lifestyle it is necessary to adopt to become an epic poet, and suggests that Diodati, who only wishes to be an elegiac poet, does not have to curb his revelry, since '*Liber adest elegis, Eratoque, Ceresque, Venusque / Et cum purpurea matre tenellus Amor*' ['Bacchus is present for elegy, and so is Erato, and Ceres, and Venus, and tender little Cupid beside his rosy mother'].⁶⁰ By contrast, Milton writes of the poet with epic ambitions:

*Ille quidem parce Samii pro more magistri
Vivat, et innocuus praebeat herba cibos;
Stet prope fagineo pellucida lympha catillo,
Sobriaque e puro pocula fonte bibat.*

[Let this poet live sparingly, like the philosopher from Samos, and let herbs furnish his harmless diet; let a bowl of beech-wood, filled with clear water, stand by him, and may he drink from a pure, sober spring.]⁶¹

⁵⁹ Eclogue IX, in *Eclogues; Georgics; Aeneid I-IV*, pp. 84–85.

⁶⁰ *Elegia sexta*, ll. 51–2. CSP p. 119.

⁶¹ *Elegia sexta*, ll. 59–62. CSP p. 119.

This kind of dualism, in which one genre of poetry is juxtaposed with another, and one lifestyle with another, is also observable in the companion poems ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’, thought to have been written one or two years after *Elegia sexta*. There, both sociable gaiety and melancholy solitude are praised as conducive to poetic inspiration, the result of which is the composition of works whose fame will outlast the life of the poet; the figure of Orpheus invoked in both cases.⁶²

‘Lycidas’, though, posits these different approaches as to how to achieve poetic fame never as secure alternatives, but rather as optional stages along the course of a single poet’s progress. Milton constructs a kind of dramatic monologue, whose speaker is never sure of himself and can be seen changing his mind over the course of the poem, with the aid of intercessors, about the meaning of poetic renown. The word ‘fame’ itself is the focus of this development. When other of King’s elegists in the volume of *Obsequies* refer to the word ‘fame’, they use it its primary Latin definition (and English derivation) to mean *fama*, rumour – often with the conceit of denying, as long as they can, the ‘fame’ they have heard that King is dead – only, eventually and sorrowfully, to give into it. For instance one of the elegies, by J. Beaumont, reports, ‘I check’t that fame [of King’s death], and told her how / I knew her trade, and her’,⁶³ while another by Clement Paman, written for inclusion among the *Obsequies* but omitted for unknown reasons, is disdainful both of hypocritical mourners and of ‘fame’ as popular opinion:

It is no hearse-hypocrisy makes me
Thus first come clothed in blacks and elegy;
I mourn not to be seen; whose sorrow lies
In popular tears, weeps at another’s eyes.
I come an early orator to Fame

⁶² Estelle Haan also notes the connection between *Elegia sexta* and the companion poems. See ‘Milton’s Bilingual Muse’, 685.

⁶³ *Obsequies to the Memory of Edward King* (1638), p. 5.

To be herself, that is, still false and lame.⁶⁴

In 'Lycidas' Milton expressly rejects this contingent sense of 'fame', exploring the possibility of framing a new definition of the word, and turning over ideas of how best to attain it. His speaker, though, is initially stuck in a Latinate idea of *fama* as unreliable (at least in relation to good news; as Milton writes in *Elegia quarta*, fame is a '*nuntia vera malorum*' – a truthful messenger of bad tidings),⁶⁵ and therefore no hook on which to hang one's ambitions:

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days.⁶⁶

'Fame' as it is used here could still be Beaumont's or Paman's fickle, unstable force, and the speaker is unpersuaded that there is any good reason not to sport with Amaryllis in the shade. But Phoebus intervenes, reminding the speaker that even if the Furies can 'slit the thin-spun life' they cannot destroy 'the praise' that comes with having lived life well –⁶⁷ not the praise of one's fellow man, even, but the praise of God. Phoebus redefines 'fame', taking the contingency out of it, and any element of partiality too, since God's eyes are 'pure', his 'witness' perfect:

Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove [...].⁶⁸

Milton's speaker acknowledges the divinity of these remarks but chooses not to abide by them, acknowledging, 'That strain I heard was of a higher mood: / But now my

⁶⁴ Clement Paman, 'On the first report of Mr Edward King's drowning', ll. 1–6. In 'Poems for Edward King not in *Justa Edouardo King*', *MQ*, vol. 28 (1994): 91–95 (92). We might note in passing that Paman's zeugmatic description of being 'clothed in blacks and elegy' echoes the 'sable shroud' of Milton's poet-speaker.

⁶⁵ *Elegia quarta*, l. 71. *CSP*, p. 59.

⁶⁶ 'Lycidas', ll. 70–72. *CSP*, p. 248.

⁶⁷ 'Lycidas', l. 76. *CSP*, p. 248.

⁶⁸ 'Lycidas', ll. 78–80. *CSP*, pp. 248–49.

oat proceeds [...]’;⁶⁹ he then continues his elegy, which treats divine subjects (soon enough interpolating a condemnation of the Laudian church and predicting its eventual demise at the hands of all-judging Jove), but is still intent on commemorating the life of a young man who has died. Within the fiction of the poem the speaker has no listeners – his song is addressed to the ‘oaks and rills’ of his landscape – but this is underlined to the reader only when we have already heard everything the ‘uncouth swain’ has said; when another narrator is introduced and we are able to pan out, as it were, to a perspective on all that has been said before. The sudden imposition of an extra narrative layer is another Miltonic experiment with pastoral framing devices; as in *A Mask*, it is hard to tell quite who is enacting the ‘return to reality’, here, unless it is the reader, by becoming suddenly conscious of how confined to myth, how fundamentally ineffectual, has been the swain’s attempt to refashion the memory of Lycidas into a ‘genius of the shore’.⁷⁰ Like Daphne, alluded to in *A Mask*, Lycidas is a myth now; he is kept alive only by poetic reminiscences, and no-one is listening. In reality Milton’s poem was a commission, for a volume with a predetermined, guaranteed readership, and though not yet a famous poet he was beginning to make a name for himself; by throwing his voice into the persona of an unknown, unheeded shepherd, he is able both to express his sorrow over the death of Edward King and to question the whole purpose and nature, and the likely future, of his chosen profession.

Epitaphium Damonis (1639)

The last of Milton’s poems to be published in the 1630s was *Epitaphium Damonis*, a Latin elegy to his friend Charles Diodati, who had died while Milton was away in Italy. The *Epitaphium* appears to have been written in 1639 and is now thought to

⁶⁹ ‘Lycidas’, ll. 87–88. *CSP*, p. 249.

⁷⁰ ‘Lycidas’, l. 185. *CSP*, p. 256.

have been published, in an extremely limited run of which only one copy is extant, in 1639 or 1640. This small pamphlet edition, which lay miscatalogued in the collections of the British Museum until 1932, is (in its current physical form, at least) undated; and this has caused a measure of controversy among editors seeking to determine whether, as was previously thought, the poem was published for the first time in 1645. Harris Fletcher would still say so: he suggests that the publication date of this pamphlet is more like 1645 or 1646. Fletcher bases this theory on, among other typological and chronological deductions, the unlikelihood that Milton would ‘rush the poem into print’ straight after writing it;⁷¹ and although in the pamphlet the poem’s ending is followed by ‘LONDIN’ in large letters, Fletcher says that this may not even indicate place of publication, signifying only that London was the place where the poem was composed.⁷² John T. Shawcross disagrees, and I am more persuaded by his argument, which asserts that the separate printing of the *Epitaphium* was a source for the 1645 version, and that the pamphlet’s lack of colophon is due to licensing difficulties on the part of Augustine Mathewes (assumed to have been the printer).⁷³ For this reason, I include the *Epitaphium* in this ‘pre-publication’ history of the *Poems* (1645).

Many readers have seen correspondences between ‘Lycidas’ and *Epitaphium Damonis*, and this is natural: both are pastoral elegies, written by Milton to commemorate the loss of a friend; and when the 1645 volume was constructed the two poems were placed in parallel positions, ‘Lycidas’ at the end of the English half and the *Epitaphium* at the end of the Latin half (and at the close of the book as a whole). It

⁷¹ Harris Fletcher, ‘The Seventeenth-Century Separate Printing of Milton’s “Epitaphium Damonis”’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philosophy*, vol. 61 (Oct. 1962): 788–796 (789).

⁷² ‘The Seventeenth-century Separate Printing of Milton’s “Epitaphium Damonis”’, 788.

⁷³ John T. Shawcross, ‘The Date of the Separate Edition of Milton’s “Epitaphium Damonis”’, *Studies in Bibliography*, vol. 18 (1965): 262–265 (264).

has also seemed reasonable to critics to draw distinctions between the poems, and in particular, to consider the *Epitaphium* the more heartfelt of the two; while we do not know for sure that Milton and Edward King were close, we know that he and Diodati were dear friends, and that Latin was a language in which they often communicated with each other, making it a fitting choice for this elegy. It is also frequently suggested that Milton felt freer writing about emotionally difficult or otherwise personal material in Latin – ‘more unbuttoned in Latin than in English’, to use Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns’ phrase.⁷⁴ There may be some truth in this: the *Epitaphium* is a sadder, lonelier poem than ‘Lycidas’, its speaker is more obviously an analogue for Milton himself, and unlike the eleventh-hour revelation of a frame narrator in ‘Lycidas’, the *Epitaphium* provides an honest *Argumentum* explaining the events leading up to Diodati’s death, and praising him as a friend and a person:

Thyrsis et Damon eiusdem viciniae pastores, eadem studia sequuti a pueritia amici erant, ut qui plurimum. Thyrsis animi causa profectus peregre de obitu Damonis nuncium accepit. Domum postea reversus et rem ita esse comperto, se, suamque solitudinem hoc carmine deplorat. Damonis autem sub persona hic intelligitur Carolus Deodatus ex urbe Hetruriae Luca paterno genere oriundus, caetera Anglus; ingenio, doctrina, clarissimisque caeteris virtutibus, dum viveret, iuvenis egregius.

[Thyrsis and Damon, shepherds of the same neighbourhood, had cultivated the same interests and been the closest possible friends from childhood on. Thyrsis, while travelling abroad for pleasure, received news of Damon’s death. Later, when he had returned home and found that this news was true, he bewailed his lot and his loneliness in this poem. ‘Damon’ here represents Charles Diodati, who was descended on his father’s side from the Tuscan city of Lucca, but who was, in every other respect, English. He was, while he lived, a young man extraordinarily endowed with talents, learning, and other gifts of a most exemplary kind.]⁷⁵

Milton’s deep personal attachment to the subject of his elegy makes the work no less of an occasion for its speaker to explore hopes and fears about his own future, the fate of his ‘destined urn’, even the generic and linguistic choices he needs to make in

⁷⁴ Gordon Campbell & Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford, 2008), p. 43.

⁷⁵ *Argumentum* to *Epitaphium Damonis*, CSP, p. 272.

order to ensure his poetic legacy. At first, not unlike the speaker of 'Lycidas', he promises to prolong Damon's memory, pastorally, as long as he is able:

*Quicquid erit, certe nisi me lupus ante videbit,
Indeplorato non comminuere sepulchro,
Constabitque tuus tibi honos, longumque vigebit
Inter pastores [...]*

[Whatever happens, unless the wolf sees me first it is certain that you shall not crumble to dust in the grave unlamented. Your fame will outlast you, it will live long among the shepherds].⁷⁶

But towards the end of the poem, the speaker announces a different intention:

*O mihi tum si vita supersit,
Tu procul annosa pendebris fistula pinu
Multum oblita mihi, aut patriis mutata camoenis
Brittonicum strides*

[O if I have any time left to live, you, my pastoral pipe, will hang far away on the branch of some old pine tree, utterly forgotten by me, or else, transformed by my native muses, you will rasp out a British tune.]⁷⁷

This express dismissal of pastoral itself is echoed in the poem's refrain, '*ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni?*' ['go home unfed, lambs, your shepherd has no time for you now'];⁷⁸ the Latin language too seems to be being dismissed, and English foregrounded, with Milton's plans to write an Arthurian epic sketched out here (see lines 162–168), as they were in other Latin poems composed at about this time, as well as in the Trinity Manuscript. The *Epitaphium* is Milton's last Latin poem, and his last pastoral poem, marking a more decisive farewell to the genre than 'Lycidas' simply by post-dating it. When Milton does return to writing poetry, it is to compose an epic poem in English. Yet he does not bear out the vows made in the *Epitaphium* and elsewhere, about his intention to compose an Anglo-centric, 'History of Britain' epic; *Paradise Lost* is much more ambitious, and much more cosmopolitan, than that. Milton's concern with the demarcations of genre and language is matched with an

⁷⁶ *Epitaphium Damonis*, ll. 27–30. *CSP*, p. 273.

⁷⁷ *Epitaphium Damonis*, ll. 162–171. *CSP*, p. 279.

⁷⁸ *Epitaphium Damonis*, first at l. 18. *CSP*, p. 273.

awareness of those distinctions' deeply arbitrary (because fallen) nature; and his lyric poetry continually experiments with the strength of both generic and linguistic boundaries. If the earlier *Elegia sexta* or 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' playfully dramatise the differences between the active and the contemplative life, both 'Lycidas' and *Epitaphium Damonis* more seriously question whether poetry, composed in *otium*, can ever have an effect upon the real world. This is where we might call on the concept of an 'active *otium*', as Estelle Haan frames it – reflecting on '*non pigra quies*' ['un-lazy rest'], the motto of the *Accademia degli Oziosi*, to which Milton's Neapolitan patron Manso belonged.⁷⁹ The poetry reached for by Milton's mourning, disenchanted, yet still ambitious speakers in the late 1630s is the imagined product of an active *otium*, that manages to affect the world while remaining aloof from it, that engages a readership it does not wholly trust, that is written in genres and languages whose limitations it cannot avoid critiquing. This is the uneasy spirit in which Milton would publish his first collection of poetry in 1645.

Poems circulated in miscellanies and manuscripts before 1645

Before examining the published collection, we must note the last of the early poems to be printed before 1645. These were the so-called 'Hobson poems', Milton's comic epitaphs for the Cambridge University carrier. According to Shawcross, 'two of the three Hobson poems appeared in the 1640 *Banquet of Jestes*, and 'Hobson's Epitaph' was included in *Wit's Recreations* in 1640.'⁸⁰ Ogden repeats this assertion with a slight variation, writing,

Milton achieved some fame in his lifetime as a comic poet. His two humorous epitaphs 'On the University Carrier' Thomas Hobson circulated widely in manuscript, and were printed in popular jest-books. (Both appeared in *A Banquet of*

⁷⁹ Estelle Haan, *From Accademia to Amicitia: Milton's Latin Writings and the Italian Academies* (Philadelphia, PA, 1998), p. 123.

⁸⁰ *Milton: The Critical Heritage*, I. 7.

Jests (1640, 1657) and *Wit Restored* (1658). And the first poem was in *Wit's Recreations* (1640, often republished).⁸¹

To begin with the briefer of these claims, an examination of the *Epitaphs* section of *Wit's Recreations* (whose colophon reads 'Oct. 8. 1639')⁸² does reveal four poems 'On Hobson the Carrier' – but none of them bears any resemblance to either of the Hobson poems that appear in the 1645 volume.⁸³ *A Banquet of Jests*, meanwhile, contains two poems about Hobson but only one of them seems to be Milton's: the first to appear in this miscellany but the second to be printed in the *Poems* 1645 as 'Another on the Same,' here titled 'Upon old Hobson the Carrier of Cambridge'.⁸⁴ In their miscellany appearances, all these poems are anonymous.

Shawcross also catalogues pre-1645 manuscript editions of poems that would later form part of the published volume. He refers to a transcription of 'An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester' (Sloane MS. 1446, ff. 37v-38v [attributed to 'Jo Milton of Chr: Coll Cambr']); to 'On Time' (Ashmole MS. 36, 37, f. 22r, in the Bodleian), and 'A Mask' (the Bridgewater MS. and two song manuscripts, 'all apparently related to the composer Henry Lawes').⁸⁵ Shawcross points out that the attribution of at least the first of these poems is proof that some people, however few, had associated Milton's name with lyric poetry before the publication of the 1645 volume. It is somewhat remarkable that so few manuscript copies of any of Milton's early verse survive, inevitably suggesting that the poems were not widely circulated, if they were circulated at all, before 1645. This further confirms Milton's preference for print publication over manuscript circulation.

⁸¹ *John Milton's Literary Reputation*, p. 9.

⁸² *Wit's Recreations* (1639), sig. Cc8^v.

⁸³ *Wit's Recreations*, sig. Aa3^r.

⁸⁴ *A Banquet of Jests* (1640), pp. 129, 131. The same is true of the 1657 edition of *Banquet*, where the poems appear on pp. 82–84.

⁸⁵ 'The Date of the Separate Edition of Milton's "Epitaphium Damonis"', 435.

Poems (1645)

The *Poems of Mr John Milton* were printed in London by Humphrey Moseley in 1645. The volume is an octavo, split into two halves, English *Poems* and Latin *Poemata*, each with its own title page – though, as becomes clear from a comparison of the two frontispieces, only the *Poemata* really stand alone as, potentially, constituting a separately publishable collection. The title-page of the volume informs us that ‘the Songs were set in Musick by Henry Lawes Gentleman of the Kings Chappel, and one of his Majesties Private Musick’.⁸⁶ Beneath this description is a quotation from Virgil’s seventh eclogue: ‘*Baccare frontem, / Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua futuro*’ [‘Bind my forehead with foxglove, lest an evil tongue harm the future bard’].⁸⁷ In the *Eclogues*, this plea is uttered by the shepherd Thyrsis, who is competing in a singing match with Corydon – the hero of the second eclogue, and the speaker of the phrase ‘*Eheu quod volui misero mihi!*’ quoted on *A Maske*’s title page. In Eclogue VII, Thyrsis asks the Arcadian shepherds to crown him with laurel as a rising poet [‘*crecentem poetam*’], to inflame Corydon’s jealousy; if, however, his rival should praise him too much [‘*si ultra placitum laudari*’], he wants his brows to be wreathed with foxglove to ward off Corydon’s evil tongue [‘*mala lingua*’].⁸⁸ This idea of praise as harmful, if it is excessive or comes from the wrong person, conveys a similar ambivalence about audience to that implied by the epigraph to *A Maske*. Thyrsis is also the name of Milton’s alter ego in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, and of the Attendant Spirit in the *Maske*; even if the readers of this volume had not read either work in their earlier, separate publications, they would soon begin to notice the thread of ambivalence that connects them all.

⁸⁶ *Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin, Compos’d at Several Times* (1645). Hereafter *Poems* (1645). A2^r.

⁸⁷ *Poems* (1645), A2^r.

⁸⁸ Eclogue VII. 27–28, in *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, p. 68.

Another discordant note is sounded on the verso of the leaf facing the title-page, which has a portrait of the author by the engraver William Marshall, with a four-line Greek poem by Milton engraved underneath that mocks the likeness.

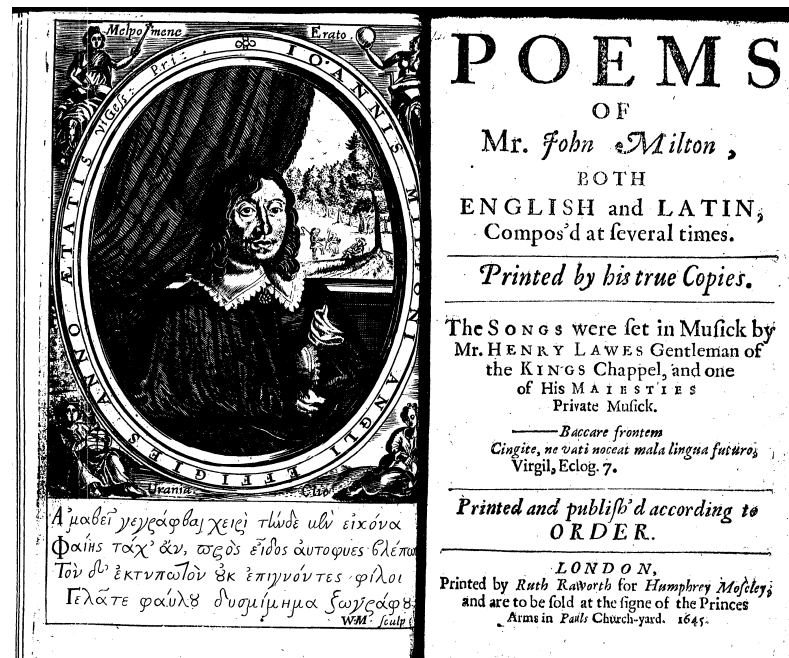


Image reproduced from Early English Books Online. Wing (CD-Rom, 1996) / M2160.

It has been suggested that this portrait, which claims to portray Milton at twenty-one years old [*Anno Aetatis Vigess: Pri.*], is 'quite clearly of an older man,' and that this accounts for the scornful Greek engraving beneath, which is seen as Milton's revenge on the non-hellenophone artist.⁸⁹ However, in his article 'Misrepresentation in Milton's 1645 *Poems*', Richard M. Johnson suggests that the portrait is cleverer than is usually assumed, and cleverer than may have been assumed by Milton himself. According to Johnson, 'if, using the bridge of the man's nose as a median vertical line, one makes a partition between the two halves of Marshall's portrait of Milton,' we see that it is actually a picture half of an old man, half of a young man.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ 'In Effigie eius Sculptor', *CSP*, p. 293.

⁹⁰ Richard M. Johnson, 'Misrepresentation in Milton's 1645 *Poems*', *Criticism*, vol. 36 (Winter, 1994): 45–71 (47).



Plate 2—A Divided View Of The Marshall Portrait

Image from 'Misrepresentation in Milton's 1645 *Poems*', p. 49.

Johnson's theory does not entirely hold up – as he himself admits, it is hard to account for the absent arm of the right-hand, 'younger' side of the portrait, and to understand how the four muses engraved in its corners tie in with the portrait's message. Nonetheless, the problematic dualism of the portrait is an apt reflection of the volume as a whole, which simultaneously aims for, and undermines the possibility of, the harmonious balance of alternatives. This happens at the level of the poems themselves, as in the case of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', which, both in co-operation with each other and in their individual subject matter, identify antithetical approaches to life and strive playfully between them, so that the choice is never between just one thing and another. This same process is also enacted at the level of the volume, which is called 'English and Latin', and divided in half, but whose halves each call for further subdivision whether on the grounds of language or genre.

The *Poems* (1645) are prefaced by a four-page address signed by publisher Humphrey Moseley, titled ‘The Stationer to the Reader’. For comparison, Waller’s *Poems*, which Moseley also published in 1645, have an anonymous, two-page ‘Address to the Reader’, whose main purpose is to assert the dominance of this edition over ‘an adulterate Copy, surreptitiously and illegally imprinted, to the derogation of the Author, and the abuse of the Buyer’.⁹¹ Moseley’s preface, to be taken with a pinch of salt due to its obvious commercial motives, is worth our notice as the first literary criticism of Milton’s poetry. He writes:

It is not in any private respect of gain, Gentle Reader, for the slightest Pamphlet is now adayes more vendible than the Works of learnedest men; but it is the love I have to our own Language that hath made me diligent to collect, and set forth such Peeeces both in Prose and Vers, as may renew the wonted honour and esteem of our English tongue: and it’s the worth of these both English and Latin Poems, not the flourish of any prefixed encomions that can invite thee to buy them, though these are not without the highest Commendations and Applause of the learnedest Academicks, both domestick and forrein: And amongst those of our own Countrey, the unparallel’d attention of that renowned Provost of Eaton, Sir Henry Wootton: I know not thy palat how it relishes such dainties, nor how harmonious thy soul is; perhaps more trivial Airs may please thee better. But howsoever thy opinion is spent upon these, that incouragement I have already received from the most ingenious men in their clear and courteous entertainment of Mr. Wallers late choice Peeeces, hath once more made me adventure into the World, presenting it with these ever-green, and not to be blasted Laurels. The Authors more peculiar excellency in these studies, was too well known to conceal his Papers, or to keep me from attempting to sollicit them from him. Let the event guide it self which way it will, I shall deserve of the age, by bringing into the Light as true a Birth, as the Muses have brought forth since our famous Spencer wrote; whose Poems in these English ones are as rarely imitated, as sweetly excell’d. Reader if thou art Eagle-eied to censure their worth, I am not fearful to expose them to thy exactest perusal.⁹²

Moseley was a well-known Royalist, undoubtedly no fan of the upheavals of his age, so there is some bitterness in his remark that ‘the slightest Pamphlet is now adayes more vendible than the Works of learnedest men.’ But Michael Wilding counsels against overestimating the extent of any political disagreement between poet and publisher, pointing out the possibility their differences would offer for ‘crossover’ in the volume’s readership:

⁹¹ *Poems*, *etc.* *Written by Mr. Ed. Waller* (1645), sig. A4r.

⁹² *Poems* (1645), sig. A3r–A4v.

Both Moseley as publisher and Milton as writer would have been aware of the advantages of appealing both to Protestant radicals and to royalist aesthetes: a larger audience than appealing to only one sectarian group. Moseley may have endured Milton's radicalism as Milton may have endured Moseley's conservatism.⁹³

Moseley is principally at pains to discuss the author's excellence, and his own for midwifing the book into existence. His special focus is on Englishness; he claims that his motive for bringing the volume out is not monetary, but patriotic, a well-known English printerly strategy. We may assume that this remark is not Milton-specific but more of a general mission statement by Moseley about his publishing practice: the volume at hand contains no prose, for one thing, so it cannot be covered by the descriptor 'Peeces both in Prose and Vers.' Interesting, nonetheless, is the way the praise of Englishness interacts with the fact that these poems are self-avowedly 'both English and Latin' – and in reality, are more linguistically various than that. This first critical engagement with Milton's poetry, then, is also the first attempt to rationalize into patriotism his fondness for foreign languages. Already touched on when the speaker envisions his future in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, this process is something Milton himself was keen to discuss at this time, both in the other Latin poems included in this volume, and in his prose – as when, for example, in the *Reason of Church Government* (1642), he expresses the ambition

that what the greatest and choycest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I in my proportion with this over and above of being a Christian, might doe for mine.⁹⁴

Moseley's preface is followed by 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', which opens the English half of the *Poems*. The rest of the works included in this half of the volume – the Psalms, 'The Passion', 'On Time', 'Upon the Circumcision', 'At a Solemn Musick', 'An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester', 'Song on May Morning', 'On Shakespeare', the two Hobson poems, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' –

⁹³ Michael Wilding, *Dragon's Teeth: Literature in the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1987), p. 9.

⁹⁴ *CPW*, I. 812.

ensue without further introduction, although many of them are dated, either with the year of their composition, or with the author's age at the time of writing. 'The Passion' ends abruptly after eight stanzas, with the admission, 'This subject the author finding to be above the years he had when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished.'⁹⁵ Post-dating his early works in this way, and commenting on their callowness, Milton is simultaneously showing off to his reader about his youthful talents, and asking for leniency in case the poems seem inexpert. A precarious balance is once again struck between confidence that the excellence of his work will speak for itself, and insecurity that a caveat might be necessary. Along with this we might think about the excuses or explanations Milton does not think are worth making; principally, it might seem strange that there is no comment or annotation when Milton slips from English into Italian, and back again, in the 'Sonnets' section of the volume.

Milton's Italian poems are conscious of their Italianness, employing the lexicon and register of Dantesque *dolce stil novo* love poetry, in combination with a Petrarchan self-fascination on the part of the speaker, who is especially fascinated by what his own poetic future will be. So, in the *canzone*, the speaker is teased at first by 'donne e giovani amoros?' ['amorous young men and women'] for daring to write love poems 'in lingua ignota e strana' ['in a strange, unknown language'],⁹⁶ before these same teasing young lovers predict his future greatness to him:

altri rivi
Altri lidi t'aspettan, e altre onde
Nelle cui verdi sponde
Spuntati ad hor, ad hora la tua chioma
L'immortal guiderdon d'eterne frondi
Perche alle spalle tue soverchia soma?

⁹⁵ CSP, p. 125.

⁹⁶ *Canzone*, ll. 1, 3. CSP, p. 96.

[Other banks, other shores await you, and other tides, on whose green banks, even now, immortal garlands of eternal leaves are waiting for your hair. Why take this burden on your shoulders?]⁹⁷

Instead of responding directly to his interlocutors, the speaker asks his *canzone* to answer for him: '*Questa è la lingua di cui si vanta Amore*' ['this is the language on which Love prides itself'].⁹⁸ The *canzone* strikes an uneasy compromise between the poet's pride in his mastery of the lyric form, in the lyric's original language, and his awareness that lyric is just one stage of his poetic development. We might see in this an analogue to the relationship with pastoral poetry exemplified by 'Lycidas' and the *Epitaphium Damonis*; this strengthens our sense that linguistic and generic experimentation are of a piece for Milton; they are necessary to the poetic trajectory he has already begun to envision for himself, but in their imperfection and partiality, they also instantiate his suspicion of such categories in the first place.

The short masque *Arcades* follows the sonnets, subtitled 'Part of an entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Darby at Harefield, by some noble persons of her family, who appear on the scene in pastoral habit [...]'.⁹⁹ The Trinity manuscript contains a draft of *Arcades*, initially headed 'Part of a maske', and amended to 'Part of an Entertainment'.¹⁰⁰ *Arcades* contains a speech by the Genius of the Wood (an Attendant Spirit-like figure), in which he declares that he sings

to those that hold the vital shears,
And turn the adamantine spindle round,
On which the fate of gods and men is wound.
Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie,
To lull the daughters of Necessity,
And keep unsteady Nature to her law.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *Canzone*, ll. 7–12. *CSP*, p. 96.

⁹⁸ *Canzone*, l. 15. *CSP*, p. 96.

⁹⁹ *CSP*, p. 162.

¹⁰⁰ *CSP*, p. 161, footnote to *Title*.

¹⁰¹ *Arcades*, ll. 65–70. *CSP*, p. 165.

This reference to the power or otherwise of song to affect Necessity, on whose knees sits the spindle determining the destiny of the eight concentric whorls of the universe, and to dissuade her daughters, the Fates, from cutting the thread of life,¹⁰² is echoed in ‘Lycidas’ Horatian fears about the urn of Necessitas, and its speaker’s worry about how swiftly and indiscriminately his own thread of life might be cut, no matter what his talent. The correspondence might be intensified by the fact that ‘Lycidas’ immediately follows *Arcades* in this volume, constituting the last English lyric in the *Poems* (1645).

A Maske (as it is spelt in this edition) follows, with its own title page that, in keeping with the separate printing of 1637, dates the work to 1634 and states that it was performed before the Earl of Bridgewater. There is a separate printer’s device and a restatement of the year, ‘*Anno Dom. 1645*’, but pagination continues, so it is unlikely that this printing of the masque was intended for publication on its own. The motto from Virgil’s second eclogue has gone too, which could be seen as one indication of Milton having been willing to publish on this occasion, as he had not been in 1637. (Alternatively, that expression of reluctance could be seen as having been rendered obsolete by the volume’s overall motto from the seventh eclogue). Henry Lawes’ preface follows, reprinted from the 1637 edition of the masque; printed after it is a copy of a letter written to the author by Henry Wootton in 1638, on the eve of Milton’s departure to Italy, complimenting him on the masque, a copy of which Milton seems to have sent him along with a letter. In fact, Wootton had already read the work (and this letter is the evidence for Shawcross’s theory about a separate 1638 printing of *A Maske*).¹⁰³ He writes:

¹⁰² See note to *Arcades* ll. 63–72, *CSP*, p. 165.

¹⁰³ *Critical Heritage*, I. 7.

I must not omit to tell you, that I now only owe you thanks for intimating unto me (how modestly soever) the true Artificer. For the work it self, I had view'd some good while before, with singular delight, having receiv'd it from our common Friend Mr R. in the very close of the late R's Poems, Printed at *Oxford*, whereunto it was added (as I now suppose) that the Accessory might help out the Principal, according to the Art of *Stationers*, and to leave the Reader *Con la bocca dolce* [with a sweet taste in his mouth].¹⁰⁴

In the remainder of the letter, Wootton sketches out a prospective route for his correspondent, announces he is attaching for Milton a letter of introduction to a friend in Paris, and shares an anecdote from his own past Italian travels for Milton's benefit. This letter has therefore additionally been useful to scholars looking to reconstruct the facts of Milton's 1638–39 Italian journey. So too have both the contents, and the paratexts, of the second half of the 1645 volume, the Latin *Poemata*.

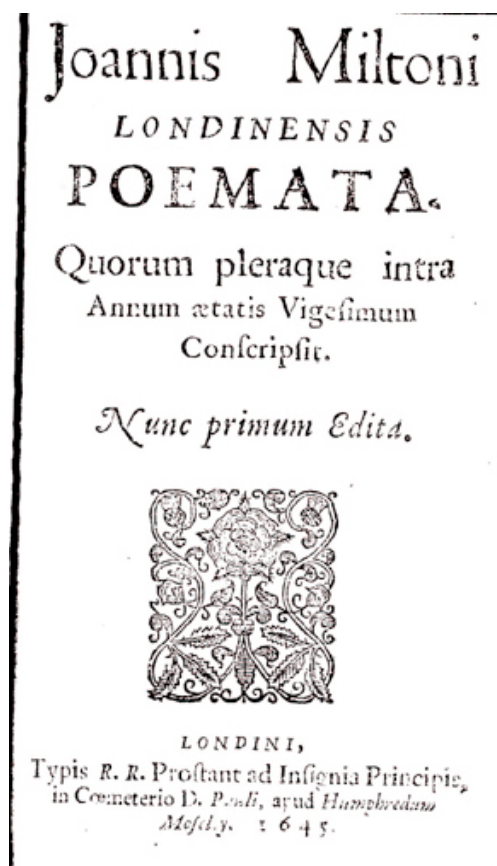
Poemata

It seems clear that Milton's Latin poems could have been published by themselves, since the *Poemata* are essentially a volume in their own right, with their own title page and separate pagination. Shawcross reports that the 1645 volume 'was issued in three forms, undoubtedly to appeal to different audiences: English and Latin (and Greek) poems ... English poems separately, and Latin poems separately.' He also reports that there exist versions of this edition in which the Latin poems are bound first, in front of the English.¹⁰⁵ But it seems unlikely that the English poems were intended for separate publication; for a start, the volume's first title-page advertises its contents as 'both English and Latin,' which without the *Poemata*, they would not be, and there is no title-page extant that refers to the English poems only. The title-page of the *Poemata* renews the publicity drive, identifying its author as a Londoner, '*Joannis Miltoni Londoniensis*', and revealing that Milton wrote many of the poems when he was in his twenties [*Quorum pleraque intra Annum aetatis Vigesimalium Conscripsit*]. Further, we

¹⁰⁴ *Poems* (1645), p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ *Critical Heritage* I. 7–8.

are told that these poems have never been published before (that they are ‘*Nunc primum Edita*’) – although, depending on whose hypothesis we believe about the possible early printing of the *Epitaphium Damonis*, this may not be strictly true.¹⁰⁶



Title-page to the *Poemata*. Image reproduced from Dartmouth University Milton reading room.¹⁰⁷

Where the *Poems* had Moseley’s preface and Henry Wootton’s encomium to *A Mask*, the *Poemata* are buttressed by three short Latin epigrams, an Italian ode and a Latin letter, all written by acquaintances of Milton from his Italian journey. These *testimonia* are introduced with a Latin paragraph, presumably by Milton himself, which stresses that the testimonies have been included not out of authorial pride but more because of respect for the givers. We are also told that the author strives with all his might to

¹⁰⁶ CSP (2009). I am using this edition of the *Complete Shorter Poems* to refer to the *testimonia* because Carey’s 2007 edition does not include them.

¹⁰⁷ http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/poemata/index.shtml (accessed 22.9.13).

avoid the jealousy that comes of excessive praise, and does not want greater plaudits lavished upon him than he deserves [*nimiae laudis invidiam totis ab se viribus amolitur, sibi que quod plus aequo est non attributum esse mavult*];¹⁰⁸ this tellingly recalls the quotation from Virgil's seventh Eclogue, with an overpraising 'lingua' characterized as 'mala,' that is appropriated for the motto of the *Poems*. Milton's friends' encomia all call attention to his Englishness (one of them puns on his being an 'Angel' as well as an 'Angle'), and his status as a vernacular poet comparable to Homer, Virgil and Tasso.¹⁰⁹ Giovanni Salzilli, a Roman poet, suggests that Milton deserves to be 'triplici poeseos laurea coronandum Graeca nimirum, Latina, atque Hetrusca, Epigramma Joannis Salsilli Roman?' ['crowned with the triple laurel of poetry, Greek, Latin and Tuscan'].¹¹⁰ This remark more closely yokes the two halves of the volume, in its implicit praise for Milton's few Italian poems, and chimes with the vatic, multilingual ambition expressed throughout his early work.

Further endorsement for Milton's skills as a linguist appears in Antonio Francini's ode, 'Al Signor Gio. Miltoni Nobile Inglese':

*Nell'altera Babelle
Per te il parlar confuse Giove in vano,
Che per varie favelle
Di se stessa trofeo cadde su'l piano:
Ch'Ode oltr'[ad] Anglia il suo piu degno Idioma
Spagna, Francia, Toscana, e Grecia e Roma.*

[In high Babel, Jove confused language so that, through various languages, the trophy of itself fell to the ground; this was in vain where you were concerned, for besides England, Spain, France, Tuscany, and Greece and Rome can all hear your worthy idiom.]¹¹¹

Hyperbolic as it might be, Francini's remark that the Babel event does not touch Milton, such is his multilingualism, enters importantly into questions of why and how

¹⁰⁸ *CSP* (2009), p. 130.

¹⁰⁹ *CSP* (2009), p. 132.

¹¹⁰ *CSP* (2009), p. 132.

¹¹¹ *CSP* (2009), p. 136.

Milton ultimately decided to write his epic poem – attempting to reach back into an unfallen world with an unfallen language – in the decidedly postlapsarian, post-Babel, even post-classical English language. One way of looking at this is to see Milton as having sublimated his foreign languages into a kind of enriched vernacular (what Dante called the *vulgare illustre* in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*), making his Latinate, etymologically informed English a kind of ‘linguistic apotheosis’.¹¹² In an extension of this theme, Carlo Dati in his prefatory letter calls Milton ‘*Polyglotto, in cuius ore lingua jam deperditae sic reviviscunt, ut idiomata omnia sint in ejus laudibus infacunda*’ [‘a polyglot, in whose mouth lost languages are revived, so that all idioms are inadequate to praise him’]. The idea that Milton’s superior linguistic knowledge beggars all languages, so that his talent is inexpressible in words, is quickly countered by the statement, ‘*Et jure ea percallet ut admirationes & plausus populorum ab propria sapientia excitatos, intelligat*’ [‘and he does well to know [these languages], so that he can understand the admiration and applause of the people that his own wisdom has excited’].¹¹³ The terms of this praise, in which Milton has a preternatural, practically prelapsarian aptitude for foreign languages ancient and modern, endue him with the ability to overcome some of the inadequacies inherent in individual languages since Babel, and maybe even before.

The *Poemata* are virtuosic in form as well as in their Latin medium. They are divided into the *Elegiarum Liber*, which consists of seven elegies, a retraction, a sequence of poems on the Gunpowder Plot and three poems in praise of Leonora, a Roman singer; and the *Sylvarum Liber*, a collection of poems of different lengths and metres, on subjects as various as the Gunpowder Plot, the perishability of nature, the Platonic Ideal, and praises to Milton’s own father, as well as to two of his Italian acquaintances, Salzilli and Manso, before ending with the *Epitaphium Damonis*. In

¹¹² ‘Milton’s Bilingual Muse’, 684.

¹¹³ *CSP* (2009), p. 140.

'Mansus', Milton uses the occasion of this encomium as a springboard to eulogising himself; in particular, he sets himself up in competition with his poetic influences. He begins:

*Haec quoque Mansus tuae meditantur carmina laudi
Pierides, tibi Mansus choro notissime Phoebi,
Quandoquidem ille alium haud aequo est dignatus honore
Post Galli cineres, et Mecaenatis Hetrusci.*

[These songs too, Mansus, the Pierides are intending for your praise, you who are so well known to the choir of Phoebus, since he has hardly designated anyone else worthy of such honour since the death of Gallus and Etruscan Maecenas.]¹¹⁴

Initially this seems a straightforward comparison: Gallus was eulogized by Virgil, and Maecenas by Horace; Milton is extolling Mansus for having patronized poets equally excellent – Tasso, Marino, and now himself. But Milton's praise, or self-praise, is more complex than this. He commends Manso for having befriended Tasso and Marino in life, but, more, for commemorating them after their death:

*nec pia cessant
Officia in tumulo, cupis integros rapere Orco,
Qua potes, atque avidas Parcarum eludere leges:
Amborum gentes, et varia sub sorte peractam
Describis vitam, moresque, et dona Minervae;
Aemulus illius Mycalen qui natus ad altam
Rettulit Aeolii vitam facundus Homeri.*

[Your pious offices did not falter at the tomb, but you wished to seize them, whole, from Orcus, as far as you could, and to elude the greedy laws of the Parcae. You described the ancestors of both men, and how their lives were carried out under varying circumstances, their habits, and their gifts from Minerva. You were emulous of that eloquent man who, born on high Mycale, related the life of Aeolian Homer.]¹¹⁵

Once again, we find Milton dwelling on the possibility that poetry can recuperate people from Orcus, the world of the dead, and from the hands of the Fates. Again, too, we find him wishing for such treatment after he has gone. So, having praised Manso for championing Tasso – a friendship which, he stresses, confers mutual glory ('*Te pridem magno felix concordia Tasso / Iunxit, et aeternis inscripsit nomina chartis*' [You and

¹¹⁴ 'Mansus', ll. 1–4. CSP, pp. 263–264.

¹¹⁵ 'Mansus', ll. 17–23. CSP, p. 264.

great Tasso were once joined in happy friendship, which has inscribed your name on the eternal charter’)]¹¹⁶ – the speaker reflects:

*O mihi si mea sors talem concedat amicum
Phoebaeos decorasse viros qui tam bene norit,
Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem;
Aut dicam invictae sociali foedere mensae,
Magnanimas heroas, et (O modo spiritus ad sit)
Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub Marte phalanges.*

[O may it be my good luck to find such a friend, who knows so well how to honour Phoebus’s followers, if ever I call back into poetry the kings of my native land and Arthur, who set wars raging even under the earth, or tell of the great-hearted heroes of the round table, which their fellowship made invincible, and – if only the inspiration would come – smash the Saxon phalanxes beneath the impact of the British charge.]¹¹⁷

These reflections, a version of the Arthurian ambition that would be expressed in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, soon give way to specific thoughts of the speaker’s own death. Despite the Englishness of the poem for which Milton’s speaker envisions himself attaining the glorious death he pictures here, his imagery is entirely classical:

*Tandem ubi non tacitae permensus tempora vitae,
Annorumque satur cineri sua iura relinquam,
Ille mihi lecto madidis astartet ocellis,
Astanti sat erit si dicam sim tibi curae;
Ille meos artus liventi morte solutos
Curaret parva componi molliter urna.
Forsitan et nostros ducat de marmore vultus,
Nectens aut Paphia myrti aut Parnasside lauri
Fronde comas, at ego securo pace quiescam.
Tum quoque, si qua fides, si praemia certa bonorum,
Ipse ego caelicolum semotus in aethera divum,
Quo labor et mens pura vehunt, atque ignea virtus
Secreti haec aliqua mundi de parte videbo
(Quantum fata sinunt) et tota mente serenum
Ridens purpureo suffundar lumine vultus
Et simul aethereo plaudam mihi laetus Olympo.*

[Then at last when I had lived out a life in which poetry was not dumb, when I had reached a ripe old age and paid my last debt to the grave, then that friend would stand by my bed with tears in his eyes, and it would be enough for me to say to him as he stood there, ‘Look after me.’ He would see to it that my limbs, loosened by livid death, were laid gently in a little urn. Perhaps he might have my features carved in marble, binding my hair with a wreath of Paphian myrtle or of Parnassian laurel: and I shall rest safe and at peace. Then, too, if one can be sure of anything, and if

¹¹⁶ ‘Mansus’, ll. 7–8. CSP, p. 264.

¹¹⁷ ‘Mansus’, ll. 78–84. CSP, p. 267.

rewards do really lie in store for the righteous, I myself, far away in the ethereal home of the heavenly gods, the region to which perseverance and a pure mind and ardent virtue carry a man shall watch this earth and its affairs – as much, that is, as the Fates permit – from some corner of that far-off world, and, with all my soul calmly smiling, a bright red blush will spread over my face, and I shall joyfully applaud myself on ethereal Olympus.]¹¹⁸

The urn recalls fate-conscious ‘Lycidas’ (written shortly before Milton travelled to Italy and made Manso’s acquaintance), while the vision of himself passing away in old age defies the prematurity of death with which that poem was forced to wrangle. Where marmoreality was something to be feared in ‘On Shakespeare’ or *A Mask*, here it is comfortably pictured as just the safe, peaceful, earthly manifestation of eternal life elsewhere: the speaker imagines himself blushing happily on Mount Olympus, while his body rests ‘*secura pace*’ [‘in secure peace’] below his marble statue on earth, which has possibly been crowned with myrtle or laurel. The psychological splitting that goes on here, with the speaker projecting himself simultaneously down into the safety of the grave and up to the lofty vantage of Olympus, is a revealing exercise in wish-fulfilment. There is more certitude in the heavenly half, as it were, of the speaker’s vision, conducted entirely in the confident future tense, than in its earthly counterpart, which is full of ‘if’s, subjunctives, and even a ‘perhaps’. Such conditionality could even be said to undermine the assuredness of the vision of the future that follows. This is a further expression of concern about what a poet can or should do to ensure that his dedication to his craft is recognised appropriately, so that he will not be forgotten in death.

These preoccupations are illuminated by reading ‘*Ad Patrem*’, Milton’s poem to his father, the date of which is disputed, but which several scholars have placed at around the same time as ‘*Mansus*’ was composed (the poems are near neighbours in

¹¹⁸ ‘*Mansus*’, ll. 85–100. *CSP*, pp. 267–268.

the *Poemata*, too).¹¹⁹ ‘*Ad Patrem*’ has been seen as a ‘half playful, wholly enthusiastic youthful defence’ by Milton of his incipient career.¹²⁰ The poem certainly has this aspiration, instructing Milton’s father, and his wider audience, ‘*Nec tu vatis opus divinum despice carmen*’ [‘Do not scorn divine poetry, the work of the bard’].¹²¹ But near the end of the poem, ‘*Ad Patrem*’ reveals a nervousness about contingency that belies the confidence of the speaker’s plans for himself. Picturing his future, he declares, ‘*Tamque nec obscurus populo miscebor inertī, / vitabuntque oculos vestigia nostra profanos*’ [‘I will no longer mix, unrecognized, with the indolent populace, and my path will escape ignorant eyes’].¹²² This takes us back to Horace’s ‘*odi profanum vulgus et arceo*’, the same poem where Necessity shakes her urn and imperils the fate of high and low alike. As Cedric C. Brown points out, a certain Horatianism is detectable in Milton all the way through to his remarks in *Paradise Lost* about appealing to ‘fit audience ... though few’.¹²³ Brown writes, ‘We can see that the Roman poet provided a reference point for Milton in the crucial concern of how the civilizing poet could present himself to the community, and how, in return, the community might or might not relate to the civilizing poet.’¹²⁴

This mistrustful dependency of writer on reader is dramatised in ‘*Ad Patrem*’ by the speaker’s hope that poetry will help him banish sleepless worries, complaints, envy, and slander – a ‘*faedissima turba*’ [‘filthy crowd’] of negative forces – but he evokes these forces so well that they remain vivid presences in the poem.¹²⁵ The ending of

¹¹⁹ See *CSP*, pp. 153–154.

¹²⁰ Irene Samuel, ‘The Development of Milton’s Poetics’, *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association* (March, 1977): 231–240 (233).

¹²¹ ‘*Ad Patrem*’, l. 17. *CSP*, p. 155.

¹²² ‘*Ad Patrem*’, ll. 103–104. *CSP*, p. 158.

¹²³ *Paradise Lost*, Book VII, l. 31. In *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow, 2007), p. 391. Hereafter *PL*.

¹²⁴ Cedric C. Brown, ‘Horatian Signatures: Milton and Civilized Community’. *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 329–344, p. 343.

¹²⁵ See ‘*Ad Patrem*’, ll. 105–108. *CSP*, p. 158.

the poem sees the speaker addressing his own youthful compositions, or '*ijuvenilia carmina*' (just as he apostrophises his *canzone* when defending his choice of the Italian language, asking it to speak for him):

*Et vos, O nostri, ijuvenilia carmina, lusus,
Si modo perpetuos sperare audebitis annos,
Et domini superesse rogo, lucemque tueri,
Nec spisso rapiant oblivia nigra sub Orco,
Forsitan has laudes, decantatumque parentis
Nomen, ad exemplum, sero servabitis aevo.*

[And you, my youthful poems, my pastimes, if only you are bold enough to hope for immortality, to hope that you will survive your master's funeral pyre and keep your eyes upon the light, then perhaps, if dark oblivion does not after all plunge you down beneath the dark crowds of the underworld, you may preserve this eulogy and my father's name, which has been the subject of my verse, as an example for a far-off age.]¹²⁶

The rhetorical ascription of emotions like boldness and hope to his own inanimate creations is clearly an act of displacement on the speaker's part, and the request to his poems to memorialise each other a figurative circumvention of how fragile and unknown are the forces that actually may or may not keep his poems from oblivion. This, like the speaker's vision of his earthly afterlife in '*Mansus*', is deeply contingent, framed as subjunctive, a realm of 'if' and 'perhaps'. Despite the declaredly virtuosic and various nature of his *ijuvenilia carmina*, then, Milton's 1645 volume is in no way certain of future success.

***Poems*' reception, 1645–73**

As Shawcross observes, the release of the *Poems* (1645) 'does not seem to have created a stir, for allusions to it are generally lacking, or to have been a big seller; copies remained unsold years later.'¹²⁷ Where James Ogden charitably suggests that the minor poems 'appeared ... in the midst of the English civil war, and perhaps in

¹²⁶ '*Ad Patrem*', ll. 115–120. *CSP*, p. 158.

¹²⁷ *Critical Heritage*, I. 7–8.

consequence were not widely read',¹²⁸ William Riley Parker's 1940 monograph, *Milton's Contemporary Reputation*, expressly states that this is no excuse:

This comparative neglect should not be laid to political events, or to the lack of an enterprising publisher, for in 1645-46 Moseley also first published the poems of Waller, Crashaw, and Suckling; and the volumes of these poets went through three or four editions before Milton's book saw a second.¹²⁹

It is true that references to the *Poems* are thin on the ground between their first and second publications. We know of a few such allusions and instances of republication, but evidence suggests that if the *Poems* were especially appreciated during this period, it was mostly on a private basis.

The first of Milton's poems to be published after 1645 was actually not a reprinting, but a publication for the first time. In 1648, Henry Lawes and his brother William published *Choice Psalms Put into Musick*, a four-volume collection of their compositions, along with elegies to William, who had died in 1645. Volume I of the *Choice Psalms* begins with four poems in praise of the brothers by their friends, of which the third, 'To my Friend Mr Henry Lawes', is signed 'J. Milton'.¹³⁰ At around the same time, 1648, William Sancroft, later to be Archbishop of Canterbury, then a fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, copied 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' and Milton's paraphrase on Psalm 36 into his commonplace book.¹³¹ After this, nothing is known of the reception of the *Poems* (1645) for almost a decade.

In 1657, Joshua Poole published his *English Parnassus: or, a Helpe to English Poesie*. This is a kind of literary thesaurus, a list of poetical vocabulary, which notes at its outset 'the Books principally made use of in [its] compiling', one of which is 'Miltons

¹²⁸ *Milton's Critical Reputation*, p. 1.

¹²⁹ William Riley Parker, *Milton's Contemporary Reputation* (Columbus, OH, 1940), p. 23.

¹³⁰ Henry and William Lawes, *Choice Psalms put into Musick* (1648), sig. A5^v. This poem would later be printed in the 1673 edition of Milton's *Poems*.

¹³¹ Thomas Warton dates this to 1648 in his 2nd edition of Milton's *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1791), v. Hereafter *PSO* (1791).

Poems'.¹³² That same year, 1658, *Wit Restor'd*, a comic compendium along the lines of the *Banquet of Jest*s (which, as discussed above, had been reprinted in 1657), was published, including both of Milton's Hobson poems, and the third of unconfirmed authorship.¹³³ That same year, the *Poems* appeared in William London's *Catalogue of the Most Vendible Books in England*, with the following entry: 'Mr Milton's Poems with a mask before the Earl of Bridgewater 12^o'.¹³⁴ In 1662 another first printing took place, that of Milton's sonnet to Henry Vane, in the memorial volume *The Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane, Knight*.¹³⁵ From the Trinity Manuscript, Stella Revard dates the sonnet to about 1652, but it was not published under Milton's name until 1694 when Edward Phillips included it in his *Letters of State*.¹³⁶ Although a republican, Vane had refused to take oaths assenting to the regicide. He was initially granted clemency by Charles II but ultimately executed for high treason. It is commonly accepted that Milton did not publish this poem, or others to politically controversial figures, in his lifetime for that reason.¹³⁷

Milton's adversary Salmasius (real name Claude Saumaise) alludes to the 1645 *Poems* in his posthumously published *Responsio* to Milton's *Defensio Secunda*: '*Abi tu homo, et insulta potius poemata scribe, Anglica et Latina, quam formam rebus regendis publicis praescribe*' ['Go away, man, and preferably write your boring poems, English and Latin, rather than prescribe how public affairs (the republic) should be run'].¹³⁸ This remark bears out some of the claims of Milton's Italian friends about his Continental fame, showing us that Milton's bilingual poetic habits were known as far as France, as early as 1653 (the year of Salmasius' death). Furthermore, the verbatim quoting from the

¹³² Joshua Poole, *The English Parnassus* (1657), p. 42.

¹³³ *Wit Restor'd* (London, 1658), pp. 83–85.

¹³⁴ William London, *Catalogue of the Most Vendible Books in England* (1657), sig. Ee4^v.

¹³⁵ George Sykes, *The Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane* (1662), pp. 93–94.

¹³⁶ See *CSP* (2009), pp. 362–63.

¹³⁷ *CSP* (2009), p. 354.

¹³⁸ *Ad Ioannem Miltonum Responsio, opus posthumum Claudii Salmasii* (Divione, 1660), p. 267.

title page of the 1645 volume, with ‘Poems English and Latin’, rendered ‘*Anglica et Latina*’, suggests that there is something remarkably quaint, perhaps even arrogant, about Milton’s having chosen to present his poetry this way. Apart from the issue of the Third Folio in 1663, which reprints Milton’s sonnet to Shakespeare, again without attribution, there is rather a pause in critical mentions or printings of Milton’s shorter poems until, and even for a short while beyond, the appearance of *Paradise Lost* in 1667. In his 1670 *Tractatulus de Carmine Dramatico Poetarum Veterum*, Edward Phillips mentions the shorter poems offhand, whilst really on the subject of *Paradise Lost*: ‘*Joannes Miltonius praeter alia quae scripsit Elegantissima tum Anglicè tum Latinè, nuper publici juris fecit Paradisum amissum Poema*’ [‘John Milton, besides having written other most elegant poems, both in English and Latin, has recently published his poem *Paradise Lost*...’].¹³⁹ It seems reasonable to assume that rather than any flowering of interest in the *Poems* themselves, it was *Paradise Lost*’s publication in 1667, followed by *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regain’d* in 1671, which occasioned the new edition of the early poetry in 1673, a year before Milton’s death.

***Poems* (1673)**

Milton’s *Poems, &c., upon Several Occasions, Composed at Several Times* was published by Thomas Dring in 1673. Two versions exist, whose title pages show that they were printed at slightly different locations in Fleet Street, but which are the same in all other particulars.¹⁴⁰ It is an octavo volume, with two tables of contents – one for the English, one for the Latin poems – and a list of errata; since it is no longer published

¹³⁹ *Tractatulus de Carmine Dramatico Poetarum Veterum, cui subjungitur Compendiosa Enumeratio Poetarum Recentiorum* (1670), appended to *Joannis Buchleri Sacrarum Profanarum Phrasium Poeticarum Thesaurus*, 17th ed. (1669), p. 399.

¹⁴⁰ *Poems, &c., upon Several Occasions, by Mr John Milton* (1673). Hereafter *Poems* (1673).

by Moseley, it lacks his effusive preface. The title page of the *Poemata* does, however, as Stephen B. Dobranski points out, repeat in error the phrase '*Nunc primum edita*'.¹⁴¹

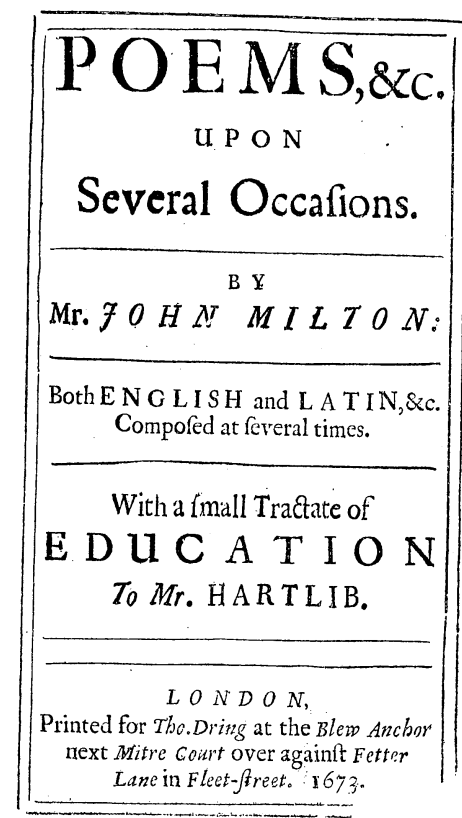


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The 1673 edition of Milton's poems contains some works not included in the 1645 volume. The first of these, dated '*anno aetatis 17*', is 'On the Death of a fair Infant dying of a Cough'; the next additions are nine English sonnets, on various themes (including that to Henry Lawes, which had been printed in 1648), appended to the ten sonnets which had been printed in the *Poems* (1645). There follows a translation of Horace, *Odes* I. v, 'Rendred almost word for word without Rhyme according to the Latin Measure, as near as the Language will permit.'¹⁴² This 'without Rhyme' is a timely emphasis post-*Paradise Lost*. On the facing page is printed '*Ad Pyrrham*', the

¹⁴¹ Stephen B. Dobranski, *Milton, Authorship, and the Book Trade* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 155–56.

¹⁴² *Poems* (1673), p. 62.

original Horatian ode. ‘At a Vacation Exercise in the Colledge’ follows, dated ‘*Anno Aetatis 19*’. Although the exercise is said to be ‘part Latin, part English’, we are only given the English half, prefaced by ‘The Latin speeches ended, the English thus began.’¹⁴³ There follows ‘On the new forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament’, the last of the new inclusions in this edition before *Arcades*, ‘*Lycidas*’, and *A Mask* – with, this time, no title page of its own, only a heading summarising the details of its performance as ‘Presented at Ludlow-Castle, 1634. &c.’.

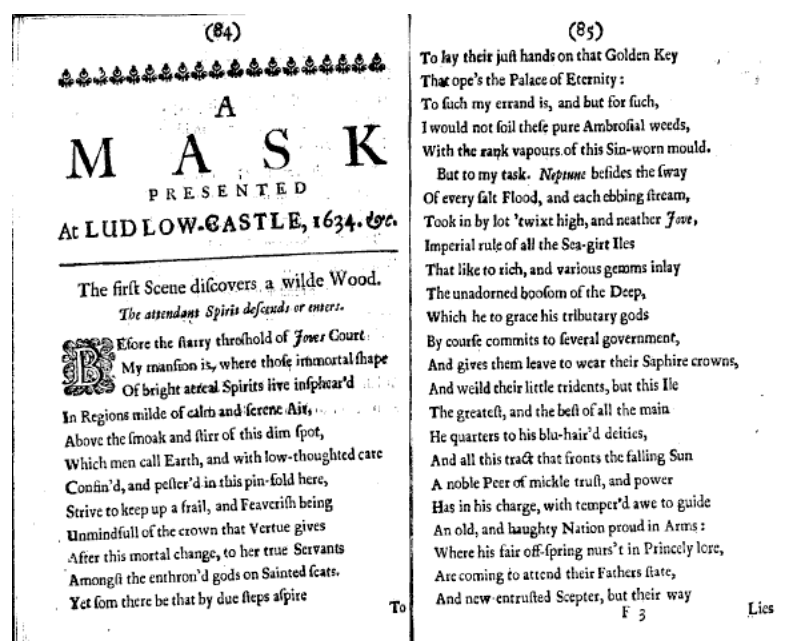


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Translations of psalms I through VIII follow *A Mask*. The first of them is subtitled ‘Done into Verse, 1653’;¹⁴⁴ the rest are still more specifically dated between 3rd and 14th August 1653. Psalm II, we are told, is written in *terzetti*, that is to say, in *terza rima*.¹⁴⁵ Next, under a general heading of ‘April, 1648. J.M.’, come psalms LXXX through LXXXVIII, which pride themselves, like the Horatian ode, on their nearness

¹⁴³ *Poems* (1673), p. 64.

¹⁴⁴ *Poems* (1673), p. 130.

¹⁴⁵ *Poems* (1673), p. 131.

to the original biblical text: ‘Nine of the Psalms done into Metre, wherein all but what is in a different Character, are the very words of the Text, translated from the Original.’¹⁴⁶ A few pieces are added to the *Poemata* in their second edition: ‘*Apologus de Rustico et Hero*’ appears after the poems to the Roman singer Leonora Baroni (that is to say, at the end of the *Elegiarum Liber*); Milton’s comic, Greek depreciation of his engraver appears after the Greek Psalm CXIV and ‘*Philosophus ad Regem*’ under the title ‘*In Effigie Ejus Sculptorem*’; and ‘*Ad Joannem Rousium*’ follows the *Epitaphium Damonis*. This ode addressed to the librarian of the Bodleian Library, dated 23rd January, 1646, explains in a subtitle the occasion of its composition: the loss of a copy of the *Poems* 1645 en route to its deposit in the Library: ‘*De libro Poematum amisso, quem ille sibi denuo mitti postulabat, ut cum aliis nostris in Bibliotheca publica reponeret, Ode* [‘an ode on the lost book of poems, which [Rouse] was asking to be sent to him again, so that he could put it back with our other books in the public library’].¹⁴⁷ Milton’s 1644 tract *Of Education* completes the volume.

As well as noting the similarities between one edition and another (particularly the 1673 edition’s insistence on dating the new material it includes with as much precision as many of the 1645 poems are dated), it is worth analysing some of the differences. The 1673 volume’s title page and altered contents reflect, and perhaps seek to embed, an attitude to Milton rather different from that attempted by the 1645 edition. Where in 1645 the volume’s full title was *Poems of Mr John Milton, Both English and Latin, compos’d at several times*, in 1673 it is *Poems, &c. Upon Several Occasions. By Mr John Milton: Both English and Latin, &c. Composed at several times. With a small Tractate of Education To Mr Hartlib*. The ‘&c.’s after ‘Poems’, and after ‘English and Latin’, seem to admit that the volume contains more than poems – and so it does: *Arcades* and *A*

¹⁴⁶ *Poems* (1673), p. 143.

¹⁴⁷ Translation in *CSP*, p. 302.

Mask belong to another genre – and more languages than only English or Latin, which it does, being smattered with Italian and Greek. Including *Of Education* resonates in this respect, too, since Milton’s 1644 tract deals in detail with language learning, recommending that Latin be learned by schoolchildren first, followed by Greek and Italian.¹⁴⁸ It also, as Leah S. Marcus points out, gives the *Poems* another aspect by ‘transforming the volume retroactively into an illustrative record of the poet’s own education in language, poetry and wisdom.’¹⁴⁹ If, whatever the reality, the emphasis in 1645 was on the twin nature of the *Poems*, by 1673 this has changed. Milton addresses his book in ‘*Ad Joannem Rousium*’ as a twin, ‘*gemelle liber*,’ but that poem is expressly dated at 23rd January, 1646,¹⁵⁰ the appellation ‘*gemelle*’ nostalgically aimed, from the perspective of 1673, at the *Poems* (1645). No longer strictly twin, less balanced and dualistic, more ‘several’ – that word is used twice in the 1673 title – the volume now admits to its own heterogeneity in a way it had not done in 1645.

Dobranski suggests that *Poems* (1673) has received less scholarly attention than *Poems* (1645) partly because, with its acknowledgement of greater variety, ‘it undermines assumptions of Milton’s autonomy.’¹⁵¹ In Dobranski’s estimation, the 1645 volume was actually more collaborative, and the 1673 volume more authorial, than has been assumed. He points out that ‘with the engraving by William Marshall, the letters by Henry Wootton and Henry Lawes, and the commendatory verses by Milton’s Italian acquaintances – the book is hardly a manifestation of authorial autonomy.’¹⁵² Dobranski suggests that ‘the first edition’s emphasis of Milton’s authorial persona obscures the book’s complex genesis,’ while, ‘with the second edition, it is the

¹⁴⁸ John Milton, ‘Of Education’, *CPW* II. 357–415.

¹⁴⁹ *Unediting the Renaissance*, p. 225.

¹⁵⁰ ‘*Ad Joannem Rousium*’, l. 1. *CSP*, p. 303.

¹⁵¹ *Milton, Authorship, and the Book Trade*, p. 12.

¹⁵² *Milton, Authorship, and the Book Trade*, p. 11.

printer's work that cloaks a similar collaborative process'.¹⁵³ The difficulty, which Dobranski's extensive research into the collaborative nature of the seventeenth-century book trade only confirms, is that while *Poems* (1645) may emphasize its single author more than *Poems* (1673), no evidence exists that convincingly proves with which edition Milton was more heavily involved.

***Poems*' reception, 1673–1695**

Though its print run was large, the 1673 edition of Milton's poetry seems only to have had rather limited and localized success. In the estimation of J. W. Good, writing in 1915, the book 'created no perceptible stir even among Milton's admirers'; not much evidence has surfaced since then to gainsay him.¹⁵⁴ Good does identify some few comments on the *Poems* as roughly contemporaneous with their 1673 republication: he unearths, and dates at 1673 or later, correspondence concerning 'Lycidas' between the poet Edmund Waller and French essayist Saint-Evremond.¹⁵⁵

Waller writes,

There is one *John Milton*, an old commonwealth's man, who hath in the latter part of his life, written a poem intituled *Paradise Lost*; and to say the truth, it is not without some fancy and bold invention. I am much better pleased with some smaller productions of his in the scenical and pastoral way; one of which called *Lycidas*, I shall herewith send you.¹⁵⁶

Saint-Evremond responds enthusiastically:

The poem called *Lycidas*, which you say is written by Mr. *Milton*, has given me much pleasure. It has in it what I conceive to be the true spirit of pastoral poetry, the old *Arcadian* enthusiasm.¹⁵⁷

The nature of these remarks, and the fact that Saint-Évremond proceeds from it to a more general discourse on pastoral poetry, is an early harbinger of the generic,

¹⁵³ *Milton, Authorship, and the Book Trade*, p. 163.

¹⁵⁴ J. W. Good, *Studies in the Milton Tradition* (Urbana, IL, 1915), p. 141.

¹⁵⁵ *Studies in the Milton Tradition*, p. 141. The poems were not published until 1809.

¹⁵⁶ 'Dr. Langhorne', ed., *Letters Supposed to Have Passed Between M. De St. Evremond and Mr. Waller* (Baltimore, OH, 1809), pp. 133–134.

¹⁵⁷ *Letters Between St. Evremond and Waller*, p. 135.

thematic way in which ‘Lycidas’, and other of the *Poems*, would eventually come to be interpreted and appropriated by critics in the next century.

While Milton’s death in 1674 seems to have sparked somewhat more interest in his early poems for biographical reasons, they were most often treated as ancillary to the greatness of *Paradise Lost*. His nephew Edward Phillips published the *Theatrum Poetarum* in 1675, his ‘Compleat Collection of the Poets, Especially the most Eminent, of all Ages,’ which also only doffs its cap to the shorter poems before giving the substance of its praise to *Paradise Lost*:

John Milton, the Author (not to mention his other Works, both in Latin and English, both in strict and solute Oration, by which his Fame is sufficiently known to all the Learned of Europe) of two Heroic Poems, and a Tragedy; namely *Paradise lost*, *Paradise Regain’d*, and *Sampson Agonistes* in which how far he hath reviv’d the Majesty and true *Decorum* of Heroic Poesy and Tragedy: it will better become a person less related then my self, to deliver his judgement.¹⁵⁸

Further such biographical motives are revealed by the manuscript *Life* of Milton by John Aubrey, eventually published as part of his *Brief Lives* in 1898 but written, Shawcross estimates, in about 1681. Number 1 on his *Catalogus Librorum* is ‘Poëms, 8vo ... Twice printed. Some writt but at 18.’¹⁵⁹ Aubrey’s remarks about *Paradise Lost* are brief, but these are briefer still.

Apart from the reissue of the *English Parnassus* in 1677, and the publication of the Fourth Folio containing ‘On Shakespeare’ in 1685, there is no printed critical reference to Milton’s *Poems* until 1687, and that only oblique, when Philip Ayres refers to Milton in his preface to *Lyric Poems Made in Imitation of the Italians*. Ayres defends his choice to write this mixture of imitations and translations against any who may

¹⁵⁸ Edward Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum* (1675), pp. 113–114.

¹⁵⁹ MS Aubr. 8, fol. 63^v. In Andrew Clark, ed., ‘*Brief Lives*’, *chiefly of Contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the years 1669 & 1696*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1898), vol. II, p. 71.

quarrel at the Oeconomy, or Structure of these Poems, many of them being Sonnets, Canzons, Madrigals, &c. objecting that none of our great Men, either Mr. Waller, Mr. Cowley, or Mr. Dryden, whom it was most proper to have followed, have ever stoop'd to any thing of this sort.

Admitting his own inadequacy by comparison to these greats, Ayres goes on, giving other precedents for the path he has chosen:

I shall very readily acknowledge, that being sensible of my own Weakness and Inability of ever attaining to the performance of one thing equal to the worst piece of theirs, it easily dissuaded me from that attempt, and put me on this; which is not without President; For many eminent Persons have published several things of this nature, and in this method, both Translations and Poems of their own; As the famous Mr Spencer, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Richard Fanshaw, Mr Milton, and some few others.

Ultimately, though, Ayres's mention of Milton is remarkable for being the first explicitly to depreciate his efforts at 'imitation of the Italians', along with the efforts of other famous poets of the Renaissance (although this might be its own kind of compliment):

The success of all which [Spencer, Sidney, Fanshaw, Milton], in these things, I must needs say, cannot much be boasted of; and thô I have little reason after it, to expect Credit from these my slight Miscellanies, yet has it not discouraged me from adventuring on what my Genius prompted me to.¹⁶⁰

The last critical mention of the *Poems* in the 1680s comes from the German scholar and Latin poet Daniel Georg Morhof's *Polybistor sive notitia auctorum et rerum commentarii* [*Polybistor*, or, Notes of authors and memoranda of things'] (1688). Writing about Milton in the section of his work titled '*De epistolarum scriptoribus*' ['on letter-writers'], Morhof focuses on the *Epistolae Familiares*, lamenting that there are so few of his letters extant in just one '*libello exiguo*' ['meagre little book'], but recapitulating some of Milton's finest epistolary arguments, especially that against Salmasius.¹⁶¹ Moving on to a discussion of Milton as a poet, Morhof writes: '*ostendunt Miltoni scripta virum vel in ipsa juventute: quae enim ille adolescens scripsit carmina Latina, una cum Anglicis edita,*

¹⁶⁰ Philip Ayres, *Lyric Poems, Made in Imitation of the Italians* (1687), sigs. A5^v–A6^r.

¹⁶¹ Daniel Georg Morhof, *Polybistor sive de notitia auctorum et rerum commentarii* (Lübeck, 1690), p. 304. Hereafter *Polybistor*. Translations mine.

aetatem illam longe superant [‘Milton’s writings show him to have been a man in his very youth: for as a young man he wrote the Latin poems, which, published along with his English poems, have long outlived that age’].¹⁶² Morhof is less keen on *Paradise Lost*, and especially troubled by the fact that it does not rhyme, deeming its books full of genius and wit (*plena ingenii & acuminis*) but unrefined (*insuavia*), with rhythmic defects. Morhof’s attention to the 1645 / 1673 volume here adds some weight to Phillips’ claim about Milton being ‘known to all the learned of Europe’ for his early verse. And by the time of the 1714 edition, completed after Morhof’s death, J. Milton French reports that a sentence had been added, to the effect that Milton was equally praised by his own countrymen for his Latin, as for his English poetry [*Ab Anglis commendari Job. Miltonus, ut in Anglicis, ita in Latinis poematibus, solet*].¹⁶³

No critical opinion, but a measure of information, on some of the material in Milton’s *Poems* is given in Gerard Langbaine’s 1691 *Account of the English Dramatick Poets*. First, Langbaine copies more or less verbatim the contents of the 1637 title page for, as it is called here, the ‘*Masque*, presented at Ludlow Castle.’¹⁶⁴ He goes on to say of Milton, ‘He publisht some other poems in *Latin* and *English*, printed 8^o. *London*, 1645.’¹⁶⁵ Langbaine does not seem to have been aware of, or at least not to have thought worth mentioning, the 1673 edition of the *Poems*. Anonymous, undated annotations to the copy of this book that I consulted in the British Library (BL C.28.g.1) add to this sentence ‘with that *Masque* in English and Latin’, and write ‘1673’ above ‘1645’. The second of these additions is readily comprehensible, drawing the reader’s attention to the existence of, and possibly indicating the

¹⁶² *Polyhistor*, p. 304.

¹⁶³ See J. Milton French, *The Life Records of John Milton*, 5 vols (New Brunswick, NJ, 1949–58), vol. v (1958), pp. 104–7.

¹⁶⁴ Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (Oxford, 1691), p. 376.

¹⁶⁵ *The English Dramatick Poets* (1691), p. 376.

annotator's preference for, the 1673 edition of the *Poems*. The first addition makes clear that the *Mask* was published along with other poems, but as for the phrase 'in English and Latin,' it cannot refer to the *Mask* itself (which is entirely English), yet it is not needed if it refers to the *Poems*, which have already been called '*Latin and English*.' The phrase could possibly refer to the order in which the poems are presented in the edition of Milton's *Poems* that the annotator has seen (possibly the 1673 edition); if, as Shawcross speculates, some copies of the 1645 *Poems* had the Latin and English poems reversed, this would be a distinction worth drawing.¹⁶⁶

References to Milton's *Poems* also appear in Anthony Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* (1691–92). Though Milton was a famous Cantabrigian, Wood tells us that he also obtained an MA from Oxford in 1635, 'not that it appears so in the Register ... but from his own mouth to my friend, who was well acquainted with [him]'.¹⁶⁷ Wood describes, none too briefly, Milton's early years and education, before remarking, 'By this indefatigable study he profited exceedingly, wrot then Several poems, paraphras'd some of *David's Psalms*, performed the collegiate and academical exercise to the admiration of all [...]'.¹⁶⁸ Later, when relating Milton's acquaintance with Manso during his Italian journey, Wood writes, 'Before he left *Naples* he return'd the Marquis an acknowledgement of his great favours in an elegant copy of Verses entit. *Mansus*, which is among the Latin poems.'¹⁶⁹ Wood lists Milton's *Poemata* first, followed by '*A Mask* – printed 1645. Oct.' and then '*Poems*, &c. – printed the same year'.¹⁷⁰ Several entries later he notes the *Poems*, &c., dating them to 1673–4, and

¹⁶⁶ *Critical Heritage*, I. 7–8.

¹⁶⁷ Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 2 vols. (1691–92), vol. II, column 880.

¹⁶⁸ *Athenae Oxonienses*, II. 880.

¹⁶⁹ *Athenae Oxonienses*, II. 880–81.

¹⁷⁰ *Athenae Oxonienses*, II. 882.

adding that ‘among these are mixed some of his Poems before mention’d, made in his youthful years.’¹⁷¹

The most instructive evidence of Milton’s critical reception in this period is an article that appeared in the January 16th edition of the *Athenian Mercury* for 1691–92. The piece draws on Milton’s *Poems* as well as on *Paradise Lost* to answer the question, ‘Whether Milton and Waller were not the best English Poets? and which the better of the two?’¹⁷² This matter did not have a foregone conclusion: Waller consistently outsold Milton and was much more frequently anthologized throughout this fifty-year period.¹⁷³ The article has equal praise for both poets, suggesting that ‘they were both excellent in their kind, and exceeded each other, and all besides. *Milton* was the *fullest* and *loftiest*, Waller was the *neatest* and most *correct* Poet we ever had.’¹⁷⁴ The poems of Milton given in support of this statement – in addition to *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* – include ‘his Juvenile Poems, those on Mirth and Melancholly, an Elegy on his Friend that was drown’d, and especially a Fragment of the Passion’.¹⁷⁵ Ogden suggests that ‘this critic was probably the first to think highly of ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’, and possibly the last to think highly of ‘The Passion’.¹⁷⁶ While it is true that ‘The Passion’ is an outlier in terms of the poems’ future popularity, the other three poems mentioned in the *Mercury* – *Lycidas*, ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ – would, along with *A Mask*, dominate discussions of Milton’s early poetry throughout the eighteenth century.

¹⁷¹ *Athenae Oxonienses*, II. 883.

¹⁷² Question 3, *Athenian Mercury*, Saturday January 16, 1692, in *The Athenian Gazette: or Casuistical Mercury*, 5 vols (1692), vol. V, n.p.

¹⁷³ *John Milton’s Literary Reputation*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁴ *Athenian Mercury*, n.p.

¹⁷⁵ *Athenian Mercury*, n.p.

¹⁷⁶ *John Milton’s Literary Reputation*, pp. 35–36.

A year later, in 1693, John Dryden, an admirer of Waller, said deprecatingly of Milton's early poems that their rhyme 'is always constrained and forced, and comes hardly from him'.¹⁷⁷ In his 1694 *Life of John Milton*, prefaced to his translation of the *Letters of State*, Milton's nephew Edward Phillips mentions by name, for various, mainly biographical reasons, the following 'Miscellaneous Poems': the *Elegia quarta*, addressed 'to *Thomas Young* Pastor of the *English* Company of Merchants at Hamborough, wherein [Milton] owns and stiles him his Master' (this, Phillips says, appears among Milton's 'Latin poems'); the Vacation-exercise; and 'that most excellent Monody ... intituled *Lycidas*. Never was the loss of Friend so Elegantly lamented'.¹⁷⁸ Phillips continues to 'the rest of his Juvenile Poems, some he wrote at the Age of 15, which contain a Poetical Genius scarce to be parallel'd by any *English* Writer'.¹⁷⁹

Further on in his biography Phillips refers to, and in the case of Manso's piece, quotes, the encomia to Milton by some of the Italian writers he met on his 1638–39 journey. Here too, he mentions Milton's own 'large Latin eclogue, intituled, *Mansus*, afterwards Published among his Latin Poems'.¹⁸⁰ Phillips quotes 'On the death of a fair infant' as the sentimental close to a passage dealing with Milton's education of his sister's sons.¹⁸¹ He refers to Milton's sonnet on Lady Margaret Lee while discussing her, as 'to be seen among his other Sonnets in his Extant Poems'.¹⁸² Listing 'particular Friends that had a high esteem for [Milton]', Phillips mentions Milton's sonnet to Henry Laurence, and those to Cyriack Skinner, 'one long since

¹⁷⁷ *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W. P. Ker, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1900), vol. II, p. 30.

¹⁷⁸ Edward Phillips, 'Life of John Milton', in *Letters of State, Written by Mr. John Milton*, ed. Edward Phillips (1694), viii, ix.

¹⁷⁹ *Letters of State*, ix.

¹⁸⁰ *Letters of State*, xiii–xiv.

¹⁸¹ *Letters of State*, xx.

¹⁸² *Letters of State*, xxiii.

publick among his Poems; the other but newly Printed.¹⁸³ His biography is followed by a printing, untitled and unintroduced, of four Milton sonnets never before published: to Oliver Cromwell, ‘To my Lord Fairfax’, to Sir Henry Vane and ‘To Mr Cyriack Skinner, Upon his Blindness’.¹⁸⁴ The *Poems* are listed, under a version of their 1673 title, as part of Phillips’ ensuing catalogue of Milton’s works.¹⁸⁵ None of the entries in the catalogue is dated, but they appear to be chronological, and the placement of the *Poems* in the list suggests that only their 1673 edition is here being acknowledged.

Just before the *Poems*’ last edition of the seventeenth century, one poem had a final solo outing. The Scottish poet William Hog, styling himself Gulielmo Hogaeo, who had already produced Latin translations of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regain’d* and *Samson Agonistes*, brought out a Latin version of ‘Lycidas’ and one other English poem from the 1638 memorial volume, John Cleveland’s entry. Hog was in financial trouble – his biography in the *Lives of Scottish Poets* reports that ‘he came in quest of fortune to London, but met only with misery’ –¹⁸⁶ and he appears to have been aiming these two translations at well-heeled Cambridge alumni, in ‘hopes that [those] ingenious Gentlemen will communicate tokens of their kindness to me’.¹⁸⁷ Hog also includes a short encomium about the glories of Cambridge, which lays on the flattery even more thickly, ‘*In Laudem Academiae Cantabrigiensis*’:

Quam Cantabrigii sedes faecunda Lycaeii!
O quot praeclaros protulit illa viros!

Milioni altivolas trahit hinc facundia pennas,
Hinc, Lycida, ingenii gloria clara tui.

¹⁸³ *Letters of State*, xxxvii.

¹⁸⁴ *Letters of State*, xlv–xlvi.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Poems upon several Occasions, both *English* and *Latin*, &c. Composed at several times’. *Letters of State*, xli.

¹⁸⁶ *Lives of Scottish Poets*, 3 vols. (1821–22), ed. David Hill Radcliffe, vol. III, p. 132.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Gulielmo Hogaeo’, ‘*Paraphrasis Latina*’, in *Duo Poemata (Quorum alterum a Miltono, alterum a Clivelando Anglice fuit)* (1694). Translation mine.

[How fruitful a seat of learning is the Cambridge Lyceum! O how many distinguished men has that place brought forth! The eloquence of Milton derives its high-flying wings from here; from here, Lycidas, derives the bright glory of your character.]¹⁸⁸

'Lycidas' is the first of the two poems to be presented, along with Hog's own Latin translation of the poem. It is difficult to see what, precisely, is achieved by this exercise, except possibly a heightening or ironizing of some of the poem's anti-Catholic sentiments by rendering them in Latin. Cleveland's poem could be said to be anti-Catholic too, making a sideswipe that associates Catholicism with insincere poetic artifice: he asks resentfully why, with his eyes weeping 'pious beads', he should 'Confine them to the Muses Rosarie?'¹⁸⁹ But then, confusingly, Cleveland appears to associate King positively with the Vatican itself, in a line that states, 'One Vatican was burnt, another drown'd'.¹⁹⁰ John M. Berdan, who produced an edition of Cleveland's poetry for his doctoral thesis at Yale in 1905, suggests that 'as the Vatican was famous in the seventeenth century as a repository of knowledge, Cleveland here uses the name as a synonym for library; perhaps he confused it with the burning of the Library at Alexandria.'¹⁹¹ In any case, if Hog's translation of these rather disparate works had any particular aim, it may have been to deliver 'Lycidas' to a pan-European audience, though it is uncertain if this was immediately successful. We may generally conclude that Hog's Latinized Miltons (he went on to translate *A Maske* in 1698) do not seem to have brought him success: the biographer Thomas Birch reports that he eventually 'died of want in the street.'¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ *Paraphrasis Latina*, sig. A1v.

¹⁸⁹ *Obsequies to the Memory of Edward King*, p. 9.

¹⁹⁰ *Obsequies to the Memory of Edward King*, p. 10.

¹⁹¹ John Berdan, ed., *The Poems of John Cleveland* (New Haven, CT, 1905), p. 214.

¹⁹² *Lives of Scottish Poets*, III. 132.

Poems (1695)

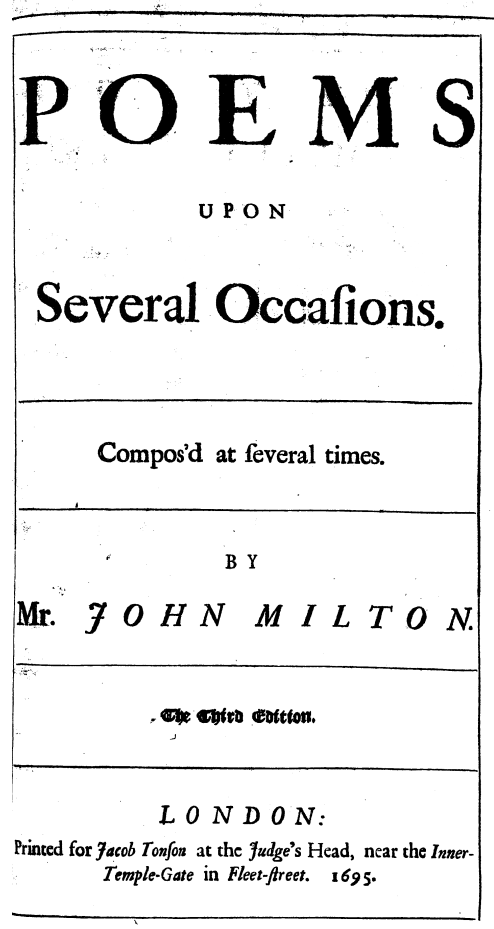


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We may, perhaps, best judge the reception of Milton's *Poems* between 1673 and 1695 by the quality of the edition that followed. By their third printing of the seventeenth century, the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, as they had become known, no longer constituted a volume in their own right. In 1695, having obtained the copyright, Jacob Tonson the Elder printed Milton's *Complete Poetical Works*, in five folio volumes, in which the *Poems upon Several Occasions* appeared in a volume alongside, indeed after, *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*. Effort is made to differentiate the shorter poems from *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson*, since they do have a separate title page and separate pagination; it is conceivable that they could have been extracted and published alone, although no such copies are extant. That said, as George

Sherburn was the first reception historian to point out, the *Poems* are poorly served by this edition, 'regarded as subordinated to the three major works, for the minor poems are printed in two columns, while the others are not'.¹⁹³

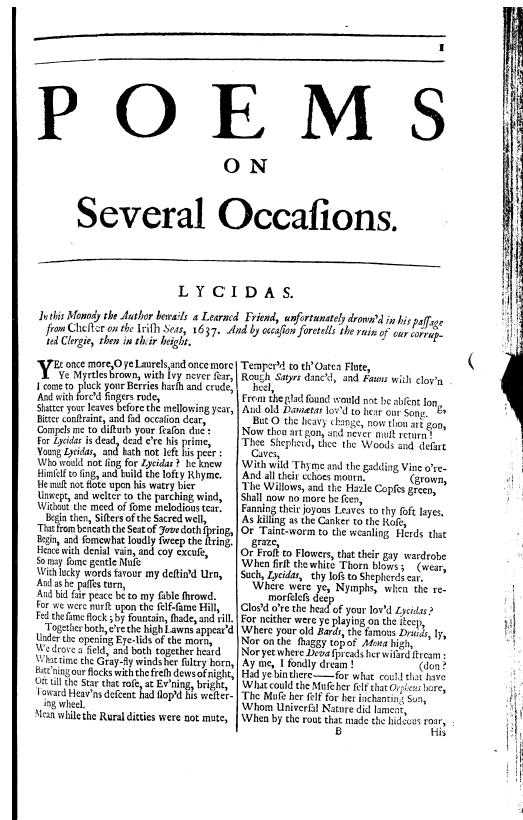


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If the *Poems upon Several Occasions* are given short shrift in 1695, some of this is in the nature of the edition. *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*, though they are printed in single rather than double columns, have no notes either. They are taken as a pair, with *Paradise Regain'd* implicitly privileged:

¹⁹³ George Sherburn, 'The Early Popularity of Milton's Minor Poems', *Modern Philology*, vol. 17, no. 5 (Sept. 1919): 259–78 (261).

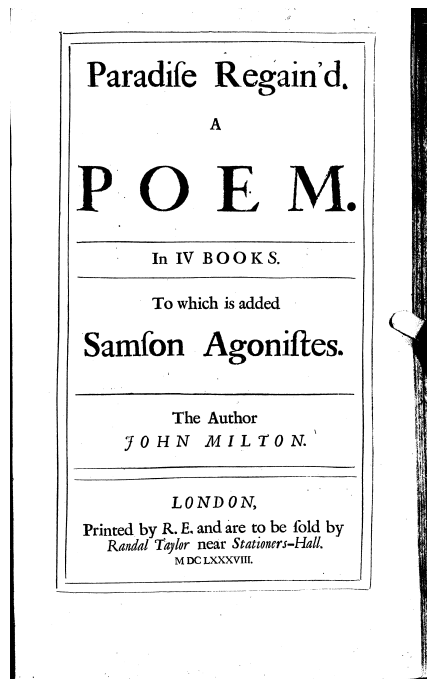


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Even *Paradise Lost*, more to the point, obviously the most important work in this edition, has hardly any notes apart from a table of its most noteworthy 'Descriptions, Similies, and Speeches' at the end.¹⁹⁴



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¹⁹⁴ John Milton, *Complete Poetical Works*, 4 vols. (1695), vol. 4, pp. 344–46. Henceforth *Poems* (1695).

The edition includes very nearly all the material from that of 1673, although without retaining *Of Education*. The order of the poems is substantially different from that of the 1673 edition, though: ‘Lycidas’, ‘L’Allegro’, ‘Il Penseroso’, and *A Mask* appear, in that order, at the beginning of the volume. We may safely interpret this as another indicator of those poems’ popularity, since these four were by far the most frequently quoted, anthologized and analyzed of the minor poems throughout the eighteenth century. *Arcades* is next, followed by the Nativity Ode through the Hobson poems, in the same order as they appeared in 1673. ‘At a Vacation Exercise’ and ‘On the New Forcers of Conscience’, which follow the sonnets in 1673, in 1695 precede them. ‘The Fifth Ode of Horace’ and ‘*Ad Pyrrham*’ follow as before.

The *Poemata* have their own, austere title-page, which, lacking information about its publisher, year of publication, and so on, does not pretend to autonomy from the *English Poems*:

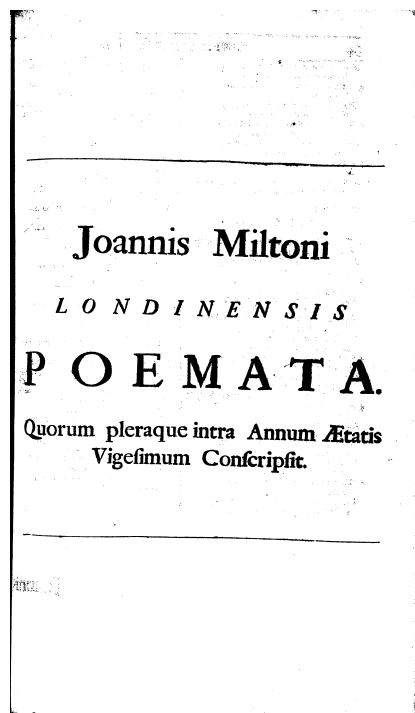


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The Latin poems are printed in their prior order, but the two Greek poems ‘*Philosophus ad regem*’ and ‘*In Effigiei Ejus Sculptorem*’ are excluded. This, coupled with the fact that the first title page omits any mention of the volume’s multilingualism, makes it clear that the element of linguistic experimentation is being downplayed.

In contrast, then, with the 1673 edition, the 1695 publication does not privilege the heterogeneity of the *Poems*, nor very much else about them. By grouping them with *Paradise Regain’d* and *Samson Agonistes*, both generally considered subsequent to *Paradise Lost*, Tonson attenuates the effect of the *Poems*’ self-avowed youthfulness and their ‘occasional’ quality. Ogden points out that unlike 1673, which essentially reproduced the order of 1645 with some additions, the 1695 version enshrines a new order which became the blueprint for the next generation of Milton editors. Ogden sees the 1695 arrangement as having grown out of the 1673 edition; he writes:

In [1673’s] table of contents ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ stand out in Roman rather than italic type; ‘Lycidas’ and ‘A Mask’ are in capitals; and the sonnets to Lawes and on the massacre in Piedmont are mentioned specifically.

THE TABLE.		THE TABLE.	
L’Allegro.	35	Psalms 6.	137
Il Penseroso.	41	Psalms 7.	138
Sonnets.	49	Psalms 8.	141
To Mr. Henry Lawes, on his Airs.	57	Psalms 80.	143
On the late Massacre in Piemont.	58	Psalms 81.	146
The fifth Ode of Horace, Lib. 1. English’d.	62	Psalms 82.	149
At a Vacation Exercise in the Colledge.	64	Psalms 83.	151
On the new forces of Conscience under the Long Parliament.	69	Psalms 84.	154
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L Y C I D A S. In this Monody the Author bewailes a Learned Friend, unfortunately drown’d in his passage from Chelster, on the Irish Seas, 1637.	75		
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Psalms 1. done into Verse, 1653.	130		
Psalms 2.	131		
Psalms 3.	132		
Psalms 4.	133		
Psalms 5.	135		
	Psal. 6.		

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'In 1695,' continues Ogden, 'this trend was more marked, as 'Lycidas', 'L'Allegro', 'Il Penseroso', *A Mask*, and *Arcades* were shifted to the beginning, before 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity'.¹⁹⁵ This would be the last edition of Milton's shorter poems for almost fifty years, reissued without editorial alteration until Newton's edition of 1752. It was in this permutation that Milton's *Poems* entered the eighteenth century.

¹⁹⁵ *John Milton's Literary Reputation*, pp. 15–16.

Chapter Two: *Poems* upon several occasions – in essays, critical biographies, miscellanies, and musical adaptations of the early eighteenth century

From 1695 to 1752, the dominant edition of Milton's *Poems* was the one put together in 1695 by Jacob Tonson as part of the *Complete Poetical Works*, edited and minimally altered by Thomas Tickell in 1720.¹ The *Poems*' relegation to the back of the 'non-*Paradise Lost* section' in this edition – when, after all, they pre-date not only that, but *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* as well – speaks of their occupying the lowest rung on the Miltonic ladder. This is reflected in both the quantity and tenor of criticism of the *Poems* during this period, which tends to make only scattered references to individual works in the course either of biographies of Milton, or analyses of *Paradise Lost*. Easily dateable works are often favoured by such biographer-critics, who, following the blueprint set by Edward Phillips, see them not as a single collection but rather as pieces of evidence to prove what Milton was doing at certain times in his life; where he was living, what he was reading, who were his teachers, friends, or romantic involvements. Just a few poems escaped this purely utilitarian fate, being foregrounded as a side-effect of the *Poems*' arrangement in the edition of 1695: *A Mask*, 'Lycidas', 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. All of these works were thoughtfully discussed by early critics of Milton; all were frequently included in the poetical miscellanies that proliferated in these years; all, too, were converted into popular theatrical entertainments. This chapter examines these various outings, often chronologically parallel, different in kind, but related insofar as they all demonstrate an essentially 'occasional' attitude to the *Poems*. By the second half of the century, though, especially in the case of the companion poems, 'Lycidas', and *A Mask*, this

¹ *Milton's Critical Reputation*, p. 18.

scattershot approach was beginning to give way to a greater sense of the *Poems*' more than occasional value. This chapter begins to chart that process too.

Criticism of the *Poems*, 1695–1740

One of the first and most conscientious readers of Milton's *Poems* was Alexander Pope. We know Pope owned Tonson's 1695 *Poetical Works*, but he also had a copy of the *Poems* from 1645, which he lent to his older friend William Trumbull in 1705.

Returning the borrowed volume, Trumbull wrote to Pope:

I expected to find, what I have met with, an admirable genius in those poems, not only because they were Milton's, or were approved by Sir Henry Wootton, but because you had commended them; and give me leave to tell you, that I know nobody so like to equal him, even at the age he wrote most of them, as yourself.²

Trumbull may be flattering the young Pope by telling him how much weight he accords his recommendation, but the terms of his praise are suggestive. First, he writes of the *Poems* as if all he had known about them, before reading them, was the identity of their author (presumably, on account of *Paradise Lost*) and the fact of their endorsement by Henry Wootton; even if this is a rhetorical posture, the fact that it is a posture possible to make must reflect the relatively low profile of the volume at this time. Then, the prediction that Pope is 'like to equal' Milton, 'even at the age he wrote most of them,' suggests Trumbull is sketching out for Pope a poetic career similar to Milton's, beginning with smaller pieces written in his late teens that show the germ of future success, and culminating in great renown. *Paradise Lost* is the implicit touchstone here, and the *Poems*, rather than being analysed on their own terms, are being employed as a point of comparison both with the epic and with what Pope may achieve in the future.

² *Correspondence of Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1956), vol. I, pp. 10–11.

Pope himself, though, seems to have been more appreciative of the *Poems* in their own right. He was clearly familiar with the *Poems upon Several Occasions* from 1673, and interested in the differences between editions: his copy of the *Poems* (1645) bears evidence of careful collation. For instance, he transcribed the last 10 lines of ‘At a Vacation Exercise’ (only published in 1673) onto the blank verso of page 65 of 1645 (the blank page between ‘Lycidas’ and *A Mask*; the choice of those lines, and their placement, suggest that Pope saw a correspondence between the Vacation Exercise’s ‘catalogue of rivers’ and the river sequence in ‘Lycidas’ featuring Arethuse, Mincius, and Camus. Pope also seems to have transcribed the entirety of ‘*Ad Ioannem Rousium*’, including Milton’s Latin note about the poem’s structure of ‘three strophes and three antistrophes with a concluding epode’, into the back of the *Poemata*.³ In addition, he writes on the blank verso of the separate title-page to *A Mask*, ‘There are several excellent lines in this Masque, & very lively Images.’⁴ Thomas Warton would call Pope Milton’s ‘first copier’, suggesting that *Eloisa to Abelard* was ‘sprinkl[ed] ... with epithets and phrases of a new form and sound, pilfered from COMUS and the PENSEROSO’, and that Pope committed this ‘theft’ safe in the knowledge that ‘he might borrow from a book then scarcely remembered, without the hazard of a discovery, or an imputation of a plagiarism.’⁵ Warton is exaggerating about the obscurity of the *Poems* in 1717, the year in which *Eloisa to Abelard* was published;⁶ there are also more egregious, and earlier, instances than this of Pope’s possible ‘pilfering’, for instance in ‘Spring, or *Damon*’, the first of his 1709 *Pastorals*, which is full of images, words, and phrases directly quoted from early Miltonic works, although these could just as well derive from Theocritus, Virgil, or Spenser, all of

³ *CSP*, p. 307.

⁴ See Maynard Mack, ‘A Finding List of Books Surviving from Pope’s Library, with a Few That May Not Have Survived’, in *Essays Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical on Pope and Some of His Contemporaries* (Newark, DE, 1982), pp. 424–25.

⁵ *PSO* (1785), viii–ix.

⁶ See my Ch. 4 for a fuller discussion of this issue and the response from Warton’s contemporaries.

whom Pope discusses in his 'Discourse on Pastoral Poetry' (published alongside the *Pastorals* in 1717).⁷

Another contemporary suggestion that the *Poems* were beginning to be known, though not yet generally popular, is a 1709 *Tatler* article by Richard Steele discussing the merits of prose against poetry. For Steele, there is 'a certain Elevation of Soul, a sedate Magnanimity, and a noble Turn of Virtue, that distinguishes the Hero from the plain, honest Man, to which Verse can only raise us', a belief he sees as being ratified by *A Mask*, saying: 'I fell into this Train of Thinking this Evening, upon reading a Passage in a Masque writ by *Milton*'.⁸ A piece from the *Spectator*, thought to have been written by Pope in 1712 (its writer is the anonymous 'Z.'), combines commentary on 'Il Penseroso' with a set of reflections on 'the Enjoyment of a cool still Evening after the Uneasiness of a hot sultry Day'.⁹ Describing his garden at great, poetical length, 'Z.' observes, 'In this sweet Retirement, I naturally fell into the Repetition of some Lines out of a Poem of *Milton*'s, which he titles *Il Penseroso*, the Ideas of Which were ideally suited to my present Wandrings of Thought.'¹⁰ 'Z.' quotes lines 61–72, and lines 147–54 of 'Il Penseroso', and then, 'reflect[ing ...] upon the sweet Vicissitudes of Night and Day, on the charming Disposition of the Seasons, and their Return again in a perpetual Circle',¹¹ lapses into a dream-vision – a 'Drama and different Scenes of the Revolution of the Year' –¹² which becomes a

⁷ See Alexander Pope, 'Discourse on Pastoral Poetry', in *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope* (1717), pp. 1–10.

⁸ Richard Steele, *Tatler*, no. 98 (Nov. 24th, 1709). *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1987), vol. II, p. 107.

⁹ 'Z.', *Spectator*, no. 425 (8th July, 1712). Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1987), vol. III, p. 593. See footnote 1, p. 591 for discussion of the author's identity.

¹⁰ *Spectator* III. 593.

¹¹ *Spectator* III. 594.

¹² *Spectator* III. 594.

masque-like pageant of the months of the year (following the Roman calendar, beginning with March).

This progression of events is already curious: ‘Z.’ seems in some respects to be imitating Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar*, but the imitation was provoked by thoughts of ‘Il Penseroso’; the Spenserianess of Milton’s early verse would not be matter for serious critical attention until Newton’s edition of the *Poems* in 1752. But the next passage in the dream-vision is more important from the point of view of the atmospheric conflation of these most popular early Miltonic works: the appearance of the month of November, in the guise of as ‘an old Man in the Extremity of Age’, who would not be able to walk were it not for the support of ‘Necessity the Mother of Fate’, on one side, and ‘Comus the God of Revels’ on the other.¹³ Of Comus, ‘Z.’ reports:

The Shape and Mantle of *Comus* was one of the things that most surpriz’d me; as he advanc’d towards me his Countenance seem’d the most desirable I had ever seen: On the Fore Part of his Mantle was pictur’d Joy, Delight, and Satisfaction, with a thousand Emblems of Merriment, and Jests with Faces looking two Ways at once; but as he pass’d from me I was amaz’d at a Shape so little correspondent to his Face: His Head was bald and all the rest of his Limbs appear’d old and deformed. On the hinder Part of his Mantle was represented Murder, with dishevel’d Hair and a Dagger all bloody, Anger in a Robe of Scarlet, and Suspicion squinting with both Eyes [...] I detested so hideous a Shape [...].¹⁴

This dramatisation of Comus’ specious enjoyments follows and elaborates upon the moral trajectory of *A Mask*, of course, but the connection of Comus with Necessity (the word ‘Necessity’ does not appear anywhere in the text of *A Mask*) also resonates with preoccupations elsewhere among the *Poems* about the indiscriminancy of fate and the relationship between that arbitrariness and the taking of immediate, frivolous pleasures.¹⁵ This is a central concern in ‘Lycidas’, as well as one of the animating

¹³ *Spectator* III. 596.

¹⁴ *Spectator* III. 596.

¹⁵ See my Ch. 1.

principles behind 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', and so we see that quartet sustained in this strange, allusive article.

Other critics in this early part of the eighteenth century also favoured *A Mask*, 'Lycidas', and the companion poems, with Elijah Fenton writing in 1725 that these four works were 'in such an exquisite strain, that, though he had left no other monuments of his genius behind him, his name had been immortal.'¹⁶ William Warburton, writing to Thomas Birch in 1737, prizes *A Mask* for its 'sweetness of description', suggesting that in composing it Milton 'only copied Shakespeare', and that in fact, the work contains 'a brighter vein of Poetry, intermixed with a softness of description, than is to be found in the charming scenes of Eden.'¹⁷ This is a remarkable instance of an early Miltonic work being praised more highly than *Paradise Lost*; it is also an instance of Milton's comparison to Shakespeare for linguistic and, we might say, atmospheric reasons. Warburton comments too that 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' are 'certainly master-pieces in their kind' –¹⁸ this is more limited praise, suggesting generic constraints that the companion poems fulfil but do not exceed; a point of view that, as we shall see, was being helped along at this time by Milton's biographers, whose narratives are almost uniquely teleological, with *Paradise Lost* as the goal towards which Milton's earlier works can only point.

The *Poems* among Milton's early biographers

John Toland's *Life of Milton*, prefixed to his 1698 edition of the prose, embeds an idea of Milton as 'destin'd to be a Scholar' from his early years, and reports that, at the age of 15, he 'gave several Proofs of his early Genius for Poetry, wherein he afterwards

¹⁶ *The Life of Mr. John Milton*, in *Paradise Lost*, ed. Elijah Fenton (1725), xxix–xx. Hereafter *PL* (1725).

¹⁷ William Warburton to Thomas Birch, 24th November 1737, in John Nichols, ed., *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* vols. I–IV (1817), vol. II, p. 79. Hereafter *Illustrations*.

¹⁸ *Illustrations* II. 81.

succeeded so happily, that to all Ages he'll continue no less the Ornament and Glory of *England*, than *Homer* is own'd to be that of *Greece*, and *Virgil* of *Italy*.¹⁹ Here, although he does not say so, Toland is quoting the *testimonia* to the *Poemata* which he will go on to invoke as evidence of Milton's 'intimat Acquaintance with several ingenious Men' in Italy:²⁰ the proofs of genius he lists are Milton's translation of Psalm 114, 'On the Death of a Fair Infant', the Latin elegies on the Bishops of Winchester and Ely, and '*In quintum novembris*'. Toland gathers these up along with 'the rest of his Juvenil Pieces' to cite from Morhof's *Polybistor* to the effect that 'Milton's writings shew him to have bin a Man in his very Childhood.'²¹ Toland's choice of which of Morhof's phrases to quote is striking, first for its blanket characterisation of these works as 'Juvenil Pieces' (Edward Phillips had called them this too, emphasising Milton's remarkable youthfulness when some of the *Poems* were written),²² and secondly for its reference to Milton's preternatural intellectual maturity. Taken together, these comments exemplify two persistent eighteenth-century perspectives on Milton's early poetry that are not totally consonant: on the one hand, the poems are juvenile, not fully developed, possibly unguarded in ways that might be useful for the biographer; on the other hand, they are masterfully mature, enough to seem the work of an adult – unless that adult were Milton, who in his full maturity surpasses all excellence. Introducing his Italian journey, for instance, Toland announces, 'We shall see him now appear in a more serious Scene, tho' yet a Child in comparison of the Figure he afterwards made in the World.'²³

¹⁹ John Toland, *Life of Milton*, in *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton*, 3 vols. (1698), vol. I, p. 6. Hereafter *Life of Milton* (1698).

²⁰ *Life of Milton* (1698), I. 8.

²¹ *Life of Milton* (1698), I. 8.

²² See my Ch. 1.

²³ *Life of Milton* (1698), I. 7.

This potential unguardedness is suggested by Toland's straight-faced description of (presumably) *Elegia septima* as the poem in which Milton

describes his falling in love with a Lady (whom he accidentally met, and never afterwards saw) in such tender Expressions, with those lively Passions and Images so natural, that you would think Love himself had directed his pen, or inspir'd your own Breast when you peruse them.²⁴

More sceptical when it comes to the biographical purport of the Italian poems – discussing Sonnet III, he concedes that it might have been written ‘on a real or feign'd Mistress’ –²⁵ Toland here takes *Elegia septima* as a straightforward document of Milton really having fallen in love at the age of 20 or 21. He slips into the second person to impress upon his reader that they may be so moved by these works as to feel they have fallen in love themselves. Yet, Toland has only just finished cautioning his reader against extrapolating too many biographical conclusions from *Elegia prima* – or, at least, to heed the parts of the poem that discuss Milton's love of learning and his occasional trips to the theatre, but not to take his mentions of exile too seriously, nor his professed fondness for British beauties (although he still prints lines 9–28, about the theatre, and 47–52, about the speaker's love of the outdoors, ‘for the satisfaction of the curious’).²⁶

‘*Mansus*’ and the *Epitaphium Damonis* are mostly used by Toland as mutually supportive pieces of evidence for how and when Milton came up with his ‘vast design’ for *Paradise Lost*, since both poems contain declarations about their speaker's future literary endeavours. Toland is keen to suggest that Tasso, via Manso, was the inspiration for the epic, although he admits that Milton ‘was not too soon determin'd about his subject’.²⁷ This is often the connection in which *Epitaphium Damonis* is taken up by Milton's biographers at this time, eager to pin down the crystallising

²⁴ *Life of Milton* (1698), I. 7.

²⁵ *Life of Milton* (1698), I. 8.

²⁶ *Life of Milton* (1698), I. 8.

²⁷ *Life of Milton* (1698), I. 9.

moment of his ambition to write *Paradise Lost*. But Toland makes a further, potentially suggestive connection when he remarks that the *Epitaphium* is ‘an Eclog nothing inferior to the *Maronian Daphnis*’ –²⁸ that is, Virgil’s Eclogue V, a dialogue between the shepherds Menalcas and Mopsus lamenting the death of their friend Daphnis. In the eclogue, Mopsus recites first, describing the barren, weed-strewn land refusing to bear crops after Daphnis’ death; Menalcas sings instead of Daphnis’ glorious entry to heaven, at which the natural world rejoices.²⁹ Mopsus is also a character in Milton’s *Epitaphium*, who asks Thyrsis why he is grieving, assuming that either he is pining for love, or has been cursed by an evil star.³⁰ Menalcas features in the *Epitaphium Damonis* too, as someone whose songs had used to delight Thyrsis in happier times. Toland’s choice of this eclogue as the exemplum to which the *Epitaphium* is ‘nothing inferior’ alerts us to the sense in which Milton’s poem could actually be said to surpass its forerunner, acting as a synthesis of Virgil’s two rather disparate speakers into one, in recognition of the psychological complexity by which a mourner can simultaneously grieve the earthly loss of a loved one, and feel joy that the person they have lost is going to heaven.

Toland also has high praise for *A Mask*, which he was the first to call *Comus*, a title that, especially once popularised by theatrical adaptations of the masque, would become the standard. But he views this work, too, in the light of something greater and more canonical – in this case, Milton’s own *Paradise Lost*. Having quoted at length from the prose work *An Apology Against a Pamphlet*, culminating with Milton’s promise to engage with his readers at some future ‘still time, when there shall be no

²⁸ *Life of Milton* (1698), I. 10.

²⁹ *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, pp. 56, 58.

³⁰ *Epitaphium Damonis*, ll. 75–80. *CSP*, p. 275.

chiding’,³¹ Toland implies that this ‘still time’ arrived with the relative calm, post-Civil War, in which Milton was able to compose his epic, and concludes his quotation by suggesting that *Paradise Lost* was the fulfilment of that promise:

Thus far our Author, who afterwards made this Character good in his inimitable Poem of *Paradise Lost*; and before this time in his *Comus* or *Mask* presented at *Ludlow Castle*, like which Piece in the peculiar disposition of the Story, the sweetness of the Numbers, the justness of the Expression, and the Moral it teaches, there is nothing extant in any Language.³²

The syntactic conflation of *Paradise Lost* and *A Mask* here means that some effort is needed to determine that it is the earlier work, not the later, that is being accorded praise for its story, numbers, expression, and moral. For Toland, Milton’s ‘Juvenil and Occasional Poems’ are still subordinate to *Paradise Lost*,³³ because with the epic, Milton did not only equal, but ‘master’d [his] Originals’ – originals including Homer, Virgil, and his own former self.

Toland’s narrative builds with Homer, Virgil, and Milton being ‘master’d’ in their turn by John Dryden, for his achievement of ‘framing a Tragedy out of *Paradise Lost*, making the Charms of *Virgil* appear in the *English Tongue*, and studying *Homer* for the same Purpose’.³⁴ What Toland is praising here is Dryden’s ability to translate his forebears into another language and another genre, and there is a sense in which we are being asked to apply this compliment to Milton too. Toland ends by quoting Dryden’s ‘incomparable and envy’d’ epigram on Milton from the 1688 *Paradise Lost* as conclusive proof both of Dryden’s judgement, and Milton’s excellence:

Three Poets, in three distant Ages born,
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.
The First in loftiness of thought surpass’d;
The next in Majesty; in both the Last.
The force of Nature cou’d no further goe:

³¹ *Apology against a pamphlet*, CPW, I. 867–954, 892.

³² *Life of Milton* (1698), p. 10.

³³ *Life of Milton* (1698), p. 44.

³⁴ *Life of Milton* (1698), p. 40.

To make a Third she joynd the former two.³⁵

Just as in Toland's deliberate syntactic confusion of Dryden and Milton, Dryden's own diction here, with its deferred, bivalent verbs ('surpass'd', for instance, is intransitive in line 3 but, aurally, could be carried over to line 4 as if to read 'surpassed / The next') only reinforces how interdependent are the terms, and the objects, of his praise. *Paradise Lost* continues to tower over English literature to the extent that, for authors who come after Milton, regard for his work is a mark of excellence; it also casts a shadow backwards, as far back as Homer and Virgil but also, more pressingly for Milton's biographers, on their author's own earlier compositions. This is dealt with, from the point of view of biography, by an insistently typological reading of Milton's early life and pre-*Paradise Lost* poetry. Notably absent from this kind of criticism is any comment on the tension potentially arising from individual poems' declaration of their precocity, given the fact that Milton was 37 years old when he chose to publish his '*iuvenilia carmina*',³⁶ nor the potential double meaning of that word to include compositions from between the ages of 21 and 40.³⁷

The failure of Milton's early biographers to notice this slippage amounts both to a certain naivety (the wholesale acceptance of what Milton's volume says about itself), and a quality of cynicism, since it enables critics to propagate their own narrative about the history and the present state of English literature. So, in the course of his *Original letters familiar, moral and critical* (1721), John Dennis quotes verbatim the testimonies from Milton's Italian acquaintances that preface the *Poemata*, mostly with an eye to critiquing the backwardness of English literary taste. He writes:

³⁵ *Paradise Lost*, 4th ed. (1688).

³⁶ '*Ad Patrem*', l. 115. CSP, p. 158.

³⁷ See my Introduction.

The great Qualities of *Milton* were not generally known among his Countrymen till the *Paradise Lost* had been publish'd more than thirty Years. But when that admirable Poet was among the *Italians*, the Greatness of his Genius was known to them in the very Bloom of his Youth, even thirty Years before that incomparable Poem was writ, witness the Epigram of *Selvaggi*, an *Italian* Poet, of which *Dryden's* Epigram which is under *Milton's* Picture is nothing but a Paraphrase. [...] Nay, *Salsiki*, a Roman Poet, sacrifices the very Honour of his Country, that is, of modern *Italy* to him, by preferring the *Italian* Poetry of *Milton* even to that of *Tasso* [...] And *Giovanni Baptista Manso*, a Noble *Neapolitan*, who had been the intimate friend of *Tasso*, and the great Patron of *Marino*, while they were living, gives extraordinary Commendations to *Milton*, tho' he was then but a Youth among them, as appears by his *Latin* Verses address to that noble *Italian*.³⁸

Dennis's aim here is not, especially, to praise Milton's early poems for their excellence, but to point out the ignorance of the English reading public by comparison to their perspicacious Italian neighbours: the Italians, 'tho' [Milton] was then but a Youth among them', were able to see past his callow exterior; whereas the English, many years later, were unable to see what was in front of their nose, the convincing proof of genius that was *Paradise Lost*:

Thus, you see, the *Italians*, by his juvenile Essays, discover'd the great and growing Genius of *Milton*, whereas his Countrymen knew very little of him, even thirty Years after he had publish'd among them the noblest Poem in the World.³⁹

We note here the recurrent figure of 'thirty years' which Dennis employs rather sweepingly; while it is just about true that thirty years elapsed between Milton's Italian journey (1638–39) and the first publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667, it is less clear what is supposed to have taken place, or not taken place, in the late 1690s to make the other thirty-year claim valid (although one clue might be the depreciation of Dryden with the suggestion that his epigram 'merely paraphrased' what the Italians had known sooner). Once again the poems' 'juvenility' is pressed in two directions: immature, these works only hint at the greatness that was to follow, yet they are also precociously brilliant.

³⁸ John Dennis, *Original Letters*, 2 vols. (1721), vol. I, pp. 78–79. Ellipses denote moments where Dennis directly quotes the *testimonia*.

³⁹ *Original Letters*, pp. 79–80.

This paradox is taken up by Jonathan Richardson Senior, in his 1734 *Life of Milton*, who, aiming to set ‘Milton’s person’ before the reader, declares that he detects in him ‘[a] certain Severity of Mind, a Mind not Condescending to Little things’.⁴⁰ In his *Life of Milton* (1779), Samuel Johnson would connect that lack of ‘condescension’ to what he saw as the inferiority of the author’s ‘short compositions’, suggesting that ‘Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace’.⁴¹ For Richardson, though, the opposite is true: Milton’s early pieces are lent grace and gravitas by the grandeur of their poet, grandeur that would find its fullest expression in *Paradise Lost*, but which was already incipient in the *Poems* (1645). Richardson emphasises that Milton’s

Juvenile Poems are So no Otherwise than as they were Wrote in his Younger Years, for their Dignity and Excellence they are sufficient to have set him among the most Celebrated of the Poets, even of the Ancients themselves; his *Mask* and *Lycidas* are perhaps Superior to all in their Several Kinds.⁴²

Richardson’s insistence on stripping ‘juvenile’ of all but its most literal meaning is pre-emptively defensive, suggesting, as Dennis’s biography did, that these poems might have been written when Milton was young but that they carry the ‘Dignity and Excellence’ of an older man. A new emphasis emerges, though, with Richardson’s invocation of the ‘kinds’ of *A Mask* and ‘Lycidas’; at this time it was becoming more common to read individual items from the *Poems* according to their genre, as we shall see from the categories under which, increasingly, some of them in particular were chosen for inclusion in miscellanies and anthologies. For Richardson, Milton ‘Excell’d in Lyric, Pastoral, Dramatick, Epick, and a Kind Purely Original, Such is his *Masque*’;⁴³ hinted at here is a sense in which the true mark of excelling at a genre is to exceed it, but this continues in fractious parallel with a belief that, especially when a poet is young, conventions are there to be obeyed, not outgrown.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Richardson Senior, *Life of John Milton*. Jonathan Richardson, Father and Son, *Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton’s Paradise Lost* (1734), xv. Hereafter *Life of Milton* (1734).

⁴¹ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

⁴² *Life of Milton* (1734), xv.

⁴³ *Life of Milton* (1734), xiv.

Thus, having praised *A Mask* for being *sui generis*, quoting both from Wotton's encomium, as printed in the *Poems*, and from Toland's remarks about there being 'nothing like it extant in any language', Richardson continues by extolling 'Lycidas' for both exemplifying and outstripping its genre: 'As great an Encomium have I heard of *Lycidas* as a Pastoral, and That when *Theocritus* was not forgot; *Theocritus*, of whom *Virgil* was but an Imitator in his Pastorals, as he was of *Homer* in his *Aeneis*.'⁴⁴ Here, Richardson involutedly congratulates Milton for an act of *aemulatio* rather than *imitatio*, ousting Theocritus from the position of finest, rarest pastoralist from which even Virgil could not topple him. The phrase 'when Theocritus was not forgot' implies that Theocritus has been forgotten now, rather suggesting that Milton's success might have been one reason for his decline in popularity; if we again compare Johnson's later treatment of Milton's *Poems*, and of modern pastoral literature more generally, we find him looking much more favourably on Virgil, as one 'taking Theocritus for his original', for whom 'every advantage of nature, and of fortune, concurred to complete his productions'.⁴⁵ He does not say so much of Milton.

Among other of the *Poems*, Richardson considers 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' to be 'Exquisite Pictures', and goes on to say: 'His Latin Poems have the Same Gravity and Dignity, and Most of them remarkably Excellent, though All Written while he was a Young Man, or *Almost* Before.'⁴⁶ Conceivably, Richardson is availing himself of the Latinate idea of youth or *iuvenilitas* here, so that the earliest of Milton's poems could indeed be said to have written before he was even a *iuvenis*, or young man – and, per

⁴⁴ *Life of Milton* (1734), xv–xvi.

⁴⁵ See Samuel Johnson, 'On Pastoral'. *The Rambler*, no. 37 (24th July 1750). *Rambler*, 6 vols. (1752), vol. II, pp. 18–19.

⁴⁶ *Life of Milton* (1734), xvi.

their consequent juvenility, to be all the remarkable for their excellence in that case. We notice the repetition of ‘Dignity’ as an attribute unusual for a young man’s poetry, this time in combination with ‘Gravity’. Otherwise Richardson does not engage with the *Poemata* on critical terms, simply following, even embellishing, Toland’s suggestions about the proof they furnish of Milton having been an ardent young lover. Unlike Toland, who hedges his bets about whether the Italian poets were addressed to ‘a real, or feign’d mistress’, and does not bring the *Ad Leonoram* poems in at all, Richardson includes all of these as proof that, having renounced love as a result of the disappointment recorded in *Elegia septima*, Milton was pierced by Cupid’s arrow again in Rome. He writes:

Once indeed it appears by a Latin Poem of his (*Eleg.* VII. written when he was about 19) he fell in love for the First time; He met the Lady upon Some Walks at *London*, Lost Sight of her, Never knew who she was, nor Saw her More, but Resolv’d Love should Thenceforward give him no farther Trouble.

But he was Mistaken, as appears by three fine Latin copies of Verses to *Leonora*, a Young Lady who Sung Admirably at *Rome*; and five *Italian* Sonnets, and a *Canzona* that seem to be for the Same Lady. He was not Insensible of Beauty; See his First Latin Elegy. But let it be remember’d This was not when he was a Young Man. We hear nothing of This After his return from *Italy*.⁴⁷

Richardson’s narrative draws a firm line under Milton’s Italian journey, beneath which only serious works and weighty projects can be said to have occupied him; his syntax might even suggest that Milton became ‘insensible of beauty’ as soon as he passed into maturity. Yet he wants to show that later seriousness as, retroactively, imbuing ‘even [Milton’s] Few Love Poems’, which he says ‘have a sort of Dignity and Gravity in them’; to illustrate this, Richardson provides his own English translation of lines 5–14 of Sonnet VI, in which the speaker describes the constancy and strength of his heart. But where the speaker of Milton’s original Italian poem announces, at its outset, that for him the whole point of wooing is a doubtful attempt at self-escape – *Poiché fuggir me stesso in dubbio sono, / Madonna a voi del mio cor*

⁴⁷ *Life of Milton* (1734), vi–vii.

l'umil dono / Farò divoto ['Since I am in doubt about how to flee myself, my lady, I shall devotedly make you the humble gift of my heart'] –⁴⁸ Richardson omits to translate these lines; without them, we lose the irony of the speaker's exaggerated assertions of his self-reliance and adamant impermeability.

Richardson makes no secret of his personal attachment to his subject, obviously struggling with those parts of Milton's life that he cannot bring himself to praise. For instance, he does his best to skip over Milton's period of political activity, slipping it into a description of his reputation:

in the Eyes of the Generality of the World, rather as a Great Poet, than as a Good Man, though even Poetry was Long Suspended whilst he was, as He thought, Combating in the Cause of God, and his Country's Liberty. but he was a Poet Early, and Always in his Soul.⁴⁹

This account manages simultaneously to disdain 'the Generality of the World' for prizing Milton's poetry over his personality, while also acknowledging the poetry's unimpeachable quality, and therefore affirming the good sense behind that supposedly over-simple reading. Before quoting selections from the prose, Richardson makes a plea to his reader to separate Milton's 'Principles' from his 'Sincerity':

That is what I am pleading for, and for Your Indulgence to the Ashes of a Man, to Whom I owe Much of the Happiness of my Life, of a Man who Meant Well to Us all, and to our Posterity; and that You, Looking on his Urn might Incense it with your Kind Sentiments and Benedictions, as I shall to my Latest Breath.⁵⁰

Beyond Richardson's touching fervour, we can see in his allusion to 'Lycidas' an awareness of the sense in which Milton's funeral urn represents his poetic oeuvre, now complete as it was not when 'Lycidas' was composed in 1638, to be 'favoured with lucky words' both by future readers and the critics who can sway them.

Richardson's project is commemorative and, to an extent, recuperative. In this he

⁴⁸ Sonnet V, ll. 2–4. *CSP*, p. 98–99.

⁴⁹ *Life of Milton* (1734), xiv.

⁵⁰ *Life of Milton* (1734), xxii.

follows John Dennis, for whom most of Milton's poems are really only grist to the mill of his wish to depreciate the 'Generality of the World', in Richardson's phrase: 'as the general Taste of *England* could be never said to be good,' he concludes this particular *Letter*, 'it was never so bad as it is at present.'⁵¹ However poorly they are served in this instance, we nonetheless note the *Poems*' employment in a narrative about English literary taste. They would be taken up in this cause again, especially once Tonson's hold on their copyright had slackened, in the miscellanies and anthologies of the latter part of the eighteenth century.

A final *Life* of Milton, written by Thomas Birch in 1738 to accompany a new edition of the prose works, is worth discussing briefly as a response, perhaps slightly ahead of its time, to the biographies I have just considered. Birch declares that, having planned only to 'correct' and 'supply' Toland's 1698 *Life*, he has been moved to write an entirely new one by the fact that Toland 'quotes no Authority for the particular facts related by him', and that 'besides his numerous Mistakes, he has omitted a great many particulars of importance.'⁵² In terms of criticism of the *Poems* themselves, Birch does not say much that is new. Remarkably, though, he is the first biographer to make use of the manuscript of Miltonic works in the library at Trinity College, Cambridge. His only forerunner in this had been Zachary Pearce, a graduate of Trinity, who in the preface to his 1733 *Review of the Text of Milton's Paradise Lost* alludes to the original sketch for the epic, 'the first Plan of that Work, still to be seen (in the Poet's own hand-writing) among the MSS. of Trinity College at Cambridge'.⁵³ It is not clear how Birch, who does not appear to have had any Cambridge connections,

⁵¹ *Original Letters*, p. 80.

⁵² Thomas Birch, 'An Historical and Critical Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. John Milton', *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton*, 2 vols. (1738), vol. I, i. Hereafter *Life of Milton* (1738).

⁵³ Zachary Pearce, *A Review of the Text of Milton's Paradise Lost*, 12 vols. (1733), vol. I, vii.

accessed the Trinity Manuscript, although his entry in the Dictionary of National Biography speculates that he was generally helped in gathering material for his highly detailed biographies by his connections at the Royal Society, and especially by his patron, Sir Philip Yorke, First Earl of Hardwicke, later High Steward of Cambridge University.⁵⁴ Birch may well have been influenced by Pearce in wishing to make use of this manuscript material, which he does by collating a large chunk of the text of *A Mask* with its Trinity draft, as well as some of 'Lycidas'.⁵⁵ In addition, he gives a comprehensive account of the contents of the *Poems* (1645), and the differences between this and the 1673 edition.⁵⁶ Birch's close bibliographical attention to the *Poems* as a volume is unusual during this period of Milton's afterlife, seeming much more to be a herald of the textually focused criticism of these works in the second half of the century (which, indeed, it influenced). Far more characteristic of this time was the *Poems'* fragmentation into the most popular of its constituent parts, in poetical miscellanies for the casual reader.

Milton's *Poems* in miscellanies, 1695–1759

Despite receiving relatively little attention as a coherent volume, many of the *Poems'* constitutive pieces grew in popularity throughout the eighteenth century, featuring in miscellanies and anthologies, alone and in various combinations, mostly but not always attributed to Milton. In his 2010 survey of Milton's literary reputation, James Ogden sees 1740 as a turning-point for the fortunes of individual poems from the 1645 collection, after which they began to be published with much greater frequency. He ascribes this to several causes: 'Tonson's loss of control over the poems'

⁵⁴ David Philip Miller, 'Birch, Thomas (1705–1766)', and Peter D. G. Thomas, 'Yorke, Philip, first earl of Hardwicke (1690–1764)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2436?docPos=3>) and (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30245?docPos=8>), accessed 25 March 2016.

⁵⁵ *Life of Milton* (1738), ii–xiii, xiv–xv.

⁵⁶ *Life of Milton* (1738), xxvi–xxvii.

copyright; the popularity of Dalton's adaptation of *Comus* in 1738; and the success of Handel's oratorio *L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato* in 1740.⁵⁷ The books I am considering as either miscellanies or anthologies are not always identified as such by their title. I have tended to treat them as one or the other on the basis of whether they are mostly descriptive, gathering material according to a theme, not necessarily heedful of those pieces' existing popularity, in which case I call them miscellanies; or mostly prescriptive, with a declared focus on reflecting and even forming the reader's preference and sense of the canon, in which case I call them anthologies. I discuss the miscellanies here, as instances of Milton's *Poems* being gathered on an occasional basis, with less attention generally paid to their long-term value, and more to their most easily excerptible features.

The first eighteenth-century miscellany instance of any of the *Poems* comes in 1715's *The Bee. A Collection of choice poems*. Volumes I and II of the collection are quite distinct, with different epigraphs, different printers (but the same bookseller), different dedications from the volumes' anonymous compiler or compilers, and slightly different titles; volume II modifies the title to *The Bee. A Collection of choice poems from Books and Manuscripts*, but volume III has no description or dedication at all, and only a plain title-page without details of printer or bookseller. Milton's 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' feature in volume II, coming, with little apparent logic, after Richard Steele's elegy to Queen Mary, and before a translation of Joseph Addison's 'Battle of Pygmies and Cranes' (originally written in Latin and here unattributed, except possibly to someone named Player). This volume's dedicatee is

⁵⁷ See *John Milton's Literary Reputation*, p. 18.

John Churchill, first duke of Marlborough (1650– 1722).⁵⁸ The dedication to volume I of *The Bee* is more informative. The compiler states that, having ‘Wanderd through a world of Poëtry’, he has now ‘cull’d out the Choicest Poëms; and, to make ’em more commodious for use, I purpose to print ’em.’⁵⁹ Justifying his criteria for selection, the compiler announces:

My Collections from *French, Italian, and Spanish* poets, will come within a small compass: they are generally so feeble and insipid, or so swoln and unnatural. but the *Greek, Latin, and British* bards abound with delicacies, that will furnish out many such entertainments as this; and not only give a poignant pleasure on first tasting; but, instead of cloying, charm in the repetition.⁶⁰

In the first place, we might notice the prevalently gustatory vocabulary – ‘delicacies’, ‘tasting’ and ‘cloying’ – reflecting the emphasis which miscellanies and anthologies place the reader’s ‘taste’ or cultural discernment. Equally striking is the compiler’s ready dismissal of nearly all French, Italian, and Spanish poetry as being at one of two extremes, weak or else overblown; and his description of British, as well as Greek and Latin, poets as ‘bards’. This conscious archaism, Celtic in origin and only taken on by Greek and Latin as an ‘alien word’, allows British literature a kind of historical primacy here,⁶¹ while the collection’s inclusion of more modern British poetry, along with the poetry of classical antiquity, accords those modern poets bardic status. This foreshadows the efforts of scholars later in the eighteenth century to emphasise the British roots, as well as the classicism, of the poetry of Milton, perhaps at the expense of his Italianism.

⁵⁸ John B. Hattendorf, ‘Churchill, John, first duke of Marlborough (1650–1722)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5401>, accessed 27 Jan 2014.

⁵⁹ *The Bee, A Collection of Choice Poems*, 3 vols. (1715), vol. I. iii. Hereafter *The Bee*.

⁶⁰ *The Bee*, I. iii–iv.

⁶¹ See ‘bard, *n.* 1’. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/15474?rskey=kVsw3r&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed September 03, 2015).

The compiler of *The Bee* makes one more remark that is potentially important with regard to determining the *Poems*' popularity at this time. He says: 'this First part [volume I], in compliance with the caprice of the Many, I have mostly furnisht from Celebrated writers: but, hereafter, I shall judge it more Meritorious to bring to light the Obscure; who, in good company, will shine as illustrious as their neighbors.'⁶² 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' appear in volume II, not volume I, of this collection; so while it would be ludicrous to suggest that Milton himself was obscure in 1715, these remarks prove that his *Poems* could still be called so. This is borne out by the fact that none of them made their way into Tonson's famous series of *Miscellany Poems* until the fourth edition of the *First Part of Miscellany Poems* in 1716, which features 'L'Allegro', 'Il Penseroso', and 'Lycidas' (apparently at the suggestion of Edward Fenton, Milton's enthusiastic biographer who believed that those poems would have sufficed to build their author's reputation even if he had written nothing else).⁶³ The companion poems are placed side by side in this edition; then John Suckling's 'Ballad upon a Wedding' intercedes, followed by Andrew Marvell's 'Nymph complaining for the death of her Fawn' and 'Young Love', before 'Lycidas' follows, itself followed by Waller's 'Panegyric to my Lord Protector'.

There does not seem much logic to this placement, nor, at first, even to Milton's presence in such a collection. Richard C. Boys pointed this out in 1940, observing that, while Waller was consistently popular at this time, and his inclusion in the *Miscellany Poems* therefore to be expected, 'the picture we have of the period does not generally include ... Milton's minor poems.'⁶⁴ In 1716 Dryden was still the presiding spirit of the *Miscellany Poems*, which included his original preface to the *Sylvae* in 1685;

⁶² *The Bee*, I. iv.

⁶³ *The First Part of Miscellany Poems*, 4th ed., 6 vols (1716), vol I, pp. 145, 149, 162.

⁶⁴ Richard C. Boys, 'Some Problems of Dryden's Miscellany', *ELH*, vol. 7 (Jun. 1940): 130–143, 132.

Dryden famously did not admire Milton's shorter poems, finding them stilted where they should have been easy effusions.⁶⁵ As we have seen, though, at this time there was a growing interest among biographers of Milton and scholars of *Paradise Lost* in mining the shorter poems for the light they could shed on the epic. This, in combination with the growing interest from poets like Pope, along with musicians and theatrical adaptors, in *L'Allegro*, 'Il Penseroso', 'Lycidas', and *A Mask*, could be said partly to reflect, and partly to contribute towards, the increasing hospitality to some of his early works in the developing English literary canon.

The *Poems*' next miscellany appearance came in 1737's *Memoirs of the Society of Grub Street*, an anthology of the best of the *Grub-street Journal*, which satirized hack journalism, and poor writing in general, from 1730 until 1738. In his sarcastic guide to 'Grubbists' wanting to learn how to imitate Milton in 'the most profound [that is, overly lavish] Grubbism', the anonymous 'B.' suggests:

This may be done, either by copying him in those things, which the vulgar reckon his imperfections; or by making use of his sublime stile to express a profound sentiment.⁶⁶

'B.' illustrates these comments with the example of those who ape Milton by 'mak[ing] use of antiquate words, scarce any where else to be met with, such as *dulcet*, *gelid*, *umbrageous*, *redolent*, &c.', believing that 'without abundance of such words as these, a poem will never be esteemed truly Miltonic.' He then quotes lines 73–76 from 'Il Penseroso' –

Oft on a plat of rising ground,

⁶⁵ See Dryden's statement that in Milton's early poems the rhyme is 'always constrained and forced, and comes hardly from him, at an age when the soul is most pliant, and the passion of love makes almost every man a rhymers, though not a poet.' In *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W.P. Ker, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1900), vol. II, p. 30.

⁶⁶ 'B', Letter no. 5 (9th January, 1730), *Memoirs of the Society of Grub-street* (1737), p. 21. Hereafter *Grub-street*. 'B.' is probably Richard Russel, who wrote the preface to the *Memoirs* and who is known to have used the signature 'B.' for 'Bavius'. See *Attributions of Authorship in the Gentleman's Magazine, 1731–1868*, compiled by Emily Lorraine de Montluzin (Charlottesville, VA, 2003). <http://bsuva.org/bsuva/gm3/GM1731.html>.

I hear the far-off *Curfeu* sound,
Over som wide-water'd shoar,
Swinging slow with sullen roar –⁶⁷

and remarks, ‘This has been admired by the injudicious, as being natural: but you will agree with me, I dare say, that nature is not to be imitated, but mended. Mr. DENNIS, no doubt, thought so, when he composed that fine Apostrophe to the river Danube, in his *Poem on the battel of Blenheim*.⁶⁸ He quotes two lines from John Dennis’s *Britannia Triumphans* (1704) – ‘While thy brown billows sounding on thy shore, / And *swinging slow with* hoarse and *sullen roar*’ –⁶⁹ and opines,

It was natural, indeed, to speak of the *swinging of a bell*, as MILTON did; but truly poetical, to speak of the *swinging of the billows of a river*; and far above the imagination of one who had been used to live by a river side, and had no idea of the motion of its billows, above what mere nature had conveyed to him.⁷⁰

‘B.’s ironic indictment of Milton’s misappropriators reveals an impatience with those for whom naturalism seems too ‘vulgar’, and who seek instead to overembellish their own work by borrowing the most ‘profund’ and ornate of Milton’s own effusions. Like the characterisation of modern poets as ‘bards’ in *The Bee*, this foreshadows Thomas Warton’s work on Milton’s naturalism and localism, his lack of aureate polish, in his 1785 edition of the *Poems upon Several Occasions*.

Several works from the 1645 volume appear in a miscellany of *Poems on moral and divine subjects by several celebrated English poets*, printed in Glasgow in 1751. This populous collection only attributes its material in the contents page, rather than in the main body of the text; and does not start a new page for a new poem, although it will for a new author. Included in this collection as ‘moral and divine’, printed one after another, are: ‘The Passion’, the Nativity Ode, ‘Upon the Circumcision’, and ‘At a Solemn Musick’. Later in the collection there is a large excerpt of lines 179–469

⁶⁷ *CSP*, p. 148.

⁶⁸ *Grub-street*, p. 22.

⁶⁹ *Grub-street*, p. 22.

⁷⁰ *Grub-street*, pp. 22–23.

from *Comus*, headed the ‘SOLILOQUY of a Lady Benighted in a Wood and having lost her brothers’, but continuing until after the two brothers’ conversation about the purposes of philosophy, when they are met by the Attendant Spirit. The next year, 1752, several of the *Poems* were printed in a miscellany with a completely different tone: *The sports of the muses. Or a minute’s mirth for any hour of the day*. ‘L’Allegro’ is the first item in volume II of *The sports of the muses* (notably, it is unaccompanied by ‘Il Penseroso’, one of very few instances in which the companion poems were separated);⁷¹ ‘On May Morning’ is included in volume I;⁷² in the same volume eight lines from *A Mask* are printed, entitled only ‘In Milton’s Comus’:

By dimpled Brook, and Fountain brim,
The Wood-Nymphs deck’d with Daisies trim,
Their merry Wakes and Pastimes keep:
What hath Night to do with Sleep?
Night has better Sweets to prove,
Venus now wakes, and wakens *Love*.
Come, let us our Rites begin,
’Tis only Day-light that makes Sin.⁷³

In *A Mask* these lines are spoken by Comus and stand as evidence of his frivolity and sexual immorality; here, they are recontextualised as a stand-alone octet that might provide ‘a minute’s mirth’ to the occasional reader. This might be viewed as one result of these lines’ appearance in John Dalton’s 1738 musical adaptation of *A Mask*, with its more tolerant attitude to some of Comus’ merry-making. It could also be seen as reflecting a new sense of the occasionality and miscellaneity of the *Poems* as a volume, of its constituent works as, in some cases, having been written to order in the first place, and therefore malleable to new circumstances that might call for their grouping under new headings. There is a certain irreverence implicit in this treatment (arguably a process begun long before, with the *Poems*’ re-titling in 1673 to emphasise that they were ‘compos’d upon several occasions, & written at different

⁷¹ *The Sports of the Muses*, 2 vols. (1752), vol. I, pp. 1–5.

⁷² *The Sports of the Muses*, I. 104.

⁷³ *A Mask*, ll. 119–127. *CSP*, pp. 186–187. *Sports of the Muses*, I. 246.

times’); but equally, there is a kind of progress being made in the recognition that Milton could have written poetry for some other purpose than as an apprenticeship for *Paradise Lost*.

If Milton’s strictly religious poems were grouped together, and his comic poems collected, his epitaphs formed another cluster. ‘On the University Carrier’, ‘Another on the Same’, and ‘On the Marchioness of Winchester’ appear in 1757’s *Select and Remarkable Epitaphs*. The compiler, John Hackett, writes:

The Sheets I have taken the Freedom to address to you were the Fruits of leisure Hours; when, somewhat grave, and sensible of a Deficiency in that Part of a Man’s Cloathing that has so great a Sympathy with the Animal Spirits, I have left Mirth for the Church-yard, and deserted Folks all alive and merry, for a pensive Hour with the Dead.⁷⁴

Hackett’s collection is quite straight-faced, its title-page bearing a quotation from Macbeth’s ‘Life’s but a walking shadow’ speech, and its dedication signing off with the wish, addressed to the volume’s sponsor, that it might be ‘long, long ... ere your Virtues furnish Matter for *your* Epitaph.’⁷⁵ The similarly titled *Select Collection of Epitaphs* from 1759, containing the same three Milton poems as Hackett’s compendium, is a light-hearted contrast to it, confirming our sense that some of Milton’s early poetry was beginning to be approached by readers in a more playful spirit. The volume’s title-page announces that its constituent epitaphs have been ‘carefully collected from the Tombstones of the most eminent Personages in England, Scotland and Ireland’, but that many more have been added on account of ‘their Oddity and Quaintness of Expression’. In contrast with Hackett’s ponderous citation of *Macbeth*, this volume prints on its cover a jaunty, if morbid, anonymous sestet:

Behold the end of all the noise,

⁷⁴ *Select and remarkable epitaphs*, 2 vols. (1757), vol. I, ii.

⁷⁵ *Select and remarkable epitaphs*, I, ii.

The cares, the fears, the pains, the joys,
That wait on mortal man:
In this concise epitome,
In ONE SAD VIEW the whole you see: -
Deny it if you can.⁷⁶

The collection also has a spoof colophon: ‘Printed for JOHN DEATH, at the Sign of the Hourglass and Skull, in Church-yard Alley, and sold by all the Parish-Clerks and Undertakers’;⁷⁷ while its only prefatory material is a letter addressed to ‘Mr Deathwatch, Undertaker, in Fleet-Street’:

Dear Mr. DEATHWATCH,
That I thus publickly address you is owing to the profound respect I bear to every thing that wears black. My imagination is so fixedly and unalterably gloomy, that I rejoice in every opportunity of advancing the death-hunting interest. --- I am, Sir, a physician; and, as you so kindly finish what I so readily begin, let us shake hands and be sworn friends, till others shall do for us what we have done for thousands. --- Memento Mori. --- Adieu! Thine most heartily!
KILL-CARE.⁷⁸

In keeping with this irreverent treatment, ‘On the Cambridge Carrier’, as it is sometimes called, also crops up occasionally on its own in expressly comic miscellanies: the *Agreeable Companion* of 1745, where it is unattributed;⁷⁹ Dublin’s *The merry companion* of 1752, also unattributed;⁸⁰ and *The Book of Fun; or the Quintessence* [sic.] *of Wit and Mirth*, of 1759, where Milton is named as the author. This last miscellany has something of the novelty atmosphere of *The Sports of the Muses* or the *Select Collection of Epitaphs*, with a jokily nonspecific title-page boasting that it contains ‘more frolicksome Stuff, than any other Book of the Size and Price’, which has been ‘collected from all the jolliest Authors, and from several original Manuscripts.’ The colophon reads ‘London: Printed for any Body that please to buy it;’⁸¹ and page 2

⁷⁶ *Select Collection of Epitaphs* (1759), sig. A1r.

⁷⁷ *Select Collection of Epitaphs* (1759), sig. A1r.

⁷⁸ *Select Collection of Epitaphs* [p. i].

⁷⁹ *The Agreeable Companion; Or, an Universal Medley of Wit and Good-Humour* (1745), p. 94.

⁸⁰ *The Merry Companion, or Humorous Miscellany* (Dublin, 1752), p. 35.

⁸¹ *The Book of Fun* (1759), sig. A1r.

winsomely reshuffles the volume's title into *The Book of Fun and Mirth; or, the Quintessence of Wit*, with 'quintessence' at least spelt correctly this time.⁸²

From the 1760s onwards, some of Milton's *Poems* would be included, with increasing frequency, in poetic anthologies, collections with the more expressly instructive aim of forming a canon of English literature. Time and again, the works most often picked for anthologising would be *A Mask*, 'Lycidas', 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. In part, this choice can be seen as resulting from the success of these pieces on the miscellany market (itself, perhaps, originally a result of their prominence in 1695). It was also, though, the result of these works' parallel life, converted into musical entertainments, on London's theatrical scene.

'Such heav'n-taught numbers should be more than read':⁸³ Musical adaptations of *A Mask*, 'Lycidas', 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'

The first of Milton's *Poems* to be converted into a theatrical entertainment was *A Mask*, which underwent two adaptations in successive years (1737 and 1738). The more popular of these two was the second, which premiered on 4th March 1738 under the title *Comus*. This adaptation, by librettist John Dalton and composer Thomas Arne, can be seen to have exerted a lasting influence over the reception of Milton's original text – not least by virtue of the fact that it popularised a new title for the masque, one which it has tended to bear ever since. But before *Comus* there was *Sabrina*, a loose operatic adaptation of the *Mask* first performed on 26th April, 1737. Its composer is unknown, but the librettist was Paolo Rolli, an Italian literary critic, teacher, musician and writer who had moved to London from Rome in 1715.

⁸² *The Book of Fun*, p. 3.

⁸³ John Dalton, *Comus*, 2nd ed. (1738), p. 5. (I have chosen to work from the second edition because it includes Dalton's preface.) Hereafter *Comus*.

To quote one early commentator, Rolli was ‘among the lesser luminaries who revolved around the sun of Handel during his dictatorship of English music in the first half of the eighteenth century’.⁸⁴ He was Italian tutor to the Prince of Wales and the Royal Princesses, and was also a keen Miltonist, having by this time already produced an Italian translation of *Paradise Lost*, the first six books of which were printed in London in 1729, the whole poem in 1735. One of the first critics since Milton’s own time to remark upon his affinity with Italian culture, Rolli works especially hard with his *Sabrina* to draw out such correspondences across Milton’s whole oeuvre.

Sabrina (1737)

Rolli wrote *Sabrina* to be put on by the ‘Opera of the Nobility,’ a collective he and some friends had founded in 1733, in opposition to Handel and his Royal Academy of Music. Their venture was controversial in the context of contemporary debates about the takeover, as it was seen by some, of the English theatre by Italian opera. As early as 1711, Addison had grouched, ‘We no longer understand the language of our own stage’, bemoaning the erosion of English audiences’ critical sensibility by their overexposure to Italian works (although, as Noelle Chao points out, operas that qualify for Addison’s censure as ‘Italian’ do not always need to be in the Italian language).⁸⁵ By the time *Sabrina* was produced, Rolli’s group, which included two celebrated castratos, Senesino and Farinelli, was already foundering: Farinelli was said to be ‘indisposed’ on the fourth night, and the opera only ever saw those three performances at the Theatre-Royal.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ R.A. Streatfeild, ‘Handel, Rolli, and Italian Opera in London in the Eighteenth Century’, *Musical Quarterly*, vol. 3 (July 1917): 428–445 (428).

⁸⁵ See Noelle Louise Chao, ‘Musical Letters: Eighteenth-Century Writings on Music and the Fictions of Burney, Radcliffe, and Scott’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Los Angeles, CA, 2007), pp. 32–33.

⁸⁶ ‘Handel, Rolli, and Italian Opera’, 443.

The music has been lost, but Rolli's libretto for *Sabrina* was published in London the same year, in parallel text, an edition which switches apparently at random between putting the Italian text on the left and the English on the right, and vice versa. The book does not identify the translator, still less mention whether the same person translated Rolli's prose *prefazione* and his verse libretto. The English translation of the preface is occasionally clumsy and fanciful, if not outright fallacious, and the translation of the verse too occasionally departs from the sense of the original. Nonetheless it is entirely possible that Rolli could have been his own translator, so to speak, and written both halves of the volume. In any case, *Sabrina* departs in some extraordinary respects from Milton's original text. While some of Rolli's alterations operate to bring the work into line with early eighteenth-century dramatic conventions (the doubling of main characters, for example), other changes take the work in the less expected direction of Italian lyric and pastoral poetry. Given the controversy about Rolli's native language and culture as a corrupting force in the theatre, there may well be a mischievous irony in his conversion of *A Mask*, a text by a celebrated English author, into an overtly Italianised work.

In Rome Rolli had been a member of the *Accademia degli Arcadi* (sometimes called the *Accademia dell'Arcadia*), a group of poets and scholars whose project, as their Arcadian name suggests, was to reform Italian literature according to the rules of pastoral poetry. Their ultimate aim, as George E. Dorris puts it, was to 'restore the commanding position in the arts and aesthetics, which Italy had lost to France in the seventeenth century.'⁸⁷ Defending Italian as a literary language superior to French was one of Rolli's favoured pastimes, exemplified by his rebuttal to Voltaire's

⁸⁷ George E. Dorris, *Paolo Rolli and the Italian Circle in London 1715–1744* (The Hague; Paris, 1967), p. 11.

English-language essay *Upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations, From Homer Down to Milton* (1727). In Rolli's rebuttal, *Remarks upon Mr. Voltaire's Essay*, published in English in 1728, he first of all objects to the suggestion that the poetic style of different nations could be qualitatively assessed. Rolli writes that a 'perfection' of style could be attained in any language, and that only local, factual specificities need distinguish one nationality's writing from another:

I must own, that I admire the Ease with which our Author distinguishes Nations by the Style. I always thought that the Country of an Author was to be discovered by his Language, or what he related of his Age, Country or himself ... There is a Degree of Perfection and Taste, which when Authors and Criticks are arriv'd at, make them all of one Nation, call'd the *Commonwealth of Letters*.⁸⁸

Despite Rolli's energetic call for literary parity between nations, he still proceeds to make a special plea for his language, rather than Voltaire's; and revealingly, he mounts this defence on the basis of which language makes the fitter, more faithful medium for *Paradise Lost*. This was before Rolli's translation of the epic had been published, but, to judge by his anecdote here, at least part of it was already circulating. He writes:

When I was in *France* I was acquainted with some learned *Frenchmen* that understood *English*, and had read *Milton's Paradise Lost*, and they admired that Battle [of the Angels] as a prodigious fine Poetical Description. One of them whose Name I don't remember, who was a great Friend to the Noble and learned *Venetian* Abbate *Conti*, had undertaken to translate the Poem; and when he read the two first Books translated by me, he said that the *Italian* language was the fittest for it, and that the *French* cou'd never make so literal a Translation, for some Reasons he alleged, the Principal of which was the Want of Blank Verse, which by the Bye was first invented by *Italian* Poets.⁸⁹

Rolli's mock-casual, 'by the Bye,' reminder to his reader that the Italians invented blank verse gives way to an arch recapitulation of some of Voltaire's most insulting remarks about the Italian language:

⁸⁸ 'Paul Rolli', *Remarks upon M. Voltaire's Essay on the Epick Poetry of the European Nations* (1728), p. 12.

⁸⁹ *Remarks upon Voltaire's Essay*, p. 15.

It will seem strange to M. *Voltaire*, when he shall see the *Italian* Softness and Effeminacy soar to Sublimity, and grow when required, as strong and as majestick as the Language of *Milton*.⁹⁰

This is a direct paraphrase, and repurposing, of Voltaire's remarks about Tasso in the *Essay*, which praise him while denigrating his country and his language. 'When [Tasso] enters into descriptions which require Strength and Majesty,' Voltaire writes,

it is wonderful how the natural Effeminacy of the *Italian* Language soars up into Sublimity and Grandeur, and assumes a new Character in his Hands, if we except about an hundred Lines in which he flattens into pitiful Conceits, but I look on these Errors as a kind of Tribute, which his Genius condescended to pay to the *Italian* Taste.⁹¹

We might notice that both Voltaire's deprecation, and Rolli's defence, of Italian are undertaken in English here. As his career progresses, Rolli increasingly employs his own language to defend the excellence of Italian – first as ancillary, somehow subservient, to English, and then as integral to it. An important instrument in this defence is Milton – first, *Paradise Lost*, and then the *Poems* too.

When the first six books of Rolli's *Paradiso Perduto* were printed in 1729, the volume included an Italian translation of Rolli's response to Voltaire, along with a life of Milton by the same author. In the *Vita di Giovanni Milton*, Rolli justifies and puffs his *Paradiso Perduto* by claiming a unique congruence between Italian and English syntax, in general and especially in Milton:

Di questa mia Traduzione io penso ch'ella sia la più esatta Metafrasi che siasi mai letta, e ciò per l'estrema correlazione delle Sintassi nelle due Lingue e particolarmente nello Stil Miltoniano: e siccome io pretendo d'aver non solo literalmente tradotto i sensi di MILTON, ma pur anche la Poesia.

[I think this, my translation, is the most exact paraphrase ever to be read, because of the extreme correlation of the syntax of the two languages, especially in the Miltonic style: and thus, I can claim not only to have literally translated Milton's meanings, but, moreover, his poetry too.]⁹²

⁹⁰ *Remarks upon Voltaire's Essay*, p. 15.

⁹¹ Voltaire, *An essay upon the civil wars of France, extracted from curious manuscripts. And also upon the epick poetry of the European nations from Homer down to Milton* (1727), p. 82.

⁹² Paolo Rolli, 'Vita di Giovanni Milton', in *Del Paradiso Perduto, Poema Inglese del Signor Milton* (1729), xvi. All translations mine. Hereafter 'Vita di Milton'.

Rolli's *Vita di Milton* also contains some notably Italo-centric comments on the *Poems* as well as on *Paradise Lost*. Rolli notes, with special pleasure, Milton's own familiarity with the Italian language: 'E veramente egli molto intendeva la Lingua toscana e i nostri Poeti, fino a comporvi alcuni Sonetti...' ['indeed, he understood the 'Tuscan language, and our poets, very well, even to the extent of writing some sonnets in Italian'].⁹³ Rolli even suggests, perhaps using the word rather loosely, that Milton 'translated' Dante and Ariosto, as well as pointing out his imitation of Petrarch in the sonnets:

Leggesi fra le sue Poesie la traduzione ch'ei fece d'alcuni versi de i divini Dante ed Ariosto: Imitò il Petrarca sì nello stile come nel metro ne' suoi Sonetti inglesi, e tradusse nella propria lingua il secondo Salmo in terzetti co'l metro Dantesco.

[One can read among his poems the translations he made of some verses by the divine Dante and Ariosto. He imitated Petrarch both in the style and the metre of his English sonnets, and he translated the second Psalm into his own language in tercets using the Dantean metre.]⁹⁴

Although Rolli overstates the extent to which Milton imitated, rather than assimilated and transmuted, Italian poetry in his own, and even if, as appears to have been the case, Rolli's observations about the Italianism of the *Poems* went unheard by most other critics of the volume, we might still register his consciousness of an aspect of early Milton that arguably even now is inadequately attended. We see this most substantially brought out by Rolli's adaptation of *A Mask*.

Sabrina's title-page is in English, calling the librettist 'Paul' Rolli, evidently his regular English moniker, since the name appears on other of his publications, including the Voltaire volume. As a note on the British Library's copy of *Sabrina* points out, the frontispiece (reproduced below) makes no mention of the opera's composer.⁹⁵ The title-page also fails to associate itself with Milton (in marked contrast, as will be seen, with the title-page to Dalton's *Comus*). Julian Herbage, in his introduction to the

⁹³ *Vita di Milton*, [p. 8].

⁹⁴ *Vita di Milton*, [p. 9].

⁹⁵ See manuscript note to A1r of *Sabrina* in BL 11714.aa.23, General Reference Collection, in which nine of Rolli's librettos have been bound together.

Royal Musical Association's 1951 edition of Arne and Dalton's *Comus*, thinks that the absence of a named composer of *Sabrina* suggests that the music was a pasticcio, a collaborative affair –⁹⁶ and anyway, only the libretto is printed here so the focus naturally falls on Rolli.

S A B R I N A.
Milton's the Poet. A N
O P E R A.
FOR THE
T H E A T R E R O Y A L
IN THE
H A T - M A R K E T.
Produced April 26th 1737.
By PAUL ROLLI, F. R. S.
No Composer named.
Dignus Vindice Nodus.
L O N D O N:
Printed by J. CHRICHLEY. M.DCC.XXXVII.
[Price One Shilling.]
Original Libretto

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If the title-page is silent on the matter, Rolli's preface swiftly informs us that his libretto is based on, and partly modelled on, Milton's *Mask*: '*il Drama di Giovanni Milton, intitolato a Mask*', '*diede il fondamento e parte della Condotta a Questo*' ['the drama by

⁹⁶ Julian Herbage, ed., *Comus – Milton, Dalton, Arne* (1951), x.

John Milton, called *A Mask*, gave this [production] its basis and part of its plot’.⁹⁷

‘*Partè*’ is right: the preface goes on to explain that while the original drama takes place between two noble brothers, their sister, and Comus (*Comaspe*), a naughty demigod [‘*semideo nocivo*’], Rolli has turned it into something else:

Fassi quì accadere a due Cavalieri e a due Dame, il fratello d’una delle quali è amante e sposo dell’altra, il cui fratello è per isposar la sorella del primo. Questi, partiti da Londra verso la Villa paterna del più qualificato, ove s’aveano a celebrare le Nozze, incontrarono in una Foresta il Disastro onde vien tessuta questa Catastrofe.

[Here I have made [the Drama] happen to two knights and two ladies, the brother of one of whom is the lover and fiancé of the other, whose brother is about to marry the sister of the first. These four, travelling from London to the paternal seat of the noblest among them, where they are going to celebrate their nuptials, encounter in a forest the disaster out of which this catastrophe is woven.]⁹⁸

Once he has summarized the ways in which the plotline of his *Sabrina* will differ from Milton’s *Mask*, Rolli is still keen to aggrandize his production by associating it with the illustrious provenance of the original. The rest of his preface describes in detail the circumstances under which *A Maske* was first performed, and the nobility of the Egerton family, which, Rolli emphasizes, has only increased in the years since *A Maske* was first written. Rolli says: ‘*quel gran Poeta godeva l’amicizia particolare del Conte di Bridgewater Capo allora di questa illustre Famiglia; e che la medesima or piu’ riguardevole ancora per meritati Titoli di Marchese e Duca in sua discedenza*’ [‘that great poet enjoyed the particular friendship of the Earl of Bridgewater, then head of that illustrious family; which is now even more venerable, his descendants having been granted the titles of Marquess and Duke’].⁹⁹

Rolli’s version of Milton’s story opens with the shepherd Tirsi [Thyrsis] and the dryad Sabrina, in a forest near a river, having a conversation about the perfidy of Comaspe, ‘*l’empio Semideo*’ [‘the impious demigod’] who stalks the forest. Tirsi is

⁹⁷ Paolo Rolli, *Sabrina. An Opera for the Theatre Royal in the Hay-Market* (1737), p. 2. All translations mine, unless otherwise indicated.

⁹⁸ *Sabrina*, p. 2.

⁹⁹ *Sabrina*, p. 2.

worried because his lord is passing through the forest that day, and he fears Comaspe will attack him and his bride-to-be. He asks Sabrina to protect them, but Sabrina replies: *‘interromper non lice il già fissato / Ordine delle Cose’* [‘it is not permitted to interrupt the fixed order of things’].¹⁰⁰ She asks Tirsi simply to trust that his lord will not be harmed. We next see our four lovers, Grandalma, Belcore, Brunalto, and Crindoro at the entrance to the forest. Belcore is thirsty; her lover Crindoro offers to fetch her some apples and bramble-berries; Brunalto follows after him, but cannot find him; the drama unfolds with various characters losing each other, finding each other again, apparently helped but mostly hindered by the pesky Comaspe, before he is unmasked at the end by Sabrina’s intervention. The drama ends with Tirsi making a somewhat disjointed invocation to Sabrina, that she should *‘scintillar su i Britanni il tuo favore, / E per te sia sempre Albion felice / Nido di Gloria di Belta d’Amore’* [‘shine your favour on the Britons, and because of you let Albion always be happy, nest of glory, beauty, and love’].¹⁰¹

Though Rolli’s libretto departs from Milton’s *Mask* in more than plot, we can see both the original Italian text and the English translation making an effort to be Miltonic, in interestingly focused ways. For instance, Sabrina’s lines predicting the triumph of *‘Belta’*, *‘Amore’*, *‘Liberta’*, and *‘Onore’* (Beauty, Love, Liberty and Honour) – *‘E in gioie piu’ care / Glorie piu’ rare / Vedransi gareggiar’* [and in dearer joys, rarer glories, they shall compete] – are turned into the following English quatrain:

With these each joy that’s most sublime,
And fame which ever shall survive,
With glorious *triumph, over time*
Shall here in emulation strive.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *Sabrina*, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ *Sabrina*, p. 60.

¹⁰² *Sabrina*, pp. 8, 9 (emphasis mine).

These lines strongly recollect Milton's 'On Time', only ever published as part of the *Poems* (1645) and subsequent editions of that volume. This evinces the translator's (so, possibly, Rolli's) familiarity with that poem, and therefore, we might reasonably suppose, an acquaintance with *Poems* as a whole. While other adaptors would follow some of the *Poems*' early commentators in seeing an affinity between *A Mask* and 'L'Allegro', even cutting and pasting excerpts of the latter poem into the theatrical version of *Comus* to give it extra gaiety, Rolli is unique in looking elsewhere among the *Poems* for temperamental correspondences with the masque.

Less congruous, perhaps, is another echo of Milton in Comaspe's boast, 'e' Legge il mio Voler, Fato il Contento' ['law is my will, fate my contentment'], recalling God's lines in *Paradise Lost* Book VII, 'Necessitie and Chance / Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate.'¹⁰³ We might for interest compare the English parallel text of *Sabrina*, here, which metrically as well as lexically echoes *Paradise Lost* – 'My will's a law; and what I please is fate' –¹⁰⁴ and Rolli's own verbatim translation, in his *Paradiso Perduto*, of the original lines from *Paradise Lost*: 'Necessitade e Caso / Non mi s'appressan. Quel ch'io voglio, è fato.'¹⁰⁵ Having Comaspe paraphrase Milton's God is one way of illustrating his presumptuousness; his unfounded sense that he cannot be conquered leads to the kind of hubristic downfall that will be Satan's too. But if the demi-god's claim is audacious and untrue it also connects him, by way of Rolli's other allusions, to the relationship the adaptor has observably sought to strengthen between the masque – and, by extension, other of the *Poems* – and the literary and philosophical heritage of seventeenth-century Italian love poetry.

¹⁰³ *PL*. VII. 72–73.

¹⁰⁴ *Sabrina*, pp. 43, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Paolo Rolli, trans., *Il Paradiso Perduto* (1736), Book VII, ll. 215–216, p. 11.

Some of this we can ascribe to a wish on Rolli's part to take away the tarnish from contemporary views of Italian and Italians, as in Voltaire's sneering words:

If we consider the Softness and Effeminacy into which the Luxuriancy of Vowels emasculates the *Italian* Tongue, and the Idleness in which the *Italians* spend all their Life, busy only in the pursuit of those Arts which soften the Mind; we must not wonder if that Language passes (as it were) for the Language of Love.¹⁰⁶

By converting it into a romantic play, lowering the stakes from the preservation of the Lady's sacrosanct virginity to the outcome of some sylvan star-crossed loves, Rolli could be said to misunderstand Milton's *Mask* totally. I would suggest that, understand it or not, Rolli takes the occasion of this adaptation to reach back into some of the glories of Italian literature, as he and his fellow Arcadians saw them; and to reinforce the importance of the Italian language, by then so often deprecated, for the work of Milton, whose excellence (at least when it came to *Paradise Lost*) was not in doubt. Rolli is able to make the changes he does to the *Mask* because of its relative obscurity and its cerebral plot, short on action of the usual kind. The masque's penumbral impersonality is a canvas onto which Rolli can retroject some of the themes and preoccupations of the poetry of the Italian Renaissance, in keeping with the aims of his Arcadian colleagues.

For instance, in scene III of *Sabrina*, when Comaspe makes his first appearance (he has briefly been alluded to in the opera's opening lines), he speaks in the voice of a hopeful lover:

*A sperare or comincio il dolce il vero
Il sol Piacer. Fino a quest'oggi, invano
Figlio di Circe e semideo, cercai
Bellezza estrema ad appagar mie voglie.*

[Now I begin to hope for the sweet, the true, the only pleasure. Up until this day, I, a demigod and son of Circe, have searched in vain for the ultimate beauty to appease my desires.]¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Essay upon epick poetry*, p. 122.

¹⁰⁷ *Sabrina*, p. 15.

In this wish, Comaspe (though he gives himself away a bit, by describing himself as the son of Circe) mostly resembles the earth-bound lover of the ‘in vita’ section of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, and Rolli a Neoplatonic poet who recognizes that worship as vain unless matched by recognition of the heavenly beauty it represents. This is what Michelangelo Buonarroti, in one of his *Rime*, calls ‘*il desir voto di beltà infinita*’ [the empty desire for infinite beauty],¹⁰⁸ reframing Platonic doctrine into Petrarchan self-chastisement; in Plotinus’s formulation:

Some lovers even worship earthly beauty, and it is enough for them, but others, those who have recollected the archetype, venerate that higher beauty too, and do not treat this earthly beauty, either, with disrespect, since they see in it the creation and plaything of that other.¹⁰⁹

Comaspe’s wish for his desires to be equalled by reality, God-like, is the same as that of the perennially unsatisfied Petrarchan sonneteer, or the Neoplatonic philosopher who sees around him an empirical world lacking the perfection of Plotinian archetypes. One of the female lovers in *Sabrina*, Grandalma (literally: ‘great soul’) also articulates a point of Neoplatonic philosophy by way of a Petrarchan allusion when, trying to persuade the male lovers not to leave the ladies behind, she says:

*Se non ti mostra il guardo
Al core amato amante,
Di pace un solo istante
Il guardo e il cor non à.
Lontan dal caro Oggetto
Ad un affetto vero
L’immagine nel pensiero
Lieve conforto dà.*

[If your lover’s sight is not shown to your loving heart, the sight and the heart will not have a single moment’s peace. Far from the love-object, the image of it in your thoughts gives scant comfort to a true passion.]¹¹⁰

Grandalma’s words ‘*al core amato amante*’ echo a famous passage from Petrarch’s *Trionfi* III, the ‘Triumph of Love,’ which states, ‘*l’amante ne l’amato si trasforma*’ [‘the

¹⁰⁸ *Poetry of Michelangelo – an annotated edition*, ed. James L. Saslow (New Haven, 1993), poem 153, l. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Plotinus, *Ennead* III. V. 1, in *Enneads*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong, 7 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1966), vol. III, p. 173.

¹¹⁰ *Sabrina*, p. 12.

lover is transformed into the loved one’].¹¹¹ The matter of Grandalma’s argument, meanwhile, refers to the Neoplatonic idea that the eyes are the highest sensory faculty, the means by which love enters the heart, and also the sense whose bewitchment is most dangerous. This is a theme of *Sabrina* as a whole, whose villain disguises himself and asks other characters to believe him; to follow their deluded eye, their ‘*occhio ingannato*,’¹¹² rather than the spiritual truth within.

The imaginatively transformative power of love, its capacity to confound one’s sense of self, may be exploited in *Sabrina* for its comic potential (even the cross-matched couples are the stuff, for instance, of Shakespearean comedy), but its germ is lyric, as is the ambivalence with which the topic of love is treated. The absence of a substantial character to counterweigh Comaspe, along with the (related) fact that *Sabrina*, unlike the original *Mask*, contains no scene in which hedonism and self-restraint are debated, means that no particular conclusion is reached about the wisdom or otherwise of occasionally getting lost in the forest. This gives the opera a kind of profound pastoralism, since it not only contemplates but exalts the moral uncertainty of its setting. In contrast with *A Mask*, even ‘good’ characters in *Sabrina* link the act of woodland retreat to the possibility of spiritual redemption, and a return to what Milton, in his Nativity Ode, calls ‘the age of gold’;¹¹³ just before she ruptures Comaspe’s plot, Sabrina says to Tirsi:

*Tutta non giunse al Fin l’età dell’oro:
 Gran parte ancor ne resta
 In campo ed in Foresta, ove i Pastori
 E i rozzi Agricoltori
 Vita innocente sanno
 D’invidia e povertà senza l’affanno.*

¹¹¹ Francesco Petrarca, *Triumphus Cupidinis*, Book III, l. 162. In Vinicio Pacca, Laura Paolino, eds, *Trionfi, Rime Estravaganti, Codice degli Abbozzzi* (Milan, 1996), p. 168.

¹¹² *Sabrina*, p. 25.

¹¹³ ‘On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’, l. 135. *CSP*, p. 110.

[The golden age is not totally at its end. A great part of it still remains in fields and forests, where shepherds and rustic farmers know an innocent life, without fear of envy or poverty.]¹¹⁴

Whatever else it may be in the context of the drama, this speech by Sabrina is also, essentially, a manifesto for the *Accademia degli Arcadi*, who envisioned Italian literature's salvation by a return to a ritual observance of the pastoral. The invocation that follows, concluding the opera, in which Tirsi asks Sabrina to shine her favour on the Britons and maintain Albion as the 'nest of glory, beauty and love', is a further, more complex, instance of this Rollian special pleading. Asking a pastoral nymph to bless and protect the English people, in an Italian-language, romantically nostalgic, strangely inaccurate speech, Tirsi's invocation attempts to gather up the inconsistencies and aberrations of *Sabrina* into a patriotic whole; but the patriotism is parallel, the final parallelism in a profoundly parallel text. In *Sabrina*, Rolli's belief in the importance of classical Italian literature to English letters is balanced, and instantiated, by his sense of the Italianism of Milton's early English work.

The Royal Musical Association's Julian Herbage does not have much time for Rolli's *Sabrina*, calling it 'conventional' and quoting Charles Burney's report in his *History of Music* that 'after the third night, it was found necessary to tack an intermezzo constantly to the performance of this opera,' which did not save it from mediocrity nor from early closure.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, Herbage speculates that Rolli's failed project 'may well have provided the incentive to John Dalton to adapt Milton's masque to the English stage.'¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *Sabrina*, p. 32.

¹¹⁵ *Comus – Milton, Dalton, Arne*, x.

¹¹⁶ *Comus – Milton, Dalton, Arne*, x.

Comus (1738)

Despite diverging from Milton's text almost as much as Rolli's *Sabrina*, Dalton's *Comus* is even keener to establish that its heritage reaches back to Milton's original. When the play was advertised in the *London Daily Post*, it was described as 'Alter'd from Milton's perform'd (upwards of a Hundred Years since) at Ludlow Castle'.¹¹⁷ The title-page of the published version, which first came out in 1738 and was reprinted seven times more during the eighteenth century (as opposed to Milton's *Mask* itself, which during the same period was separately printed only twice), omits to mention the composer's or the librettist's name, instead describing at some length the circumstances of the original performance, and quoting from the still-obscure 'Ad Patrem': 'quid vocis modulamen inane juvabit / Verborum sensusque vacans numerique loquacis?' ['what good will the senseless modulation of a voice do, empty of words and significance and eloquent numbers?'].¹¹⁸ In Milton's poem, these lines argue for the importance of poetry as a necessary accompaniment to music, an emphasis that might be accounted for by the poem's conceit, in which Milton is aiming to convince his musical father that poetry is a respectable vocation. But their appropriation here is curious, as the motto for a work in which at least supposedly, poetry has been set to music, not the other way around.

¹¹⁷ *London Daily Post, and General Advertiser*, 2nd March 1738, quoted in Don-John Dugas, "Such Heav'n-taught Numbers should be more than read": *Comus* and Milton's Reputation in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England', *Milton Studies* 34 (1996): 137–57 (155).

¹¹⁸ *Ad Patrem*, ll. 50–51. *CSP*, p. 156.

Milton
Comus, a Mask :
 (Now adapted to the STAGE)
 As Alter'd from
MILTON's Mask
 A T
LUDELOW-CASTLE,
 Which was never represented
 But on *Michaelmas-Day*, 1634;
 BEFORE THE
 Rt. Hon. the Earl of *Bridgewater*,
 Lord President of *Wales*.
 The Principal Performers were
 The Lord *Brackly*, } } The Lady *Alice*
 Mr. *Tho. Egerton*, } } *Egerton*.
 The Musick was compos'd
 By Mr. HENRY LAWES,
 Who also represented the *Attendant Spirit*.

*Quid vocis modulamen inane juvabit
 Verborum sensusque us.ans numerique loquaci?*
 MILTON. ad Patrem.

D U B L I N :
 Printed by S. POWELL,
 For G. RISK, G. EWING, and W. SMITH, in *Dame-
 Street*, and G. PAULKNER, in *Fife-Street*, Bookellers.
 M D C C X X V I I I .

Image reproduced from Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

Dalton outlines his project in a poetical prologue, which begins by calling Milton a ‘steadfast Bard, to his own Genius true’, who ‘[s]till bade his Muse, **fit Audience find, tho’ few*’. The suggestion is that, no matter Milton’s confidence in his own brilliance, he ‘still’ required an audience – one that he knew he would not find in his own era, ‘a trifling Age’; so, instead, ‘To choicer Spirits he bequeath’d his Page.’¹¹⁹ Following John Dennis’s complaint that Milton had not found favour with the British public ‘till the *Paradise Lost* had been publish’d more than thirty Years’, Dalton claims that, ‘to *Britannia*’s Shame, / She scarce for half an Age knew *Milton*’s Name’; but ‘now, his Fame by every Trumpet blown, / We on his deathless trophies raise our own.’¹²⁰ It is not clear what Dalton sees as having triggered the public’s reported change of heart; the reference to his (theatrical) audience as Milton’s ‘fit audience though few’ is a

¹¹⁹ Prologue, l. 1–4. *Comus*, p. 5.

¹²⁰ Prologue, ll. 5–6, 7–8. *Comus*, p. 5.

piece of wishful flattery, ‘an invitation,’ as Thomas Tyrrell writes, to those watching the masque to ‘view themselves as a culmination of the prophecy at the beginning of book seven’ of the epic, and to distance themselves, or at least their critical faculties, from ‘the barbarous dissonance / Of Bacchus and his revellers’ that follows in *Paradise Lost*.¹²¹

The reference to ‘fit audience, though few’, helpfully asterisked, italicised, and footnoted, is corroborated by another Miltonic paraphrase, from Book III of the epic this time, of the moment where God, viewing his works, ‘survey’d / Hell and the Gulf between’.¹²² Dalton conceives Milton as possessed of those superlative powers of poetic transformation which Milton had ambitiously, at times ambivalently, pictured for himself in his earlier poetry:

Nor Art nor Nature did his Genius bound,
Heav’n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, he survey’d around.
All Things his Eye, thro’ Wit’s bright Empire thrown,
Beheld, and made what it beheld his own.¹²³

Having described Milton’s omnipotence, though, Dalton concedes that some work is nonetheless necessary to bring him back to life again: ‘Such Milton was: ’Tis ours to bring him forth, / And yours to vindicate neglected worth.’¹²⁴ Dalton takes himself at his own occult suggestion, by picturing his author as some version of the Attendant Spirit, ‘brought forth’ by the performance:

Like some bless’d Spirit he to Night descends,
Mankind he visits, and their Steps befriends,
Thro’ mazy Error’s dark perplexing Wood [...].¹²⁵

¹²¹ *PL*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow, 1997), Book VII, ll. 31–2, pp. 391–92. See Thomas Tyrrell, ‘’Tis Comus invites to the Temple Away!’ (unpublished MA dissertation: York, 2013), p. 28. Downloaded from <https://cardiff.academia.edu/ThomasTyrrell>, 11 June 2014.

¹²² *PL* III. 69–70.

¹²³ Prologue, ll. 9–12. *Comus*, p. 5.

¹²⁴ Prologue, ll. 13–14. *Comus*, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Prologue, ll. 17–19. *Comus*, p. 5.

As well as echoing *Paradise Lost* Book IV, where a stream runs ‘with mazie error’ to visit plants and flowers,¹²⁶ the ‘dark perplexing Wood’ also seems to recall the ‘*selva oscura*’ in which Dante finds himself at the beginning of the *Inferno*, out of which he is guided by the ‘bless’d spirit’ of Virgil.¹²⁷ Construing Milton as a spiritual guide, Dalton casts himself in the role of a kind of heavenly intermediary, something continued with his prologue’s last stanza, a humble request to the audience that they forgive the imperfections of the work they are about to see.

Attend the Strains, and should some meaner Phrase
 Hang on the Stile, and clog the nobler Lays,
 Excuse what we with trembling Hand supply,
 To give his Beauties to the public Eye;
 His the pure Essence, Ours the grosser Mean,
 Thro’ which his Spirit is in Action seen.¹²⁸

The ‘Strains’ and ‘Lays’ (two words recognisably drawn from ‘*Lycidas*’) could be the ‘pure Essence’ of Milton’s original text, or could refer to the music for this production composed by Arne; either way, Dalton’s province is the ‘grosser mean’, simply the vehicle for the conveyance of these Miltonic ‘Beauties’. Dalton flatters his audience that, since they are generous-hearted, they will only notice the good in this work:

Great Objects only strike the gen’rous Heart;
 Praise the sublime, o’erlook the mortal Part;
 Be There your Judgment, Here your Candor shown;
 Small is our Portion, -- and we wish ’twere none.¹²⁹

Despite his professions of modesty, Dalton’s portion is not really that small. His first big act as adaptor is to add a Second Attendant Spirit, who shares the task of the First Attendant Spirit, familiar to us from Milton’s original masque. Dalton interrupts the Attendant Spirit’s opening monologue at line 17, ‘With the rank vapours of this

¹²⁶ *PL* IV. 239, p. 232.

¹²⁷ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto I, l. 2. In John Sinclair, ed. and trans., *Inferno* (Oxford, 1961), p. 22.

¹²⁸ *Comus*, p. 6.

¹²⁹ *Comus*, p. 6.

sin-worn mould',¹³⁰ and inserts a scene in which the Second Attendant Spirit is introduced – 'Some Messenger from *Jove*, / Commission'd to direct or share my Charge' – and asked to

Declare, on what strange Errand bent,
Thou visitest this Clime, to me assign'd
So far remote from thy appointed Sphere?¹³¹

The Second Attendant Spirit's main contribution to *Comus* is to ask occasional expository questions of the First Attendant Spirit, removing some of the 'absurdity,' to which Thomas Warton would later object, 'of the Spirit talking to an audience in a solitary forest at midnight.'¹³² This character also adds variation, breaking up some of the lines spoken solely by the Attendant Spirit in Milton's original. Dalton seeks to liven up Milton's *Mask* in other ways: for instance, during the first scene with Comus and his crew, where, in Milton's version, only Comus speaks, Dalton splits the dialogue between members of the crew, a Man, a Woman, and Comus himself. He also adds two songs in which the crew declare their hedonistic attitude: in the first song the Man and Woman sing, 'No dull stinting Hour we own: / Pleasure counts our Time alone',¹³³ a posture rather belied by the song that follows, a solo by the Man, in which he worries about time passing because it means day will arrive and end their revels:

Soon, too soon; the busy Day
Drives us from our Sport and Play.
What have we with Day to do?
Sons of Care! 'twas made for you.¹³⁴

Whereas Milton's scene ends with the Lady walking away with Comus (disguised as a shepherd), here, as the Lady and Comus exit, Comus' crew-members jump out from behind a tree and the Man sings another song, more explicitly Bacchic, in praise of

¹³⁰ *A Mask*, l. 17, *CSP*, p. 181.

¹³¹ *Comus*, p. 10.

¹³² *PSO* (1785), pp. 264–65.

¹³³ *Comus*, p. 16.

¹³⁴ *Comus*, p. 17.

'Love and Wine'. Here, too, there is a striking preoccupation with the passing of time, as the Man urges:

Fly swiftly, ye Minutes, till Comus receive
The nameless soft Transports, that Beauty can give;
The Bowl's frolick Joys let him teach her to prove,
And she in return yield the Raptures of Love.¹³⁵

Dalton also adds a scene in which the Lady's two brothers are tempted with the Cup by Comus' crew, who according to the stage directions 'enter ... reveling and by turns caressing each other', offering the brothers 'the sweet Assurance ... / Of Present and the pledge of future Bliss'.¹³⁶ The Elder Brother refuses the Cup, saying, 'Forebear, nor offer us the poison'd Sweets, / That thus have render'd thee thy Sex's shame', to which the Woman replies with a song:

Fame's an Eccho, prattling double,
An empty, airy, glittering Bubble,
A Breath can swell, a Breath can sink it,
The wise, not worth their keeping, think it.

Why then, why such Toil and Pain
Fame's uncertain Smiles to gain?
Like her Sister, Fortune, blind,
To the best she's oft unkind,
And the worst her Favour find.¹³⁷

Recognisably, these words recall the ideas about the indiscriminancy of fame and fortune, the unclear relationship between a person's virtuosity and the events that befall them, that preoccupy many of the poems in Milton's 1645 collection. The Elder Brother's answer is that 'by own her Sentence Virtue stands absolv'd, / Nor asks an Eccho from the Tongues of Men / To tell what hourly to herself she proves.'¹³⁸ Again, units of time are invoked; as they are when the Woman, 'in a Pastoral Habit', decides to prove her point to the brothers by inviting them to the Bower of Bliss, where they will experience 'each rising Hour by rising Pleasures

¹³⁵ *Comus*, p. 23.

¹³⁶ *Comus*, p. 32.

¹³⁷ *Comus*, p. 33.

¹³⁸ *Comus*, p. 33.

mark'd'.¹³⁹ In Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the Bower of Bliss is inhabited by Acrasia, a Circe-like figure who captures her lovers and transforms them into monsters. Circe is Comus' mother, but the Bower of Bliss is never mentioned in *A Mask*, where the sexual threat is confined to that posed by Comus to the Lady; Dalton spreads the threat out, so that the Brothers' chastity too is in danger.

The song that follows is performed 'by One Man and two Women', who advise the brothers to 'live, and love, enjoy the Fair', reporting that 'Here in Pleasure's Vineyard we/ Rove, like Birds, from Tree to Tree, / Careless, airy, gay, and free' –¹⁴⁰ and as she leaves the stage the woman calls the rest of the crew 'Part'ners of my joys', a parody of *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, where Adam calls Eve 'Sole partner and sole part of all these joys' in Eden.¹⁴¹ The brothers are not tempted, the Elder Brother singing a song in which he distinguishes between lust and love, in terms that confirm the allusion to *Paradise Lost*, and its purpose:

Capricious, wanton, bold, and brutal Lust
Is meanly selfish, when restricted, cruel,
And, like the Blast of pestilential Winds,
Taints the sweet Bloom of Nature's fairest Forms.
But Love, like od'rous *Zephyr's* grateful Breath,
Repayes the Flower that Sweetness which it borrows,
Uninjuring, uninjur'd Lovers move
In their own Sphere of Happiness content,
By mutual Truth avoiding mutual Blame.¹⁴²

The reference to 'Zephyr' recalls Book IV of the epic, where we (along with Satan) see Adam and Eve for the first time, and are told that they are required to undertake 'no more toil / Of their sweet Gardening labour then sufficed / To recommend cool *Zephyr's*'.¹⁴³ Before the Fall, Adam and Eve's exertion is exactly matched by the breeze that arrives to cool them; the breeze is only as strong as it needs to be to refresh

¹³⁹ *Comus*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁰ *Comus*, p. 35.

¹⁴¹ *PL*, IV. 411, p. 245.

¹⁴² *Comus*, p. 36.

¹⁴³ *PL* IV. 328–29, p. 240.

Adam and Eve. This chiasmic mutuality is only found in love, not lust; the Elder Brother's lines also invoke, by way of cautionary implication, Adam and Eve after the Fall, at the end of Book IX: 'Thus they in mutual accusation spent / The fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning.'¹⁴⁴ Here, too, the passage of time is being noted, 'mark'd' not 'by rising pleasures' but by 'mutual accusation', as if to confirm the emptiness of sinful pleasures urgently pursued in the face of onrushing time, however comforting they might seem.

Another interpolation from elsewhere in Milton's oeuvre comes during Comus' temptation of the Lady, which takes place at the start of Act III in this adaptation. Comus begins his overtures to the Lady by reciting the first 36 lines of 'L'Allegro' (except lines 17–24); there follows a performance by the Naiads, whom Comus summons and asks to perform a dance in 'Lydian Measures' – another nod to 'L'Allegro' that seems, perhaps counterintuitively, to usher in a newly despondent mood. Next comes a progression of songs by the Pastoral Nymph (with, the stage directions specify, 'a melancholy and desponding air') and Euphrosyne, goddess of mirth, who appears on the scene fresh out of the quoted portion of 'L'Allegro'.¹⁴⁵ The Pastoral Nymph sings a song lamenting the loss of her lover, which seems like an elegy at first: the name 'Damon', in a Miltonic context, inevitably conjures up the *Epitaphium Damonis*, while the Nymph's continual references to him in the past tense suggest he has died; but the penultimate line of the song reveals he has only, 'faithless', left her. Euphrosyne answers the Nymph's lament with a song that assumes a level of sexual determination, and a moral freedom, highly unusual for female characters at this time. Having declared that 'Love, the greatest Bliss below, / How to taste few Women know', Euphrosyne offers her remedy: she does not

¹⁴⁴ *PL IX*. 1187–88, p. 538.

¹⁴⁵ *Comus*, p. 44.

expect constancy from men; she is able to reframe rejection into a sign of her lovers' and not her own failure, and to configure their departure from her as a positive bonus:

Farewel Lovers, when they're cloy'd;
If I am scorn'd, because enjoy'd,
Sure the squeamish Fops are free
To rid me of dull Company.¹⁴⁶

This assumption of sexual agency, as Tyrrell points out, is at odds with what we know about trends in the literary representation of female lust at this time; he quotes A. D. Harvey's report that, at this time, only pornographic fiction represented women as enthusiastic about sex, and that women who professed to enjoy sex were not considered normal.¹⁴⁷ It is true that Euphrosyne, a goddess, is not subject to the same social strictures as an ordinary woman; we are reminded of this by the somewhat dark *memento mori* of a conclusion to her song in which she vows, 'All I hope of mortal Man / Is to love me – whilst he can'.¹⁴⁸ Gossman and Whiting call the goddess's song 'a strange compound of eroticism and cynicism,' and suggest that this Euphrosyne is 'quite un-Miltonic'.¹⁴⁹ It is true that Dalton's Euphrosyne is not much like Milton's, but her behaviour is, in some respects, the logical extension of 'L'Allegro', or rather, of 'L'Allegro' without the counterweight of 'Il Penseroso'. What is arguably un-Miltonic about Dalton's *Comus*, as opposed to Milton's *Mask*, is the lack of balance that necessarily follows upon the majority of the songs, dances, and vivid set-pieces being allotted to Comus and his crew, rather than the Lady and her Brothers. An apparent exception is the descent of the Attendant Spirit, 'in a splendid Machine', announcing that he has come to save the Lady's 'purer Breast

¹⁴⁶ *Comus*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁷ A. D. Harvey, *Sex in Georgian England* (1994), *passim*, quoted in 'Tis Comus Invites to the Temple Away!', p. 22.

¹⁴⁸ *Comus*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁹ Ann Gossman, G. W. Whiting, 'Comus, Once More, 1761', *Review of English Studies* 11 (1960): 56–60 (57).

from Spot and Blame’, and then singing a song about ‘true Pleasure’, ‘awful Virtue’, and the reward of ‘eternal Bliss for transient Pain’.¹⁵⁰ Yet Comus instantly dismisses the song as ‘mere airy Dreams of air-bred People ... Who look with Envy on more happy Man, / And would decry the Joys they cannot taste.’¹⁵¹ This ascription of mortal jealousies to supernatural figures is evidence of Comus’ impoverished morality; but his misprision is corroborated by the whole matter of the play, which relies for its entertainment value on blurring, rather than reinforcing, the distinction between its human characters and their supernatural counterparts.

The temptation scene between Comus and the Lady is reproduced more or less intact from Milton’s original *Mask*. Roger Fiske speculates that ‘a later composer would have seen it as a musical challenge and the climax of the opera, but Dalton and Arne had no option but to leave it as spoken dialogue.’¹⁵² There are a few cuts, notably the Lady’s lines, ‘What grim aspects are these, / These ugly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me!’¹⁵³ As Tyrrell notes, Comus’ followers in this production are not a ‘mute, monstrous, and ungendered rabble’, but instead ‘vocal and glamorous figures, capable of speaking and singing and defending their choice of a libertine lifestyle’.¹⁵⁴ Comus makes one new comment in response to the Lady’s ‘Shall I go on, or have I said enough?’, replying:

Enough to shew
That you are cheated by the lying Boasts
Of starving Pedants, that affect a Fame
From scorning Pleasures which they cannot reach.¹⁵⁵

This attack recalls the criticism of the Lady’s two brothers as ‘pedant youths’ by the Woman in a Pastoral Habit; it is also similar to what Comus has just said, about

¹⁵⁰ *Comus*, p. 49.

¹⁵¹ *Comus*, p. 49.

¹⁵² Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (1973), p. 186.

¹⁵³ *A Mask*, ll. 693–94. *CSP*, p. 215.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Tis Comus Invites to the Temple Once More!’, p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ *Comus*, p. 52.

spirits decrying mortal joys because they ‘cannot taste’ them – because, in essence, they are jealous. The emphasis on the vacuity of fame, again hearkening back to ‘Lycidas’, is a further, potentially persuasive argument in favour of seizing the day.

Dalton and Arne add a substantial amount of music and a particularly striking dance scene to Act III of their opera. In an extension of Comus’ dislike of pedantry, and a reference back to the Second Brother’s scepticism, in Milton’s original *Mask*, about ‘the pensive secrecy of desert cell’,¹⁵⁶ Euphrosyne sings a song disavowing ‘Ye Drones, that mould in idle Cell,’ since ‘the Heart is wiser than the Schools, the Senses always reason well.’¹⁵⁷ Euphrosyne summons fauns and dryads, asking them to portray amorous stories in dance, ‘in various Measures shew Love’s various Sport’:

Now cold and denying,
Now kind and complying,
Disdaining, complaining,
Consenting, repenting,
Indifference now feigning.¹⁵⁸

This representation of fickle, inconstant human love immediately precedes Comus’ final attempt to persuade the Lady that ‘Beauty is Nature’s Coin, and must not be hoarded’,¹⁵⁹ adding, we may suppose, force to her refusal – although Euphrosyne has already provided the remedy for lovers’ inconstancy with her song about how to deal with ‘squeamish Fops’. As in the original *Mask*, the First Attendant Spirit speaks, with the addition of two lines discussing his ‘other Means’ to free the Lady: ‘I learn’d ’em then when with my Fellow Swain, / The youthful *Lycidas* his Flocks I fed.’ Then the Second Attendant Spirit enters, accompanied by a Third Attendant Spirit – Lycidas himself – who sings a shortened version of the Sabrina invocation.¹⁶⁰ Once Sabrina has freed the Lady, the brothers express their amazement to the First

¹⁵⁶ *A Mask*, l. 386. *CSP*, p. 199.

¹⁵⁷ *Comus*, p. 53.

¹⁵⁸ *Comus*, p. 54.

¹⁵⁹ *Comus*, p. 54.

¹⁶⁰ *Comus*, p. 56.

Attendant Spirit. The Elder Brother's speech seems designed to reinforce the Lady's words; 'Yet still the Freedom of the Mind, you see, / No Spell can reach,' he explains to the Attendant Spirit.¹⁶¹ *Comus* ends with the Chorus repeating a version of the last lines of Milton's original text:

Taught by Virtue you may climb
Higher than the sphery Chime;
Or, if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.¹⁶²

Dalton's Epilogue is included for the first time, like the preface, in the play's second edition. The stage directions specify it is 'to be spoken by Mrs. *Clive*, in the Dress of *Euphrosyne*, with the Wand and Cup.' The epilogue humorously defends the masque against potential accusations of implausibility:

Some Critick, or I'm much deceiv'd, will ask,
'What means this wild, this allegorick Mask?
'Beyond all Bounds of Truth this Author shoots;
'Can Wands or Cups transform Men into Brutes?
'Tis idle Stuff!' – And yet I'll prove it true;
Attend; for sure I mean it not of you.¹⁶³

Giving this speech, whose purpose is to bridge the play and, as it were, the outside world, to the well-known actress playing *Comus*' new, scandalous heroine, clutching the instruments of temptation, further blurs the distinction between the drama's supernatural subject matter and its human audience. This is especially the case because the way in which Euphrosyne 'prove[s *Comus*] true' is to recite a host of bestial metaphors for human behaviour (having jokily flattered the audience that of course, none of them is implicated):

The mealy Fop, that takes my Cup, may try,
How quick the Change from Beau to Butterfly;
But o'er the Insect should the Brute prevail,
He grins a Monkey with a Length of Tail.
One Stroke of This, as sure as Cupid's Arrow,
Turns the warm Youth into a wanton Sparrow.

¹⁶¹ *Comus*, p. 59.

¹⁶² *Comus*, p. 61.

¹⁶³ *Comus*, p. 62.

Nay, the cold Prude becomes a Slave to Love,
Feels a new Warmth, and coos a billing Dove [...].¹⁶⁴

After 20 lines of these playful animalistic metaphors, Euphrosyne concludes:

But to be grave, I hope we've prov'd at least,
*All Vice is Folly, and makes Man a beast.*¹⁶⁵

This deliberate, jocose non sequitur hurriedly reframes not only the epilogue just gone, but also the cheerful moral ambiguity of the adaptation as a whole. This low-stakes, vividly licentious version of Milton's *Mask* was a success: it was performed eleven times in its first season, after which it was a mainstay of the Drury-Lane Theatre's repertoire for the next thirty years.

Colman and Arne's *Comus* (1772)

Comus saw one last adaptation in the eighteenth century, this time substantially cut down and converted into a two-act afterpiece by the playwright and theatre manager, George Colman the Elder. Colman retains much of Arne's music, but slices away a great deal of Dalton's libretto. The title-page confirms the connection with Milton, but neglects to acknowledge the great debt this version of the masque owes to Dalton's adaptation:

¹⁶⁴ *Comus*, p. 62.

¹⁶⁵ *Comus*, pp. 62–63.

C O M U S :

A

M A S Q U E.

ALTERED FROM

M I L T O N.

AS PERFORMED AT THE

T H E A T R E - R O Y A L

i N

C O V E N T - G A R D E N.

The M U S I C K Composed by Dr. ARNE.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. LOWNDES; T. CASLON; S. BLADON;
W. NICOLL; and T. BECKET and Co.

MDCCLXXII.

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The publisher's *Advertisement* to this version of *Comus* discusses and defends the cuts that have been made, on the grounds that 'Pure Poetry unmixt with passion, however admired in the closet, has scarce ever been able to sustain itself on the Stage.'¹⁶⁶ While reassuring the reader that 'no circumstance of the Drama contained in the original Masque, is omitted', he confirms that some 'divine arguments on temperance and chastity, together with many descriptive passages, are indeed expunged or contracted', because 'divine as they are, the most accomplished declaimers have been embarrassed in the recitation of them'.¹⁶⁷ In a continuation of

¹⁶⁶ George Colman the Elder, *Comus: a Masque* (1772), i. Hereafter *Comus* (1772).

¹⁶⁷ *Comus* (1772), i.

Dalton's sentiment that 'such heaven-taught numbers should be more than read',

Colman asserts:

It cannot be dissembled that the Masque of Comus, with all its poetical beauties, not only maintained its place on the Theatre chiefly by the assistance of Musick, but the Musick itself, as if overwhelmed by the weight of the Drama, almost sunk with it, and became in a manner lost to the Stage. That Musick, formerly heard and applauded with rapture, is now restored; and the Masque on the above considerations is curtailed.¹⁶⁸

The language of restoration here is reflected in an opinion of the 1738 *Comus* offered by the *Theatrical Dictionary* in 1792:

This piece is a very judicious alteration of Milton's Masque at Ludlow-castle, wherein it is rendered much more fit for the stage by the introduction of many additional songs, most of them Milton's own, of part of the *Allegro* of the same author, and other passages from his different works, so that he has rather restored Milton to himself than altered him.¹⁶⁹

The idea that Milton's original *Maske* was not 'fit for the stage', and that his readers or adaptors could be said to understand the work better than its author, was common at this time; Thomas Warton suggested in 1785 that 'we must not read COMUS with an eye to the stage,' preferring to see it as 'a suite of speeches.'¹⁷⁰ For almost sixty years until Warton's edition, and arguably beyond, Dalton's *Comus* completely overrode Milton's *Maske* in the public consciousness. Many people simply did not know the difference between the original work and its adaptation. For instance, as Ann Gossman and G. W. Whiting point out, quite a few passages in Samuel Derrick's 1760 *Poetical Dictionary*, attributed to Milton, are actually Dalton originals. Under 'DANCING', he quotes, as having been written by Milton, a speech by Comus, from Dalton's *Comus*, accompanying the Naiads' dance which begins, 'Now softly slow let Lydian measures move.'¹⁷¹ Gossman and Whiting note other of Derrick's misattributions – for instance, under 'SPHERES' he quotes from the *Merchant of*

¹⁶⁸ *Comus* (1772), i–ii.

¹⁶⁹ *A New Theatrical Dictionary* (1792), p. 45

¹⁷⁰ *PSO* (1785), pp. 264–65.

¹⁷¹ Samuel Derrick, *A Poetical Dictionary*, 4 vols. (1760), vol. I, p. 208.

Venice and ascribes that to Milton too –¹⁷² and speculate that he must either have considered Dalton’s *Comus* superior to Milton’s *Mask*, or not have been able to distinguish between them.¹⁷³ By the time Warton came to edit and examine the original text, he may have paid unprecedented attention to its linguistic and generic particularities, but even he was now calling the work *Comus*, on the grounds that this title had ‘the full sanction of use.’¹⁷⁴

Colman’s is a less famous adaptation, perhaps because its alterations and cuts, both to Dalton’s *Comus* and the original masque, are so substantial as to leave the piece ‘mangled’.¹⁷⁵ For example, Colman removes the Attendant Spirit’s first speech, and any of the suspense that comes with *Comus* being named by characters onstage while the audience has not yet seen him: this *Comus* opens with the antihero entering, accompanied by his Bacchanalian crew, and making his speech beginning ‘The star that bids the shepherd fold’.¹⁷⁶ Colman’s denouement, meanwhile, takes place mostly as in Dalton’s adaptation, though it is significantly shortened, with the occasional line grafted from elsewhere. In his summative speech the Attendant Spirit speaks lines transplanted, with only slight alterations, from his opening monologue in the original

Mask:

But when a mortal, favour’d of high *Jove*,
Chances to pass thro’ yon advent’rous glade,
Swift as the sparkle of a glancing Star
I shoot from Heav’n, to give him safe convoy.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² *A Poetical Dictionary*, IV. 131.

¹⁷³ ‘Comus, Once More’, 60.

¹⁷⁴ *PSO* (1785), p. 126.

¹⁷⁵ See John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1600 to 1830*, 10 vols. (1832), vol. III, p. 539, on Colman’s *Comus*: ‘In this mangled state it still keeps possession of the stage.’

¹⁷⁶ *Comus* (1772), p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ *Comus* (1772), p. 29.

There is one entirely new song, on an expectedly *carpe diem* theme, inserted during the temptation scene, sung by ‘a Man,’ one of Comus’ crew. He sings:

Mortals, learn your lives to measure
Not by length of time, but pleasure;
Soon your Spring must have a fall;
Losing youth, is losing all:
Then you’ll ask, but none will give,
And may linger, but not live.¹⁷⁸

This is a version of Euphrosyne’s cynical wish for mortal man to love her ‘– while he can’, but its tenor is not nearly as playful as that of the goddess’s song. Unlike Dalton’s *Comus*, where mortal and immortal characters are humorously conflated, Colman’s version largely keeps them apart. For all that it retains Dalton’s songs, Colman’s *Comus* lacks the dramatic purchase of the 1738 adaptation, which would continue to dominate the scene throughout the eighteenth century. This same period saw two other important instances of Milton’s *Poems*’ musical and theatrical adaptation, the first of which, only two years after Dalton’s *Comus*, was the setting to music of ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ by George Frederick Handel in 1740.

Jennens and Handel’s *L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1740)

On 5th December, 1732, Handel’s former patron Aaron Hill wrote to him with a request that he compose a work to ‘deliver us from our *Italian bondage*; and demonstrate, that *English* is soft enough for Opera, when compos’d by poets, who know how to distinguish the *sweetness* of our tongue, from the *strength* of it’.¹⁷⁹ This recalls the war of words between Voltaire and Rolli over the relative strength and sweetness of English and Italian in 1728–30, along with the operatic poetomachia between Rolli and Handel, reflecting a literary patriotism that was growing in proportion with the developing sense of an English canon. Handel’s invention of the

¹⁷⁸ *Comus* (1772), p. 24.

¹⁷⁹ *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill, Esq.*, 4 vols. (1753), vol. I, pp. 115–116.

English oratorio can be seen as answering Hill's request; after adapting Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* in 1736 and his *Song for St. Cecilia's Day* in 1739, Handel collaborated with the librettist Charles Jennens to produce *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, ed il Moderato* in 1740. Jennens does not change the words of Milton's original text, but the first two of the oratorio's three parts consist of sections from 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', jumbled up and juxtaposed to heighten the comparison between the two poems. For instance, Part the First begins with a recitative consisting of the first 10 lines of 'L'Allegro', followed by a second recitative of 7 lines shortened from the first 10 lines of 'Il Penseroso'.¹⁸⁰ Part One is slightly weighted in favour of 'L'Allegro'; Part Two in favour of 'Il Penseroso'; this attempt at total even-handedness is born out by Jennens' composition of an entirely new poem, 'Il Moderato', for the third part of the oratorio.

A compromise between Milton's two works, 'Il Moderato' opens by banishing the Penseroso, who has dominated in the prior section.

Hence: boast not, ye Profane,
Of vainly fancy'd, little tasted Pleasure,
Pursu'd beyond all measure,
And by its own Excess transform'd to Pain.¹⁸¹

The idea that restraint is its own excess, and that pleasure pursued too energetically can be its own pain, is recognisably Horatian; Jennens' supply of a moderate medium is an extrapolation from the fact of Milton having written two poems, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', and not come down clearly on one side or the other. It might even be seen as a concerned response to the unbalancing effect of Dalton's *Comus*, in, arguably, over-dramatising pleasure and under-representing modest restraint. At the

¹⁸⁰ Charles Jennens, *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1740), pp. 3–4. Hereafter *L'Allegro*, etc.

¹⁸¹ *L'Allegro*, etc., p. 16.

end of Part Three, L'Allegro and il Penseroso join together in a duet that paraphrases some of Prospero's lines from the end of *The Tempest* –

As steals the Morn upon the Night,
And melts the Shades away,
So Truth does Fancy's Charm dissolve,
And rising Reason puts to flight
The Fumes that did the Mind involve,
Restoring intellectual Day –¹⁸²

before the Chorus concludes with a couplet:

Thy Pleasures, Moderation, give;
In Them alone we truly live.¹⁸³

L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato was first performed on 27th February, 1740, and during this first season it was put on five times, with songs from the production being separately published and sold from March of that year onwards. Evidence suggests that the oratorio was a commercial success, perhaps by virtue more of Handel's music than of Jennens' libretto, which occasioned some surprise for its departure from Milton's original words; an article in the *Covent-Garden Journal* reports:

When Mr. Handel first exhibited his Allegro and Penseroso, there were two ingenious Gentlemen who had bought a Book of the Words, and thought to divert themselves by reading it before the Performance began. *Zounds* (cried one of them) *what damn'd Stuff this is! – Damn'd stuff indeed*, replied his Friend. *God so!* (replied the other, who then first cast his Eyes on the Title-Page) *the Words are Milton's*.¹⁸⁴

The work was also successful when performed in Dublin in 1741, and Handel continued to conduct it frequently until he died in 1759.¹⁸⁵ Though some found the music unimaginative, too 'imitative' of the mood of the poems,¹⁸⁶ a competing faction saw this as a strength, with one critic writing in 1753:

¹⁸² See William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act V sc. i, ll. 56–58. Ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan. In *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, Gen. Eds. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan (rev. ed. 2001), p. 1092. Hereafter *Arden Shakespeare*.

¹⁸³ *L'Allegro*, etc. pp. 18–19.

¹⁸⁴ *The Covent-Garden Journal* (31st March, 1752). Quoted in R.W. Myers, *Handel, Dryden, and Milton* (1956), p. 55.

¹⁸⁵ *Handel, Dryden, and Milton*, pp. 55–56.

¹⁸⁶ See Charles Avison's *Essay on Musical Expression* (1752), p. 61: 'the Composer is not principally to dwell on particular Words in the Way of Imitation, but to comprehend the Poet's general Drift or Intention, and on this to form his Airs and Harmony, either by Imitation (so far as Imitation may be proper to this End) or by any other Means.'

May not Imitation be consistent with *Air* and *Harmony*? [...] Are we not in all Cases to make the Sound an Eccho to the sense? [...] If not; with what Propriety could Milton's *L'allegro il Penseroso* [sic.] have been set to Music, which is chiefly descriptive – I believe no reasonable Person, or Judge of Words and Music, will deny that the beautiful, *picturesque* Scenes, which Milton describes, are greatly heightened and assisted, by the Music Mr. Handel has adapted to them'.¹⁸⁷

Centos and *Lycidas*: a musical entertainment (1763)

Handel's setting of the companion poems is thought to be one reason for those pieces' popularity in the second half of the eighteenth century (although, as we have seen, other factors may have contributed to that too). Perhaps inspired by Handel's own *Samson. An Oratorio* (1747), whose libretto, although based principally on Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, also included snippets from 'On Time', 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', 'An Epitaph upon the Marchioness of Winchester', and 'At a Solemn Music', there was a brief midcentury vogue for Milton's poems to be included in composite pieces, or centos, made up, usually, of one text in the main, supplemented by excerpts from various authors, and set to music. David Garrick's 1755 *The Fairies. An Opera*, for instance, drawn for the most part from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, also quotes three passages from 'L'Allegro', as well as one from *Paradise Lost* and one from *Arcades*. The revised version, published in 1763, includes a further passage from *A Mask*.

'Lycidas' too underwent a musical adaptation in 1763, with libretto by William Jackson (whose name does not, however, appear on the title-page of the published version), and a composer whose name was not recorded. This adaptation has for its epigraph the lines, changed into the present tense, as well as into an exclamation: 'Thus sings the uncouth Swain, / With eager thought warbling his Doric lay!'¹⁸⁸ The

¹⁸⁷ William Hayes, *Remarks on Mr. Avison's Essay on Musical Expression* (1753), pp. 65–67. *Handel, Dryden, and Milton*, p. 61.

¹⁸⁸ [William Jackson], *Lycidas: a musical entertainment* (1763), A1r.

main difference between this version and Milton's original text lies in the metre, which Jackson retains for the recitatives, but alters for the air, or main tune. An example is the replacement of Milton's lines,

Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
We drove a field, and both together heard
What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn[.]¹⁸⁹

with:

Together e'er the Lawns appear'd
Under the eyelids of the Morn
We drove afield, together heard
The Gray-fly wind his sultry Horn[.]¹⁹⁰

The controversial passage from Milton's original poem, condemning corruption in the church, is reduced to eight lines, themselves diminished to fit with the metre of the 'air'; the controversy is relocated, too, from the prelacy to the poetic community, so that the rotten sheep of Milton's 'Lycidas' are, here, inferior swains:

How well could I have spar'd for thee
The Swains whose lean and flashy Songs
Grate on their Pipes of wretched Straw?
The sheep look up and are not fed,
But swoln with the rank Mist they draw,
Rot and the foul contagion spread –
Not so thy Flocks, O shepherd dear;
Not so thy Songs, o Muse most rare!¹⁹¹

Lycidas: a musical entertainment may have been the least successful of all the adaptations of Milton's *Poems* in this period. Unlike the companion poems and, especially, the masque, Milton's original 'Lycidas' was not overridden in the public imagination by its simplified musical counterpart. Its lexical thorniness, metrical unevenness, and generic unconformity remained uppermost for critics; and these are the terms on which it would continue to be approached by thoughtful readers later in the century.

¹⁸⁹ 'Lycidas', ll. 25–28. *CSP*, p. 245.

¹⁹⁰ *Lycidas: a musical entertainment*, p. 2.

¹⁹¹ *Lycidas: a musical entertainment*, p. 8.

Chapter 3: *Poems* in the canon – edited, anthologised, and criticised, 1752–1779

Although, as we have seen, several of Milton's early works were growing in popularity throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, and although *Paradise Lost* continued to enjoy regular new editions in these years, the *Poems* as a volume had not undergone any new editorial treatment since 1695. This changed in 1752, when Thomas Newton produced an edition of *Paradise Regain'd*, *Samson Agonistes*, and the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, as a complement to his two-volume variorum edition of *Paradise Lost* which had been published in 1749.

PARADISE REGAIN'D.

A

P O E M,

I N

F O U R B O O K S.

To which is added

S A M S O N A G O N I S T E S:

A N D

P O E M S U P O N S E V E R A L O C C A S I O N S.

T H E A U T H O R

J O H N M I L T O N.

A N E W E D I T I O N,

With N O T E S of various A U T H O R S,

By T H O M A S N E W T O N, D. D.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. and R. T O N S O N and S. D R A P E R in the *Strand*.

M D C C L I I.

The title-page of Newton's 1752 edition. Image from Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.

In the preface to his edition, Newton sets out his purpose in treating the work of modern writers with the same critical care that has hitherto been reserved for classical authors:

To publish new and correct editions of the works of approved authors has ever been esteemed a service to learning, and an employment worthy of men of learning. It is not material whether the author is ancient or modern. Good criticism is the same in all languages. Nay I know not whether there is not greater merit in cultivating our own language than any other. And certainly next to a good writer, a good critic holds the second rank in the republic of letters.¹

Newton shows an awareness of the history of Milton criticism itself, praising the ‘chart and compass’ left him by prior editors,² though not without a note of censure for those he feels have served the text poorly. Of Patrick Hume’s 1695 edition, for instance, Newton writes:

He laid the foundation, but he laid it among infinite heaps of rubbish. The greater part of his work is a dull dictionary of the most common words, a tedious fardel of the most trivial observations, explaining what requires no explanation.³

Throughout his criticism of *Paradise Lost*, and also the *Life of Milton* prefaced to his 1749 edition, Newton is scornful of over-complication by critics; he observes, for instance, ‘It is the great fault of commentators, that they are apt to be silent or at most very concise where there is any difficulty, and to be very prolix and tedious where there is none’.⁴ This continues his belief in the importance of ‘cultivating our own language’, rather than striving to excel in foreign languages for the sake of it; so, for instance, he is not particularly impressed by Milton and Diodati having written to each other in Latin and Greek, saying:

It may be right for scholars now and then to exercise themselves in Greek and Latin; but we have much more frequent occasion to write letters in our own native language, and in that therefore we should principally endeavour to excel.⁵

¹ *PL* (1749), I. sig. A2^r.

² *PL* (1749), I. sig. A2^r.

³ *PL* (1749), I. sig. A2^v.

⁴ *PL* (1749), I. vi.

⁵ *PL* (1749), I. xii.

A growing critical patriotism, keen to canonise British authors for their achievement in their native tongue, can be seen to inform Newton's approach to the *Poems* too, which he mentions early in this *Life of Milton*:

And in 1645 was published a collection of his poems, Latin and English, the principal of which are On the morning of Christ's nativity, L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Lycidas, the Mask &c &c: and if he had left no other monuments of his poetical genius behind him, these would have been sufficient to have rendered his name immortal.⁶

We notice that Newton is echoing Elijah Fenton's remarks in his *Life of Milton* from 1725, which pick out 'Lycidas', *A Mask*, and the companion poems as having sufficed to immortalise Milton's name.⁷ Importantly, though, Newton adds the Nativity Ode, as well as the unspecific but fervent '&c. &c.' here, to suggest that many more of the *Poems* deserve to be viewed as the 'principal' items in that collection. The twofold '&c.' also recalls the two instances of '&c.' in the *Poems*' 1673 title, admitting to greater multiplicity in these works' genre and language than had previously been allowed.⁸

Notably, and this would be important for his treatment of the *Poems* in the 1752 edition, Newton invokes the Trinity Manuscript in his *Life of Milton*, painstakingly listing all the works whose early versions it incarnates, and observing,

It is curious to see the first thoughts and subsequent corrections of so great a poet as Milton: but it is remarkable in these manuscript poems, that he doth not often make his stops, or begin his lines with great letters. There are likewise in his own hand-writing different plans of Paradise Lost in the form of a tragedy: and it is an agreeable amusement to trace the gradual progress and improvement of such a work from its first dawnings in the plan of a tragedy to its lustre in an epic poem.⁹

Newton's tone here, though not iconoclastic, is affectionately irreverent. He expresses delight and curiosity at being able to view Milton's early drafts, and this, on the one hand, is respectful and scholarly, an act of intensive critical attention until

⁶ *PL* (1749), I. xix.

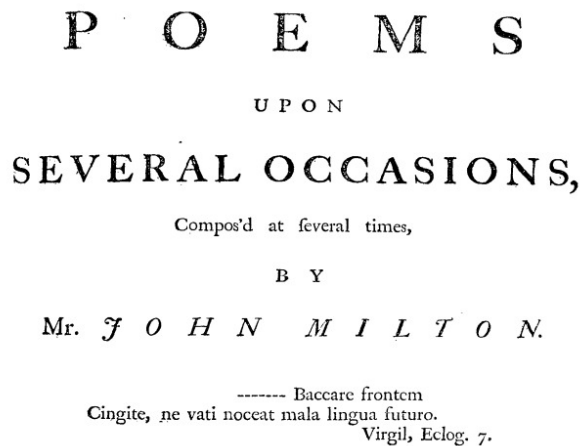
⁷ See my Ch. 2.

⁸ See my Ch. 1.

⁹ *PL* (1749), I. lx.

recently not paid to vernacular works. On the other hand, though, the relative historical proximity of Milton, the fact of his drafts being extant, means that editors can pick up on things like his slight inattention to grammatical detail, or some of the wrong turns he took on the way to producing the final version of the epic. This makes for a more assailable, as well as a more accessible, Milton; and since more of them are available in manuscript, makes the *Poems* more assailable than *Paradise Lost*.

Thomas Newton's *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1752)



The separate title-page to the *Poems* in Newton's 1752 edition. Image from Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.

A graduate of Trinity College, working with the direct encouragement of Zachary Pearce – who, as we have seen, was the first Milton scholar to make use of the Trinity Manuscript in connection with *Paradise Lost* – Newton also acknowledges his

debt to the foregoing scholarship of Thomas Birch, who had been the first to include the manuscript in a *Life* of Milton.¹⁰ He writes that the Trinity materials

were printed before in the Historical and Critical Life of Milton prefixed to his prose works by the learned and ingenious Mr. Birch, who is continually adding something new to the stock of learning: but it was judged proper to reprint them from the Manuscript in this edition, as they bear a nearer relation to the author's poetical works.¹¹

Newton's is also the first edition of the *Poems* to attempt to impose chronological order on these works. He specifies: 'In these poems where no date is prefix'd, and no circumstances direct us to ascertain the time when they were compos'd, we follow the order of Milton's own editions.'¹² The idea that Milton's own dates might be a last resort, since they are potentially unreliable, is another instance of what we might call respectful scepticism about the accepted wisdom surrounding the *Poems*. Newton engages in a great deal of textual cross-referencing throughout this edition, both with the Trinity Manuscript and between the 1645 and 1673 editions of the *Poems*. Again, the only scholar to have done this before was Birch.

In keeping with the impatience he has expressed elsewhere about Milton's habit of writing poetry in languages other than his own, Newton is not very enthusiastic about the *Poemata* – he 'cannot say [they] are equal to several of [Milton's] English compositions' – but he concedes that 'yet they are not without their merit'.¹³ Following Milton's earlier critics, Newton suggests that these early poems are remarkable considering their context – 'most of the modern Latin poetry' being just 'a Cento', a mere patchwork – and the early age at which they were composed: 'there is spirit, invention, and other marks and tokens of a rising genius; for it should be considered, that the greater part of them were written while the author was under

¹⁰ See my Ch. 2.

¹¹ *Poems* (1752), iii.

¹² *Poems* (1752), pp. 341–42.

¹³ *Poems* (1752), iv.

twenty.¹⁴ What Newton does not do is provide the *Poemata* with the same level of careful textual annotation as he does the *Poems*, an omission he covers off with the statement:

They are printed correctly according to his corrections in 1645 and 1673; and as they can be read only by the learned there is the less occasion for any notes and observations upon them. Some few are added, which were thought no more than necessary.¹⁵

Newton's notes to the individual poems tend to point out allusions he believes he is the first to have noticed, or to comment on usages he sees as in some way egregious – for instance, on the use of the word 'thunderous' in 'At a Vacation Exercise',¹⁶ he writes, 'I think I have seen the word *thunderous* in other old authors, though I cannot recollect the particular passages.'¹⁷ Newton is usually more particular when gesturing to the 'old authors' from whom he sees Milton drawing, especially Spenser. Of the river sequence in the Vacation Exercise,¹⁸ he writes, 'In invoking these rivers Milton had his eye particularly upon that admirable episode in Spenser of the marriage of the Thames and the Medway, where the several rivers are introduc'd in honour of the ceremony', and follows with several quotations and line references from *The Faerie Queene*.¹⁹ On the phrase 'smouldring clouds' from line 159 of the Nativity Ode, Newton remarks that 'smouldring' is 'a word that I find neither in Junius, nor Skinner, nor Bailey, but in Spenser and Fairfax'.²⁰ Another Spenserian correspondence is noted when, commenting on Milton's rhyming of 'truth' with 'Ruth' in Sonnet IX,²¹ Newton says, 'it may perhaps offend the niceness of modern ears that the same word should rime to itself though in different senses: but our old

¹⁴ *Poems* (1752), iv–v.

¹⁵ *Poems* (1752), iv–v.

¹⁶ 'At a Vacation Exercise', l. 36, *CSP*, p. 80.

¹⁷ *Poems* (1752), p. 316.

¹⁸ 'At a Vacation Exercise', ll. 91–100. *CSP*, pp. 82–3.

¹⁹ *Poems* (1752), p. 320.

²⁰ *Poems* (1752), p. 332.

²¹ Sonnet IX, ll. 4–5. *CSP*, p. 291.

poets were not so very delicate, and the reader may see parallel instances in Spenser's Faery Queen [...].²²

Newton's fullest critiques are of those four of the *Poems* most famous at this time, beginning with 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', of which he writes that they

are exquisitely beautiful in themselves, but appear much more beautiful, when they are considered, as they were written, in contrast to each other. There is a great variety of pleasing images in them; and it is remarkable, that the poet represents several of the same objects as exciting both mirth and melancholy, and affecting us differently according to the different dispositions and affections of the soul. This is nature and experience.²³

Newton's conviction about the necessity of each companion poem to the other, and his comments on the realism, as it were, of Milton's observation that the same objects can provoke mirth and melancholy according to their observer's cast of mind, echoes a set of remarks made by the Shakespearean editor Lewis Theobald in 1733. Commenting on Orsino's opening speech from *Twelfth Night*, in particular the comparison of 'that strain' he hears to 'the sweet south / That breathes upon a bank of violets, / Stealing and giving odour', Theobald suggests that Shakespeare is

by 'This insinuating, that affecting Musick, tho' it takes away the natural sweet Tranquillity of the Mind, yet, at the same time, communicates a Pleasure the Mind felt not before. This Knowledge, of the same Objects being capable of raising two contrary Affections, is a Proof of no ordinary Progress in the Study of human Nature.

Theobald interposes '*Milton *an Imitator of him*' before continuing,

The general Beauties of those two Poems of MILTON, intitl'd, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, are obvious to all Readers, because the Descriptions are the most poetical in the World; yet there is a peculiar Beauty in those two excellent Pieces, that will much enhance the Value of them to the more capable Readers; which has never, I think, been observ'd. The Images, in each Poem, which he raises to excite Mirth and Melancholy, are exactly the same, only shewn in different Attitudes. Had a Writer, less acquainted with Nature, given us two Poems on these Subjects, he would have been sure to have sought out the most contrary Images to raise these contrary Passions. And, particularly, as *Shakespeare*, in the Passage I am now commenting, speaks of these different Effects in Musick; so *Milton* has brought it into each Poem as the Exciter of each Affection: and lest we should mistake him, as meaning that different Airs had this different Power (which every Fidler is proud to have you

²² *Poems* (1752), p. 517.

²³ *Poems* (1752), p. 356.

understand,) He gives the Image of those self-same Strains that *Orpheus* used to regain *Eurydice*, as proper both to excite Mirth and Melancholy. But *Milton* most industriously copied the Conduct of our *Shakespeare*, in Passages that shew'd an intimate Acquaintance with Nature and Science.²⁴

Theobald's position is that while 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' have been enjoyed by readers before, that has only been because of their 'general beauty'. His new suggestion is that the poems' 'peculiar beauty' only emerges if they are read as imitations of Shakespeare, as embodiments, really, of what he reads as Duke Orsino's observation that the same things can act differently upon minds differently disposed. Theobald's comments would be taken up again by Samuel Johnson in his *Life of Milton* (1779) when discussing 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'.

Continuing his association of Milton with 'old authors', Spenser in particular, Newton writes of the 'throng of knights and barons bold' in 'L'Allegro',²⁵

It may perhaps be objected that this a little unnatural, since tilts and torneaments were disus'd, when Milton wrote this poem: But when one considers how short a time they had been laid aside, and what a considerable figure these make in Milton's favourite authors, his introducing them here is easily accounted for, and I think as easily to be excus'd.²⁶

This piece of relativism forgives Milton for using antiquated language because it had not been out of use for too long, and was favoured by his own 'favourite authors'; here again we see a kind of British canonicity conferring its blessing on Milton for imitating not only classical poets, but also earlier vernacular authors. Newton's notes to *A Mask*, meanwhile, mostly supplied by Robert Thyer and William Warburton, emphasise the work's relationship to Shakespeare and tend to characterise it, therefore, as an act of English *imitatio* on Milton's part. Thyer writes, for instance:

Milton seems in this poem to have imitated Shakespear's manner more than in any other of his works; and it was very natural for a young author preparing a piece for

²⁴ *The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Lewis Theobald, 7 vols. (1733), vol. I, pp. xix–xx.

²⁵ 'L'Allegro', l. 119. *CSP*, p. 143.

²⁶ *Poems* (1752), p. 365.

the stage to propose to himself for a pattern the more celebrated master of English dramatic poetry.²⁷

Quoted just after Thyer, Warburton goes so far as to suggest that Milton is better when he is imitating Shakespeare than when he is being himself:

Milton has here more professedly imitated the manner of Shakespear in his faery scenes than in any other of his works: and his poem is much the better for it, not only for the beauty, variety, and novelty of his images, but for a brighter vein of poetry, and an ease and delicacy of expression very superior to his natural manner.²⁸

Thyer's remark on the phrase 'O thievish night', from line 195 of the masque, is similarly unobsequious:

This is extremely low in the midst of a speech of so much gravity and dignity. But the candid reader will impute it, no doubt, to our poet's condescension to that prevailing fondness for this kind of false wit about the time in which he wrote.²⁹

Newton corroborates this comment, adding, 'I suppose Dr Dalton was of the same opinion, for he has omitted these lines in *Comus*, as he adapted it for the stage.'³⁰ An important shift has taken place: now, Newton is not only praising Milton's own corrections to his work – as when, comparing the correction of line 269 of *A Mask* from 'the prospering growth of this tall wood', in the Trinity Manuscript, to 'the prosperous growth of this tall wood' in 1645, he approvingly notes, 'We see by the Manuscript with what judgement Milton corrected';³¹ he is also suggesting that subsequent authors have known better than Milton himself about his work. This perspective is embedded by Warburton's comment on lines 374–75, 'And Wisdom's self / Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude': 'Mr. Pope has imitated this thought; and (as was always his way when he imitated) improved it ... Mr. Pope, I say, has not only improved the harmony, but the sense'.³²

²⁷ *Poems* (1752), p. 395.

²⁸ *Poems* (1752), p. 395.

²⁹ *Poems* (1752), p. 411.

³⁰ *Poems* (1752), pp. 411–12.

³¹ *Poems* (1752), p. 417.

³² *Poems* (1752), p. 426.

Newton is more kindly disposed towards 'Lycidas', which, he suggests, 'is with great judgement made of the pastoral kind'. He is altogether keen to see the poem in its contexts literary, historical, and biographical. First, he briefly remarks that there are resemblances between it and Virgil's Eclogue X, as well as Spenser's poems in memory of Philip Sidney. Next, he explains 'Lycidas' archaisms, which, this time, he does not see as a blemish but as a conscious choice:

The reader cannot but observe, that there are more antiquated and obsolete words in this than in any other of Milton's poems; which I conceive to be owing partly to his judgement, for he might think them more rustic, and better adapted to the nature of pastoral poetry; and partly to his imitating of Spenser, for as Spenser's stile is most antiquated, where he imitates Chaucer most, in his Shepherds Calendar, so Milton's imitations of Spenser might have the same effect upon the language of this poem.³³

Then, Newton turns his attention to interpreting the section of 'Lycidas' condemning the corruption of the church. He first suggests his preference for the manuscript variant of line 129, 'and little said', as 'juster and better' than the final version, 'and nothing said' –³⁴ a line he explains by the fact that it 'agrees very well with the popular clamours of that age against the suppos'd connivence [sic.] of the court at the propagation of popery.'³⁵ As few scholars have been since, Newton is convinced that he knows what is meant by the 'two-handed engine at the door'; indeed, he was one of the first to interrogate this phrase, and, as John Leonard has recently pointed out, the very first to collate it with 'the axe of God's reformation' as described in Milton's prose:³⁶

But that two-handed engin &c, that is, the ax of reformation is upon the point of smiting once for all ... An ax is properly a *two-handed engin*. *At the door*, that is, this reformation is now ripe, and at hand; *near, even at the doors* ... This explication is the more probable, as it agrees so well with Milton's sentiments and expressions in other parts of his works. His head was full of these thoughts, and he was in expectation of some mighty alteration in religion, as appears from the earliest of his prose-works, which were publish'd not four years after this poem. In the second book of his treatise of Reformation in England, he employs the same metaphor of *the ax of God's reformation*,

³³ *Poems* (1752), p. 480.

³⁴ *CSP*, p. 252.

³⁵ *Poems* (1752), p. 493.

³⁶ See John Leonard, 'The Two-Handed Engine and the Millennium at the Door', in *Young Milton*, pp. 252–279 (p. 261).

beving at the old and hollow trunk of papacy ... And in his *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defense*, addressing himself to the Son of God he says – *but thy kingdom is at hand, and thou standing at the door* ... The reading of these treatises of Milton will sufficiently make appear what his meaning must be, and how much about this time he thought about lopping off prelatical episcopacy.³⁷

Newton ends his reflections on ‘Lycidas’ by dismissing Jonathan Richardson’s suggestion that ‘by this last verse the poet says (pastorally) that he is hastening to, and eager on new work’; he believes instead that the ‘fresh woods, and pastures new’ are those of Italy, where Milton would shortly travel. Newton finishes his critique, which has run for twenty pages, by quoting Thyer to the effect that (after all) ‘the particular beauties of this charming pastoral are too striking to need much descanting upon’. For Thyer,

What gives the greatest grace to the whole [of ‘Lycidas’] is that natural and agreeable wildness and irregularity which runs quite through it, than which nothing could be better suited to express the warm affection which Milton had for his friend, and the extreme grief he was in for the loss of him. Grief is eloquent, but not formal.³⁸

The bibliographical and historical awareness, as well as the sheer thoroughness, with which Newton approached the *Poems* in his edition constitutes a real turning-point in their reception. As we shall see, the most popular of these works continued to be read for pleasure, but they were increasingly positioned as important for other reasons too. We can see this from the new way in which the *Poems*, especially the best-known ‘L’Allegro’, ‘Il Penseroso’, ‘Lycidas’, and *A Mask*, were drawn together in literary anthologies throughout the second half of the eighteenth century.

‘The temporality of taste’: Milton’s *Poems* anthologised

As I suggested above, it has been possible to categorise most of the literary compilations that feature Milton’s work in this period as either miscellanies or anthologies, according to whether they are descriptive or prescriptive, whether their

³⁷ *Poems* (1752), pp. 493–94.

³⁸ *Poems* (1752), p. 501.

aim is occasional or canonical. Useful to this process of discrimination, especially when it comes to defining the anthologies which mostly include the *Poems* in the second half of the century, has been James Noggle's *The Temporality of Taste in Eighteenth-century British Writing*. Noggle premises 'taste' as a temporally ambivalent term, which can refer both to the capacity for instantaneous judgement – he quotes Joshua Reynolds, in a speech given to students at the Royal Academy in 1776, calling taste 'that act of the mind by which we like or dislike, whatever be the subject' –³⁹ and to a broader, socially consented-upon set of opinions, more gradual, and longer in the formation, the *consensus gentium*. According to Noggle, this divide 'intimately conditions the consciousness of individuals in the period';⁴⁰ it is a 'temporal incongruity' built into eighteenth-century ideas of taste.⁴¹ Related to this temporal incongruity are the incongruities between personal and social, specific and general in the formation of taste; we see anthologies negotiating these, too.

An early instance of the *Poems*' anthologising is the *Select Collection of Modern Poems*, first published in Glasgow in 1744. Supporting Ogden's hypothesis that the more frequent appearance of Milton's *Poems* in miscellanies and anthologies was triggered by the success of the musical adaptations of *A Mask*, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' in the 1730s, this collection devotes its first section to *The Mask of Comus* (as it is called here), printed in full and including Henry Wotton's letter to Milton, followed by 'Lycidas', 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. This means Milton receives far more space than is allotted to any other single author in the volume. In this octavo anthology the poems are presented in a large font, with plenty of white space, and each new poem starts on a new page, which is not always the case in anthologies of the period. The

³⁹ [Joshua Reynolds,] *A Discourse, Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy on the Distribution of the Prizes*, December 10, 1776 (1777), p. 10.

⁴⁰ James Noggle, *The Temporality of Taste in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Oxford, 2012), p. 1

⁴¹ *The Temporality of Taste*, p. 1.

volume has no preface and gives no indication of its compiler; the focus is all on the texts chosen for inclusion, as evidenced by the title-page, which reports that the poems within were written ‘By the most eminent hands’, and soberly lists all the authors it will include: Milton Prior, Hughes, Addison, Dryden, Congreve, Gay, Pope, Parnel and Lansdowne.

The frontispiece to the *Select Collection* also has an epigraph, ‘*perpetua semper dignissima vita*’, from the Proem to Book III of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*. The entire phrase is:

*tuisque ex, inclute, chartis,
floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant,
omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,
aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.*

[From out of your illustrious leaves, like bees that drink everything in a flowery wood, in just the same way we feed upon all your golden sayings, golden, and ever most worthy of eternal life].⁴²

Addressed to Epicurus, the Proem is Lucretius’ cautious attempt to set himself up not as a rival to his forebear, but as a humble follower; he has just said,

*te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc
ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis,
non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem
quod te imitari aveo*

[I follow you, O ornament of the Grecian race, and now on the imprints you have left I put my own firm footsteps, not so much desiring to compete with you as, on account of love, because I long to copy you].⁴³

Lucretius’ emphasis is on *imitatio* that never crosses over into conflict, painstaking imitation as a way to discover how an admired author works. Applied by Lucretius to Epicurus, the logic of the apian analogy is that just as bees drink *omnia* [everything] in the forest, so can Epicurus’ readers feast on *omnia* [all] his writings; bees can afford to be indiscriminate, because everything in the forest tastes good to them, and so can admirers of Epicurus, because all his writing is equally nourishing. In the context of

⁴² Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, Book III, ll. 10–13, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. Martin Ferguson Smith (Cambridge, MA, 1975, rev. 1992), p. 188.

⁴³ *De Rerum Natura* III. 3–6, p. 188.

an anthology – the word itself meaning ‘a collection of flowers’ – the reason a reader can afford to be indiscriminate is because someone expert before them has first discriminated, and chosen, as it were, the finest flowers of a variety of poets. That Milton has so much more space than any other poet in this anthology suggests that more of his *dicta* [sayings] were found to be *aurea* [golden] than those of any other of the authors included.

Although the *Select Collection* was not aimed expressly at children, many anthologies in the period were. *The Art of Poetry on a New Plan*, published in 1762, sees the poems it includes as ancillary to the main content, which are ‘such Reflections and critical Remarks as may tend to form in our YOUTH an elegant TASTE, and render the study of this Part of the BELLES LETTRES more rational and pleasing.’⁴⁴ The collection was compiled by John Newbery, a publisher with a special interest in children’s books; he had already brought out *The Circle of the Sciences* (1745–8), *A Spelling Dictionary of the English Language* (1748), a *Pocket Dictionary*, ‘design’d for the Youth of both Sexes, the Ladies and Persons in Business’ (1753),⁴⁵ and a collection of *Letters on the most Common, as well as Important, Occasions in Life* (1756), all publications to which he refers in the Advertisement to this collection, as volumes in which ‘he has endeavoured to introduce [the young Pupil] to the Arts and Sciences, where all useful Knowledge is contained.’⁴⁶ Newbery dedicated this anthology to the Earl of Holderness, the Secretary of State whom he had successfully petitioned in an extradition case; Newbery writes that although he knows Holderness, a modest man, will squirm at being so publicly praised, he feels that ‘this Acknowledgement is a Duty that I owe, not only to your Lordship, but to the Public; for, if I mistake not,

⁴⁴ John Newbery, ed., *The Art of Poetry on a New Plan*, 2 vols. (1762), vol. I, sig. A1^r. Hereafter *The Art of Poetry*.

⁴⁵ John Newbery, *A Pocket Dictionary, or Complete English Explicator* (1753), sig. A1^r.

⁴⁶ *The art of poetry*, I. vii.

the only Use of reciting the Virtues and Actions of the Great, is to make others emulate their Example'.⁴⁷ This recital of virtues for the benefit of an imitating public could be applied to Newbery's method as an anthologist, too.

The Art of Poetry is structured according to different poetic forms and genres, setting down the 'precepts' of, for instance, the epigram, the epitaph, the elegy or the pastoral, before providing illustrative examples of these forms, genres, and modes. Newbery states in his introduction: 'We have not satisfied ourselves with writing *dull receipts how poems may be made* [a quotation from Pope's *Essay on Criticism*], but have, (together with such rules as are necessary for the construction of English verse and of the various species of Poetry) presented the reader with variety of examples from our best and most celebrated English poets.'⁴⁸ The introduction also makes much of poetry's significance as an ancient art form: 'If the sciences were to be estimated by their antiquity, Poetry would undoubtedly bear the palm from all others, since it is, we may suppose, nearly as old as the Creation, and had its being almost with the first breath of mankind.'⁴⁹ Samuel Johnson had expounded this belief in his assessment of the pastoral as the original genre – in that sense, the oldest of the oldest.⁵⁰ Newbery chronicles a long moment in history when poetry's holy purposes, as he views them, were overlooked.

This divine science, originally intended for the worship of God, was in process of time debased; and when men forsook the Lord of Life, apply'd to inferior purposes. It was call'd in to the praise of legislators and great men. This use was made of it not only by the eastern nations, but by the Greeks, Romans, and by the ancient bards in Britain, who, as history tells us, made songs in praise of their heroes, which they adapted to music, and sung to their harps.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *The Art of Poetry*, I. Aiv–v.

⁴⁸ *The Art of Poetry*, I. v.

⁴⁹ *The Art of Poetry*, I. i.

⁵⁰ *Rambler*, II. 11.

⁵¹ *The art of poetry*, I. iv.

This dismissal of the poetry of ‘ancient bards’, Greek, Roman, and British, as ‘inferior’ is startling; it is the complete opposite, for instance, of the compiler of 1722’s *The Bee*, whose introduction stated that ‘the Greek, Latin, and British bards abound with delicacies’.⁵² There is a sharp difference between the stated aim of a miscellany, simply to delight the reader, and Newbery’s task as he sees it: to inspire, with good examples, a new generation of authors who will recuperate the art of poetry, which in his opinion has ‘of late ... been most shamefully prostituted’.⁵³

‘On May Morning’ is the first of the 1645 poems to be quoted in this volume, in a section titled *Of the Beauty of Thought*, just after a series of lengthy excerpts from *Paradise Lost*, specifically scenes between Adam and Eve, ‘where the tender passions are concerned’.⁵⁴ Newbery repeatedly invokes ‘the best judges’, as he calls them,⁵⁵ especially Addison, to justify his choice of particular passages from the epic as ‘extremely beautiful’; he uses the same epithet to describe ‘On May Morning’.⁵⁶ ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’, meanwhile, feature as examples of *Descriptive Poetry*, a category which Newbery considers to be ‘of universal use, since there is nothing in nature but what may be described.’⁵⁷ Of the two poems Newbery observes:

In descriptions that are intended as ornamental, the poet should never say so much but that the reader may perceive he was capable of saying more, and left some things unobserved in compliment to his sagacity. *Milton’s L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are to be admir’d on this account, as well as others, for in these every thing passes as it were in a review before you, and one thought starts a hundred.⁵⁸

The emphasis here, we might note, is on ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ as challenging works that leave space for the reader’s ‘sagacity’ rather than foreclosing interpretative possibilities. Newbery’s reading may strike us as an overly confident characterisation

⁵² See my Ch. 2.

⁵³ *The Art of Poetry*, I. iv.

⁵⁴ *The Art of Poetry*, I. 28.

⁵⁵ *The Art of Poetry*, I. 32.

⁵⁶ *The Art of Poetry*, I. 34.

⁵⁷ *The Art of Poetry*, I. 128.

⁵⁸ *The Art of Poetry*, I. 128–29.

of early Milton's attitude to his readership; we can see how, principally, it serves his own purpose, turning the companion poems into educational exercises.

That same year, 1762, John Drummond, an English teacher in Edinburgh, published *A Collection of Poems for Reading and Repetition*, dedicated to Lady Mary Hay and Lady Henrietta Cunningham, who we may assume to have been his pupils. In Drummond's preface 'To the Public,' he suggests that such a various collection as he has provided is necessary, since 'those who are accustomed to read only one species of poetry, frequently contract a monotony, and disagreeable tone, or a dislike to all other kinds of poetry.'⁵⁹ Drummond has some specific instructions for his readers, too:

Such sentences as strike the fancy, or are suitable to the capacity of the learner, I would have committed to memory, and repeated slowly, articulately, and distinctly, in the presence of their instructors, of their fellow-students, or of those for whom they have a veneration and esteem ... It will not only strengthen the memory, and enable them to acquire an exact pronounciation; but also to conquer that hesitation of speech, very common to young people; to remove that simple downcast look, which is often interpreted as meanness of spirit, want of education, or of proper encouragement [...].⁶⁰

Drummond quotes from *A Mask* several times in this anthology, without attribution, under such headings as 'Chastity', 'Harmony', and 'Singing'; he includes excerpts from 'Il Penseroso' too, under 'Melancholy' and 'Nightingale', and 'L'Allegro' under 'Mirth'. Unlike the extracts from *A Mask*, though, those from the companion poems, as well as sections quoted from *Paradise Lost*, are attributed to Milton. This might suggest that 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' were, by this point, beginning to find a more comfortable foothold in the canon than any other of the *Poems*. Drummond's purpose is educational, like Newbery's, but he has chosen these poems on the basis of their fitness for repetition, as an elocution exercise; this is very unlike Newbery,

⁵⁹ John Drummond, ed., *A Collection of Poems for Reading and Repetition*, 2 vols. (1762), vol. I, v.

⁶⁰ *Poems for Reading and Repetition*, v–vi.

whose introduction to his volume culminates in a condemnation of those who ‘reduce our Poetry to be like *Echo*, nothing but sound’.⁶¹

Another, though rather more subtly, educational anthology, *The Beauties of English Poesy*, was put together by Oliver Goldsmith in 1767. Goldsmith announces in his introduction that he is filling a gap in the market: ‘My Bookseller having informed me that there was no collection of English Poetry among us, of any estimation, I thought a few Hours spent in making a proper selection would not be ill bestowed.’⁶² He follows by discoursing on the nature of this kind of collection, which he calls a compilation rather than a miscellany or anthology, in terms that recall Newbery’s combination of ‘precept’ and illustration:

Compilations of this kind are chiefly designed for such as either want leisure, skill, or fortune, to choose for themselves; for persons whose professions turn them to different pursuits, or who, not yet arrived at sufficient maturity, require a guide to direct their application. To our youth, particularly, a publication of this sort may be useful; since, if compiled with any share of judgement, it may at once unite precept and example, shew them what is beautiful, and inform them why it is so.⁶³

Goldsmith further explains that, though poetry is a matter of taste to some extent, he has ‘run but few risques’ of alienating his readers: ‘every poem here is well known, and possessed, or the public has been long mistaken, of peculiar merit.’⁶⁴ Unlike Newbery, whose wish to found a new generation of poets might conceivably be hampered by his belief in ‘the general depravity of mankind’,⁶⁵ Goldsmith clearly trusts in the *consensus gentium* to the extent that he is willing to invoke it as one of his selection criteria; it is therefore unsurprising that of Milton’s *Poems*, Goldsmith picks the already popular L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso,’ for his anthology. It is rather surprising, however, and at this point unprecedented, that he puts ‘Il Penseroso’ first.

⁶¹ *The art of poetry*, vi.

⁶² *The Beauties of English Poetry*, I. i.

⁶³ *The Beauties of English Poetry*, I. i–ii.

⁶⁴ *The Beauties of English Poetry*, I. iii.

⁶⁵ *The art of poetry*, I. iv.

Goldsmith introduces the two poems with a somewhat apologetic paragraph, as if it were still necessary for Milton's *Poems* to make amends for not being *Paradise Lost*:

I have heard a very judicious critic say, that he had an higher idea of Milton's stile in poetry, from the two following poems, than from his *Paradise Lost*. It is certain that the imagination shewn in them is correct and strong. The introduction to both in irregular measure is borrowed from the Italians, and hurts an English ear.⁶⁶

There is reason to suppose that Samuel Johnson is Goldsmith's 'judicious critic' here. Although Johnson would not formalise his opinions on Milton's poetry until his *Life of Milton* (1779), he and Goldsmith were friends (indeed, Johnson would write Goldsmith's epitaph); Johnson seems to have been identifiable by similar epithets (John Scott would later refer to him as an 'ingenious critick');⁶⁷ and he was particularly fond of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. He, too, found Milton's Italianism unpleasing, saying of *Paradise Lost* that 'Of the Italian writers without rhyme, whom Milton alleges as precedents, not one is popular; what reason could urge in its defence has been confuted by the ear.'⁶⁸ Here, too, we notice popularity as a criterion for literary judgement; this idea is a fretful tenet of Johnson's criticism, especially his criticism of Milton.

A Companion in a Post-chaise, an anthology published in 1773, also only includes 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' and, possibly suggesting its influence by Goldsmith's volume, again places them in the opposite order. This book too advertises its contents as having been chosen not only on the basis of enjoyableness, but that of longstanding literary repute: the collection's full title is *A Companion in a post-chaise, Or, an Amusement for a Leisure Hour at Home: containing a careful selection of the most approved*

⁶⁶ *The Beauties of English Poetry*, I. 39.

⁶⁷ 'On Milton's Lycidas', in John Scott, *Critical Essays on some of the poems of several English poets* (1785), pp. 37–64, pp. 40–41. Hereafter *Critical Essays*.

⁶⁸ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 294.

and entertaining pieces, in verse and prose, that have appeared for many Years past.⁶⁹ It is interesting to see that only ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ qualify on all these counts. From this point until the end of the eighteenth century, ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ are the only items from the *Poems* to be anthologized, whether in collections with a specifically pedagogical purpose, like 1774’s *The Speaker* – ‘miscellaneous pieces selected from the best English writers, and disposed under proper heads, with a view to facilitate the improvement of youth in reading and speaking’ –⁷⁰ or *The Poetical Preceptor; or, a collection of select pieces of poetry, extracted from the works of the most eminent English poets*, which emphasizes that it is ‘calculated for the Use, not only of Schools, but of private Gentlemen.’⁷¹ *The Speaker* was reprinted very frequently, well into the nineteenth century (it last saw print in 1835); so was the *Poetical Preceptor*; so too was a collection called *Poems on Various Subjects Selected to Enforce the Practice of Virtue*, first published in 1780, again featuring only ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’. Finally, in 1798, an anonymous ‘Gentleman, Late of Eton College’, wrote some ‘Hints to a Young Author’ in the *European Magazine*, in which he suggested ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ as a ‘guide for local poetry’.⁷²

Why ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ were considered educational and exemplary at this time we cannot categorically say. There had not been a great deal of critical commentary on them at this time, although one clue might lie in Newton’s comments from his 1752 edition, some of which I discussed above. Having commented on their ‘great variety of pleasing images’, their combination of ‘nature

⁶⁹ *A Companion in a Post-chaise* (Salisbury, 1773).

⁷⁰ *The Speaker* (1774), sig. A1^r.

⁷¹ *The Poetical Preceptor* (1777), sig. A1^r.

⁷² “‘Hints to a Young Author,’” By a Gentleman, Late of Eton College, Selected from a Private Correspondence’, *European Magazine*, xxxiv (1798), p. 171. Quoted in *Critical Heritage*, II. 33.

and experience,⁷³ Newton went on to observe that ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ were

certainly the best of Milton’s productions in rime, for the rimes in *Lycidas* are irregular, but yet we may observe that several things are said, which would not have been said but only for the sake of the rime ... Mr Pope, I have been informed, had remark’d several defects of the kind in these two poems; and there may be some truth and justness in the observation, which Dryden has made in the dedication of his *Juvenal*, that ‘rime was not Milton’s talent, he had neither the ease of doing it, nor the graces of it;’ but then it must be said, that he had talents for greater things, and there is more harmony in his blank verse than in all his riming poetry in the world.⁷⁴

These remarks, which we can see following in the tradition of the more occasional comments on the early poems I discussed above, tend to damn ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ with faint praise, even as they defend them from all angles. The poems’ regular rhymes are to be praised, but if they are found defective, or seen to warp the subject matter, this is because Milton was fit for ‘greater things’, the blank verse of *Paradise Lost*. One reason for the poems’ increasingly frequent selection for anthologies might be their regularity, then, their pleasing sounds and imagery; another might be that, as we have begun to see, they were among the few of Milton’s early poems countenanced by Samuel Johnson.

‘An anguished doubter, a strenuous believer’: Samuel Johnson and the *Poems of Milton*

Samuel Johnson had the occasion to set out his opinions on Milton’s life and poetry when, in 1773, he was commissioned by booksellers Tom Davies, William Strahan and Thomas Cadell to write biographies of 52 writers, intended to form the first ten volumes of a 60-volume edition called *The Works of the English Poets*. These biographies, which it would take Johnson several years to complete, soon became untethered from their original purpose, and from 1781 onwards would be published

⁷³ *Poems* (1752), p. 356.

⁷⁴ *Poems* (1752), pp. 360–61.

instead as the stand-alone, six-volume edition *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. Although Johnson appears to have thought of some of the biographies as labours of love, Milton's was not one of them. Some of this can be blamed on the nature of the undertaking. The *Works* were designed, as Richard Terry notes, to be 'a large-scale, inclusive project, eschewing literary, as opposed to commercial, discrimination'. All but five of the poets included for canonization were chosen not by Johnson, but by 'a cartel of booksellers', as Terry calls them, who were trying 'to reassert [their] possession of literary copyrights in the face of the incursions being made into their domain in Scotland.'⁷⁵ This exigency even affected the *Works*' point of departure: it was decided that Milton should be the first author in the collection not, especially, because of his virtuosity or influence, but because more recent works, starting with his, were subject to fiercer copyright disputes than older ones, so it was more important for David, Strahan and Cadell to stake their claim.⁷⁶ As Terry observes, this commercially astute but literarily indiscriminate approach sat ill with Johnson, who, 'unable to stifle the discriminations naturally arising to his own judgemental intellect,'⁷⁷ felt compelled to weigh in on which of Milton's works he felt to be most, and least, deserving of the critical enshrinement all were getting.

In his 1751 essay 'On the Difficulty of Defining Comedy', Johnson had written,

Definition is, indeed, not the province of man; every thing is set above or below our faculties. The works and operations of nature are too great in their extent, or too much diffused in their relations, and the performances of art too inconstant and uncertain, to be reduced to any determinate idea.⁷⁸

In the first place, it might strike us as ironic that a famous lexicographer, at that very moment at work on his *Dictionary of the English Language*, should so readily admit that

⁷⁵ Samuel Johnson, Preface to *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed. George Steevens, 8 vols. (1765), vol. I, p. 8. Hereafter *Preface to Shakespeare*.

⁷⁶ *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past*, pp. 216–217.

⁷⁷ *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past*, p. 250.

⁷⁸ 'On the Difficulty of Defining Comedy', *Rambler* IV. 220–230 (pp. 220–21).

‘definition is not the province of man’. In the second, it is curious that an essay supposed to be about the difficulty of defining comedy has turned into an essay about the difficulty of defining anything at all. Noticeably, Johnson’s concerns about defining a literary work closely resemble his thoughts about the impossibility of successfully defining words and, having once defined them, fixing them in a stable, transmissible system. In the preface to his *Dictionary* he admits: ‘No dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect, since while it is hastening to publication, some words are budding, and some falling away.’⁷⁹ That this impossibility does not immobilize or even much discourage Johnson, appearing rather to energize him, reflects the animating tension at the heart of his literary criticism too, which Martin Maner has characterized as that between ‘anguished doubt’ and ‘strenuous belief’.⁸⁰ This conflict, I suggest, centrally informs Johnson’s approach to Milton, perhaps especially to his *Poems*.

‘On the Difficulty of Defining Commentary’ continues its separation of nature and art with a further subdivision, when Johnson distinguishes ‘art’ between the human faculties of imagination on the one hand and logic, distinction, and regularity on the other:

Definitions have been no less difficult or uncertain in criticism than in law. Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the inclosures of regularity. There is therefore scarcely any species of writing, of which we can tell what is its essence, and what are its constituents.⁸¹

For Johnson, imagination is ‘licentious and vagrant’, ‘impatient of restraint’, while logic *embodies* restraint, the very ‘distinction’ and ‘regularity’ which imagination

⁷⁹ Preface to the Dictionary, in Gwin J. Kolb and Robert DeMaria, Jr, eds., *Johnson on the English Language* (2005), p. 110.

⁸⁰ Martin Maner, *The Philosophical Biographer: Doubt and Dialectic in Johnson’s Lives of the Poets* (1988), p. 21.

⁸¹ *Rambler*, IV. 221.

'baffles' and 'perplexes'. I suggest that this expression of worry, about being able to tell the 'essence' of a work of art apart from its 'constituents', is an important key to Johnson's otherwise mysteriously scabrous critique of John Milton's early poetry.

Both in his work on Milton and elsewhere, 'distinction', 'definition' and their cognates, along with kindred terms like 'selection' or 'discernment', are crucial for Johnson, and in his assessment, the *Poems* are almost a taunt to those faculties. This is partly because Johnson considers that the pieces are not praiseworthy in their own right, and are admired only because the 'blaze' of Milton's reputation 'drives away the eye from nice examination';⁸² and partly because they are often internally inconsistent, tonally various, imaginatively commingling features of more than one genre. But if Johnson censures Milton's early poems for defying strictures of genre and subject, he does so with a concomitant awareness of those strictures' inadequacy. He has used the same word, 'uncertain', to describe both art and literary definition. By this we may infer a parallel between the artist's attempted imposition of order and form on nature, from which the work of art results, and the literary critic's attempted imposition of his interpretative categories on works which, being combinations of imagination and logic, nature and art, do not obey them.

Writing his *Lives of the Poets*, in its own way a survey of the English canon, Johnson is painfully conscious that he has only the opinions of others, and now his own opinions, to go on when deciding what that canon should be. In her 1952 book *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism*, Jean Hagstrum pointed out how much, for Johnson, rests on his perception of 'taste',⁸³ a term that, as we have seen, mediates between the idea of personal aesthetic appreciation, and that of a broader, socially accepted set of

⁸² *Lives of the Poets*, I, 279.

⁸³ Jean Hagstrum, *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism* (Minneapolis, MN, 1952), pp. 26–27.

cultural opinions, the *consensus gentium*. To illustrate what Johnson thought of the *consensus gentium*, Hagstrum adduces his preface to the 1765 edition of Shakespeare's dramatic works. Johnson opens the *Preface to Shakespeare* by querying the wisdom of those who 'reverence [antiquity], not from reason, but from prejudice', who 'seem to admire indiscriminately whatever has been long preserved, without considering that time has sometimes cooperated with chance'.⁸⁴ Here we see the familiar element of contingency distressing Johnson, compounded by what he sees as the reading public's inability to discriminate between the effects of 'time' and 'chance'. He modifies this with the suggestion that the benedictions of time and chance can, if combined with sufficient discriminatory acumen, be a good enough reason for certain kinds of work to be valued after all:

To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientifick, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed they have often examined and compared; and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour.⁸⁵

Shakespeare's canonical status is a foregone conclusion for Johnson; he writes that the playwright 'may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration.' But he remains fatalistically conscious that 'human judgement, though it be gradually gaining upon certainty, never becomes infallible; and approbation, though long continued, may yet be only the approbation of prejudice or fashion.'⁸⁶ What saves such reflections from arbitrariness, therefore, is a focus on those 'criteria for discrimination', as Terry calls them, by which literature is to be praised or dispraised; in this case, when Johnson asks 'by what peculiarities of excellence *Shakespeare* has gained and kept the favour of

⁸⁴ *Preface to Shakespeare*, p. 5.

⁸⁵ *Preface to Shakespeare*, p. 6.

⁸⁶ *Preface to Shakespeare*, p. 8.

his countrymen.⁸⁷ The nature of those ‘peculiarities of excellence’, although some of them will be relevant to my discussion of Johnson’s relationship with Milton’s poetry, is in some ways less important than their centrality to Johnson’s argument about how to determine a writer’s canonical status. In the case of Milton’s *Poems* – responding, perhaps, to the higher profile some of these works were beginning to enjoy – Johnson’s main task is to correct what he sees as the reading public’s tendency to carry over praise indiscriminately from those Miltonic works that do deserve it, to those that do not.

Johnson finds Milton’s early poetry overrated, and blames this on two parties: first, Milton himself, who ‘seems to have had a degree of fondness not very laudable’ for his own early works;⁸⁸ secondly, and in part consequently, Milton’s readers, who have let their admiration for *Paradise Lost* bias their assessment of the earlier work. ‘Those who admire the beauties of this great poet,’ Johnson writes, ‘sometimes force themselves into approbation of his little pieces, and prevail upon themselves to think that admirable which is only singular.’⁸⁹ Impressed but not thunderstruck by *Paradise Lost*, Johnson was not minded to let his respect for that work cloud his judgement when it came to evaluating the rest of the poet’s oeuvre, which he did in a spirit we might call resentfully exhaustive. He writes in the *Life of Milton*:

All that short compositions can commonly attain is neatness and elegance. Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace; he overlooked the milder excellence of suavity and softness; he was a *Lion* that had no skill in *dandling the Kid*.⁹⁰

This observation is well known, particularly the *Paradise Lost*-derived metaphor of the lion and the kid to indicate Milton’s ungentle talent, which did not lend itself to working in miniature. Boswell quotes Johnson uttering another, similar, observation:

⁸⁷ *Preface to Shakespeare*, p. 8.

⁸⁸ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

⁸⁹ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278

⁹⁰ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

‘Milton, Madam, was a genius that could cut a Colossus from a rock; but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones’.⁹¹ As I suggest above, Johnson might have borrowed the ‘little things’ remark from Richardson’s description of Milton’s as ‘a Mind not Condescending to Little things’.⁹² There is something more subtly freighted, though, about the previous sentence, which veers into more general criticism – ‘All that short compositions can commonly attain ...’ – to suggest that Milton’s short compositions are *un*common, even ‘singular’, in failing to attain the ‘neatness and elegance’ that is usually all short poems can hope for, but that this singularity is not enough to recommend them.

Johnson is altogether at pains to make clear that although Milton’s early poems are unusual, this does not mean they are good:

The English poems, though they make no promises of *Paradise Lost*, have this evidence of genius, that they have a cast original and unborrowed. But their peculiarity is not excellence: if they differ from the verses of others, they differ for the worse; for they are too often distinguished by repulsive harshness; the combinations of words are new, but they are not pleasing; the rhymes and epithets seem to be laboriously sought, and violently applied.⁹³

Johnson takes a few different tacks here. For the moment I shall pass over the wider implications of his qualifying aside, ‘though they make no promises of *Paradise Lost*’, which seems to commit the very crime for which, elsewhere, Johnson condemns so many of Milton’s admirers: reading the *Poems* in the light of the epic. More immediately curious is the statement that follows. With his repeated averments that what is new or extraordinary about Milton’s shorter pieces is not new or extraordinary for the better, Johnson seems caught between an inherent appreciation of that which is recognizably ‘peculiar’, ‘different’, ‘distinguished’, or ‘singular’, and a dislike of the ‘repulsive harshness’ which, as he sees it, makes these particular poems

⁹¹ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1971), vol. IV, p. 305.

⁹² Jonathan Richardson Senior, *Life of John Milton*. Jonathan Richardson, Father and Son, *Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton’s Paradise Lost* (1734), xv. Hereafter *Life of Milton* (1734).

⁹³ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

stand out. Interestingly, as Christine Rees points out, the word ‘harshness’ in Johnson’s own *Dictionary* is illustrated by a quotation from Dryden about the ‘perpetual harshness’ of the sound of Milton’s ‘antiquated words.’⁹⁴ Dryden’s comments, from his preface to the 1685 *Sylvae*, strictly refer to *Paradise Lost*, but it is worth speculating that they underpin some of Johnson’s remarks here, in their qualified admiration for Milton – ‘the height of his invention, and the strength of his expression’ – and their warning against going beyond praising him, reasonably, as ‘excellent’, to the ‘idolatry’ of unadulterated praise.⁹⁵

When Maner described Johnson in 1988 as ‘an anguished doubter, a strenuous believer’, he sought to disabuse those who, on the basis of (then-)recent scholarship, had too readily replaced their ‘old imago, Johnson the dogmatic generalizer’, with ‘the new one, Johnson the empiricist’.⁹⁶ Maner suggests that Johnson’s style of biography ‘constantly subordinates the particular to the general’, by ‘using detail and anecdote to illuminate character’;⁹⁷ the second clause is accurate but not the first, since, as Maner himself elsewhere notes, Johnson might equally be said to prioritize the particular over the general. Johnson is intent upon problematising his own evidence, frequently ‘turning aside to evaluate his sources’ reliability,⁹⁸ and he takes care to notify the reader when his opinions have not been acquired first-hand – as with his assessment of Milton’s Italian poems, where Johnson admits he ‘cannot pretend to speak as a critic’.⁹⁹ Whether in assessing Milton’s life or evaluating his work, the balance between the particular and the general never convincingly tips for

⁹⁴ ‘Harshness’, in Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), p. 971, online ed. by Brandi Besalke, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&xi=970. Hereafter *Dictionary*.

⁹⁵ *Sylvae: or the Second Part of Poetical Miscellanies*, ed. John Dryden (1685), sig. a7^r–a8^v.

⁹⁶ *The Philosophical Biographer*, p. 5.

⁹⁷ *The Philosophical Biographer*, p. 6.

⁹⁸ *The Philosophical Biographer*, p. 22.

⁹⁹ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 279.

Johnson. Nowhere is this difficulty more pronounced than in his assessment of 'Lycidas'.

'Easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting': Johnson on 'Lycidas'

The first mention of 'Lycidas' in the *Life of Milton* comes near the beginning, when Johnson is simply listing Milton's productions in chronological order without much comment. He describes 'Lycidas' as an elegy, in which 'Milton's acquaintance with the Italian writers may be discovered by a mixture of longer and shorter verses, according to the rules of Tuscan poetry, and his malignity to the Church by some lines which are interpreted as threatening its extermination.'¹⁰⁰ Nothing is said here about the pastoral nature of 'Lycidas': Johnson calls it an elegy, but does not say for whom, focusing instead on the poem's Italian style and its author's Puritanism. It is odd that in this initial overview, Johnson does not find it necessary to mention the fact of the poem's pastoralism, which will come to dominate the more detailed critique that follows. There, he embarks on 'Lycidas' by saying:

One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed is *Lycidas*; of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. What beauty there is, we must therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of rough *satyrs* and *fauns with cloven heel*. Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief.¹⁰¹

We note the recurrence here of the term 'harsh', which Dryden had applied to *Paradise Lost*, and Johnson to all the English *Poems*. The remark about 'Lycidas' rhymes and 'unpleasing ... numbers' recollects Johnson's initial statement that 'Milton's acquaintance with the Italian writers may be discovered by a mixture of longer and shorter verses'.¹⁰² His expression of mistrust about the poem's capacity

¹⁰⁰ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 254.

¹⁰¹ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

¹⁰² *Lives of the Poets*, I. 254.

for real ‘grief’ – a direct rebuttal of Thyer’s remarks, as quoted in Newton’s edition of the *Poems*, that ‘grief is eloquent, but not formal’ – is heightened here by reference to an elegy by Cowley:

When Cowley tells of Hervey that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labours and the partner of his discoveries; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines!

‘We drove a field, and both together heard
What time the grey fly winds her sultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night.’¹⁰³

Johnson has already articulated his preference for Cowley’s Latin poetry to that of Milton, with the statement, early in the *Life*, that ‘the products of [Milton’s] vernal fertility have been surpassed by many, and particularly by his contemporary Cowley.’¹⁰⁴ Here, he is referring particularly to Cowley’s English poem ‘Upon the Death of Mr William Hervey’ (1642), a heartfelt poem of remembrance from one friend to another, during which Cowley apostrophizes the ‘fields of Cambridge, our dear Cambridge’, asking them, ‘Have ye not seen us walking every day? / Was there a tree about which did not know / The love betwixt us two?’¹⁰⁵

However, Johnson soon leaves the pretence of elegiac criticism behind, and moves to a broader attack on ‘Lycidas’ in terms of the pastoral:

In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting: whatever images it can supply, are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind.¹⁰⁶

This appears to be a dismissal of all pastoral literature, with ‘easy’ and ‘vulgar’ suggesting that pastorals lack complexity and are ‘easy’ for a poet to put together, and that, to use Johnson’s own definition of the word ‘vulgar’ in his *Dictionary*,¹⁰⁷ they

¹⁰³ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

¹⁰⁴ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 243.

¹⁰⁵ Abraham Cowley, ‘Upon the Death of Mr William Hervey’, ll. 41–44. *The Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley* (1688), p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Vulgar’, in *Dictionary*, p. 2232, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=2232.

are ‘plebeian’, partaking in and appealing to common tastes. While ‘disgusting’ was not necessarily quite so forceful a word then as it is now, the primary meanings of ‘disgust’, at least in Johnson’s dictionary, included ‘to strike with dislike or to offend’ and, more viscerally, ‘to raise aversion in the stomach.’¹⁰⁸ Yet when defining the pastoral, both in a *Rambler* essay of 1750 and in his *Dictionary* of 1755, Johnson had simply, neutrally called it ‘a poem in which any action or passion is represented by its effects upon a country life.’¹⁰⁹ Either Johnson’s opinion of the pastoral altered beyond recognition in the twenty-odd years between these comments and the publication of the *Life of Milton*; or there is something misleading about his focus on the pastoral ‘form’ of this particular poem.

Johnson’s two 1750 essays on the pastoral embed an important distinction between the originary, true-to-life classical pastorals of Theocritus and Virgil, and the inauthentic rusticity, the ‘studied barbarity’, of the post-classical pastoral as he sees it.¹¹⁰ The first essay ends with the promise that its sequel will prove ‘how little the latter ages have contributed to the improvement of the rustick muse.’¹¹¹ Johnson argues that the pastoral has longevity on its side:

It has been maintained by some, who love to talk of what they do not know, that pastoral is the most antient poetry; and, indeed, since it is probable, that poetry is nearly of the same antiquity with rational nature, and since the life of the first men was certainly rural, we may reasonably conjecture, that, as their ideas would necessarily be borrowed from those objects with which they were acquainted, their composures, being filled chiefly with such thoughts on the visible creation as must occur to the first observers, were pastoral hymns, like those which *Milton* introduces the original pair singing.¹¹²

If we take Johnson at his word here, he no sooner condemns the belief that pastoral is the most ancient poetic genre as the preserve of the ignorant – those ‘who love to

¹⁰⁸ ‘Disgust’, in *Dictionary*, p. 609, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=609.

¹⁰⁹ *Rambler* II. 19; and ‘Pastoral’, in *Dictionary*, p. 1462, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=1462.

¹¹⁰ *Rambler*, II. 22.

¹¹¹ *Rambler*, II. 17.

¹¹² *Rambler*, II. 11.

talk of what they do not know' – than he agrees with it. Further, he uses the idea of pastoral as the original genre to justify his assertion that it is universally pleasing, even for children:

For the same reason that pastoral poetry was the first employment of the human imagination, it is generally the first literary amusement of our minds. We have seen fields, and meadows, and groves from the time that our eyes opened upon life; and are pleased with birds, and brooks, and breezes, much earlier than we engage among the actions and passions of mankind.¹¹³

Johnson is convinced that the 'true pastoral,' as he calls it, continues to please readers throughout their life thanks to the initial purchase it has on their imagination, compounded 'perhaps with that secondary and adventitious gladness, which every man feels on reviewing those places, or recollecting those occurrences, that contributed to his youthful enjoyments.'¹¹⁴

In this light, it is worth reconsidering Johnson's comments on the failure of 'Lycidas' both with respect to 'nature, for there is no truth', and 'art, for there is nothing new.' This reinscribes the dichotomy between nature and art that was present in Johnson's essay on the difficulty of defining comedy – and everything – and we are thereby reminded of the distinction he sets up there between a genre's 'essence' and its 'constituents'. Johnson believes in the decline of the pastoral through time, as if it becomes harder and harder to keep the pastoral's 'essence' pure, uncorrupted by the appurtenances – the constituents – the genre has taken on over the years. He considers that post-classical pastoral authors and critics have not respected their genre's inherent simplicity; that they have not

paid sufficient regard to the originals left us by antiquity, but have entangled themselves in unnecessary difficulties, which, having no foundation in the nature of things, are wholly to be rejected from a species of composition in which, above all others, mere nature is to be regarded.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Rambler*, II. 11.

¹¹⁴ *Rambler*, II. 12

¹¹⁵ *Rambler*, II. 18.

While acknowledging that his model Virgil was himself an imitator, ‘taking Theocritus for his original,’¹¹⁶ Johnson ventures that in Virgil’s case, ‘every advantage of nature, and of fortune, concurred to complete his productions ... he was born with great accuracy and severity of judgement, enlightened with all the learning of one of the brightest ages, and embellished with the elegance of the Roman court.’¹¹⁷ The implication is that Virgil’s natural gifts combined with a period, and a political situation, conducive to poetic accomplishment; Johnson’s subsequent indictment of the pastorals of Spenser, Milton, and Pope suggests his belief that no such era has come along since.

Though he reverences a prior historical period in his own discussion of the pastoral, Johnson finds the mythical golden age to be an improper setting for modern pastoral poetry, and an inappropriate standard against which to judge it. For Johnson, setting a modern pastoral in the mythical past is an act of misdirected, overly literal historicism, unnecessary since the genre need not be a strict ‘dialogue, or narrative of men actually tending sheep,’ but can be, more generally, ‘a representation of rural nature ... exhibiting the ideas and sentiments of those, whoever they are, to whom the country affords pleasure or employment.’¹¹⁸ If one’s *dramatis personae* are not confined to shepherds, there is no need to set the action in a golden age when shepherds were the literati, or (which seems to bother Johnson even more) to strive for verisimilitude by coarsening the language in which the characters speak. Thus, Johnson disapproves forcefully of writers who

conceive it necessary to degrade the language of pastoral, by obsolete terms and rustick words, which they very learnedly call Dorick, without reflecting, that they thus become authors of a mingled dialect, which no human being ever could have spoken, that they may as well refine the speech as the sentiments of their

¹¹⁶ *Rambler*, II. 19.

¹¹⁷ *Rambler*, II. 18–19.

¹¹⁸ *Rambler*, II. 20

personages, and that none of the inconsistencies which they endeavour to avoid, is greater than that of joining elegance of thought with coarseness of diction.¹¹⁹

Johnson illustrates this criticism with a quotation from Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, but his use of the word 'Dorick' points quite squarely towards Milton and 'Lycidas', notably its final octet, which reveals that the entire foregoing poem has been the 'Doric lay' of an 'uncouth swain'.

In his next paragraph Johnson manages to attack both Spenser (for his dialect) and Milton (for his politics) at the same time, when he asks, 'What will the reader imagine to be the subject on which speakers like these exercise their eloquence? Will he not be somewhat disappointed, when he finds them met together to condemn the corruptions of the church of Rome?'¹²⁰ Of course, as he goes on to confirm, again without mentioning Milton by name, Johnson does not consider this to be the proper matter of pastoral poetry anyway. He says:

It is ... improper to give the title of a pastoral to verses, in which the speakers, after the slight mention of their flocks, fall to complaints of errors in the church, and corruptions in the government, or to lamentations of the death of some illustrious person, whom when once the poet has called a shepherd, he has no longer any labour upon his hands, but can make the clouds weep, and lilies wither, and the sheep hang their heads, without art or learning, genius or study.¹²¹

Johnson's criticism here – his discomfort with the 'mingled dialect' of an artificially rustic speaker, and the thematic impropriety of a supposed pastoral blurring into an indictment of Catholic corruption – is a veiled forerunner of the explicit critique of 'Lycidas' that appears in the *Life of Milton*. What irritates him in both instances is the idea of a writer lazily confusing the 'constituents' of pastoral with its 'essence', imagining that his work is done as soon as he identifies his main character as a shepherd, and expecting the rest to fall into place.

¹¹⁹ *Rambler*, II. 22.

¹²⁰ *Rambler*, II. 23.

¹²¹ *Rambler*, II. 25.

Unsurprisingly, Johnson's description of 'Lycidas' in the *Life of Milton* conveys just that frustration with what he sees as the poem's crowded, chaotic, indiscriminate atmosphere:

[...] Among the flocks, and copses, and flowers, appear the heathen deities; Jove and Phoebus, Neptune and Aeolus, with a long train of mythological imagery, such as a College easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge, or less exercise invention, than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion, and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping; and how one god asks another god what is become of Lycidas, and how neither god can tell. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour...

The poem has yet a grosser fault. With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverend combinations. The shepherd likewise is now a feeder of sheep, and afterwards an ecclesiastical pastor, a superintendent of a Christian flock. Such equivocations are always unskilful, but here they are indecent, and at least approach to impiety, of which, however, I believe the writer not to have been conscious.¹²²

Johnson's problem, here, seems on the one hand to be about Milton availing himself of the apparatus of pastoral too blandly, in a manner too pat and rote. His mythological allusions are said to be 'such as a College easily supplies' while further ennui is conferred by Johnson's paraphrasing of the poem's plot: 'how a shepherd has lost his companion', 'and how one god asks another god [...]', 'and how neither god can tell.' But on the other hand, while expressing his boredom at Milton's unimaginative interpretation of the pastoral in 'Lycidas', Johnson demonstrates equal unease with the poem's more experimental moments, the 'irreverend combinations' of 'trifling fictions', traditional to the pastoral, with the 'awful, sacred truths' that are the matter of Christian worship. Though he grudgingly exonerates Milton from the charge of impiety, Johnson is much offended by these acts of generic, thematic mixing. Yet he does not, except very obliquely, suggest that part of his offence comes from the fact that 'Lycidas' is supposed to be an elegy, a poem of mourning for an actual person. Focusing his fury on what he sees as Milton's failure to respect

¹²² *Lives of the Poets*, I. 279.

the true essence of pastoral, Johnson never properly takes ‘Lycidas’ to task for failing to respect the essence of elegy.

Christine Rees has an answer for this, which for a moment borrows from Johnson’s misleading focus on the ‘constituents’, rather than the ‘essence’, of pastoral,

In choosing to write his elegy in pastoral form, Milton opens up the radical potential of that conventional genre, and tests to the limit its capacity to accommodate difficult and bitter questioning – an effect that Johnson may well have grasped.¹²³

Identifying elegy as the genre of ‘Lycidas’, pastoral as the form, Rees is partly indulging a wish to humanise Johnson by ascribing biographical causes to his Miltonic discontents. Her discussion of ‘Lycidas’ is immediately preceded by an examination of Milton’s Sonnet XXIII (‘Methought I saw my late espoused saint’), in which she links Johnson’s emotional response to the sonnet with his feelings about the death of his own wife, Tetty, in 1752. Rees yokes his ‘anger’ at ‘Lycidas’ to that same loss, suggesting that ‘Johnson reacts to [‘Lycidas’] roughness with a violence of his own, which suggests a critical sensibility caught on the raw (rather than the *insensibility* of which his critics accuse him).¹²⁴

We are invited by Rees to suppose that the ‘difficult and bitter questioning’ about death in ‘Lycidas’, a function of Milton’s generic experimentation, is a reason for Johnson’s highly personal dislike of the poem. Even while disagreeing with this purely biographical interpretation of Johnson’s response to ‘Lycidas’, we might still note with interest that Rees’ description of the pastoral as a form, rather than a genre, mirrors Johnson’s own, in his remark about ‘Lycidas’ *form* being ‘that of a pastoral’. Given that Johnson’s *Dictionary* contains 13 definitions of the noun ‘form’, and none of them refers to the shape, still less the genre, of a work of literature, it is

¹²³ Christine Rees, *Johnson’s Milton* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 156.

¹²⁴ *Johnson’s Milton*, p. 156.

tempting to take the word more literally, at least for a moment, as in Johnson's first dictionary definition of 'form': 'the external appearance of anything.'¹²⁵ Rees could be said to do this when she suggests elegy is the primary genre of 'Lycidas', and that 'it is the *apparatus* of pastoral, the rococo rustic-role-playing, that [Johnson] rejects.'¹²⁶ This is not a totally groundless assumption: Johnson was writing at a time when Milton's inferior poetic imitators were, indeed, dressing themselves in the sheep's clothing of 'Lycidas'; the poem's 'pastoral form and irregular verse had become a pattern for the elegies of poetasters,' as Arthur Johnston puts it.¹²⁷ But moments later, and back to calling the pastoral a genre again, Rees identifies

the duplicity... which goes to the root of [Johnson's] quarrel with pastoral. The genre can be represented as a form of fantasizing that elides the distinction between feigning and falsehood; it devalues and trivializes reality, whether it is the reality of country life or emotional reality. Reality is a term which tends not to find favour with literary theorists, but it matters to Johnson.¹²⁸

It becomes clear that, far from being merely decorative, 'Lycidas' pastoralism is profound. Johnson asks us to believe, and subsequent critics mostly have believed, that his quarrel with 'Lycidas' is a quarrel with the 'easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting' *constituents* of pastoral, which do not seem to him to be appropriate accompaniments to its speaker's supposed 'grief'; in fact, he can be seen reacting much more energetically against the *essence* of pastoral, its elision of fantasy and reality and, especially, its mediated, attenuated relationship with the events of real life. 'Lycidas' is much more of a pastoral than it is an elegy, being strictly elegiac only in the most superficial sense, occasioned by the death of a friend of its author but largely given over to fearful projections of its author's own future. If Johnson disapproves of what he suspects to be the insincerity of Milton's mourning for

¹²⁵ 'Form', in *Dictionary*, p. 844, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=844.

¹²⁶ *Johnson's Milton*, pp. 165-66.

¹²⁷ Arthur Johnston, 'Poetry and criticism after 1740', in Roger Lonsdale, ed., *History of Literature in the English Language* (1971), pp. 257-98 (p. 262).

¹²⁸ *Johnson's Milton*, pp. 164-65.

Edward King, I want to suggest that this irritation was scarcely more than a pretext. Johnson did not mistake the true nature of ‘Lycidas’: a semi-hopeful, semi-trepidatious act of projection, in which the speaker both tortures and delights himself with thoughts of what his own death might mean, via the imagined – or, anyway, highly fictionalized – death of another version of himself. This is absolutely the matter of Renaissance pastoral, with the possibility it provides for the poetically framed testing-out of real-world concerns and fears. Fifty years before he wrote *The Life of Milton* – when, at twenty years old, he had just been forced to leave Oxford University after running out of money – Johnson had engaged in a similar act of poetic projection himself.

Johnson’s ‘The Young Author’, from 1729, draws heavily on the atmosphere of ‘Lycidas’, especially at its outset. The poem tells the story of a ‘peasant, long inclined to roam,’ who dreams of transcending his environment:

Pleas’d with the scene the smiling ocean yields,
He scorns the verdant meads and flowery fields;
Then dances jocund o’er the watery way,
While the breeze whispers, and the streamers play.¹²⁹

The peasant longs for literary fame and, ‘intrust[ing] his happiness to human kind’, tries his luck in London on the journalistic scene. The speaker warns us that this is a bad idea:

This thought once form’d, all counsel comes too late,
He flies to press, and hurries on his fate;
Swiftly he sees the imagined laurels spread,
And feels the unfading wreath surround his head –¹³⁰

and, sure enough, it is only a dream: the young author is met by hostility and failure. This did not happen to Johnson – after a tough start, he made a great success in literary London – but at the time of writing, it still could have done. Like Milton,

¹²⁹ Sameul Johnson, ‘The Young Author’, ll. 1, 3–6. In *Poems of Dr. Samuel Johnson* (1820), p. 59. All further references will be to this edition.

¹³⁰ ‘The Young Author’, l. 17, 23–26.

who was still on the verge of poetic greatness when he composed 'Lycidas' in 1638, part of Johnson's purpose when writing 'The Young Author' in 1729 was to express his fears about what might yet happen to him. If 'Lycidas' is exquisite torture to Johnson, this is certainly, partly, because its generic and linguistic experimentation strains his critical imagination to its limits; but also, relatedly, because it reminds him of something he would rather forget – not the death of his wife, but the fears and fallibilities of his own choice of profession, as dramatised by the miserable end of his own poetic surrogate, the ill-fated Young Author:

The pamphlet spreads, incessant hisses rise,
To some retreat the baffled writer flies;
Where no sour critics snarl, no sneers molest,
Safe from the tart lampoon, and stinging jest;
There begs of Heaven a less distinguish'd lot,
Glad to be hid, and proud to be forgot.¹³¹

'Properly selected, and nicely distinguished': Johnson on 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'

In the case of those of Milton's *Poems* that he does like, Johnson can be remarkably clement. He closes one section of the *Life* by observing, 'Surely no man could have fancied that he read *Lycidas* with pleasure, had he not known its author'; and begins the next by saying, 'Of the two pieces, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, I believe opinion is uniform; every man that reads them, reads them with pleasure.'¹³² At the level of rhetoric this is, as Rees points out, 'the tightest of turns'; Johnson moves 'from rejecting the validity of public opinion to endorsing it'.¹³³ But Johnson's remarks are uncontroversial precisely because, as he observes, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' were already far more popular than 'Lycidas' among the reading public – appearing, for instance, as I have shown, with much greater regularity in miscellanies and anthologies, both before and after Johnson's intervention on their behalf. When

¹³¹ 'The Young Author', ll. 29–34.

¹³² *Lives of the Poets*, I. 279.

¹³³ *Johnson's Milton*, p. 166.

sketching out the publication of the *Poems* 1645 in the first, purely biographical part of the *Life*, it is only ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ that Johnson mentions by name, saying: ‘About this time (1645), a collection of [Milton’s] Latin and English poems appeared, in which the *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, along with some others, were first published.’¹³⁴ Johnson praises the companion poems as ‘two noble efforts of imagination,’ whose ‘images are properly selected, and nicely distinguished’,¹³⁵ terms that would not look out of place in an anthologist’s introduction to the poems.

In any case, Johnson’s oratorical pivot is followed by what seems at first like an instance of contrarian hair-splitting, in which he asserts an opinion different from one of the few critical comments on ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ that he would then have been able to find: Lewis Theobald’s allusion to the companion poems in 1733. Johnson was not keen on Theobald as a reader of Shakespeare, criticizing ‘the inflated emptiness of his notes’ while assessing bygone scholars in the preface to his own 1765 edition of the *Works*, and finally summing up his forebear as ‘weak and ignorant ... mean and faithless ... petulant and ostentatious’.¹³⁶ Although Johnson does not invoke Shakespeare by name here (or, much, elsewhere – Shakespeare is conspicuous by his absence from Johnson’s discussion of *A Mask* too),¹³⁷ he expressly denies Theobald’s assertion that Milton was imitating the playwright with his companion poems:

The author’s design is not, what Theobald has remarked, merely to show how objects derive their colours from the mind, by representing the operation of the same things upon the gay and the melancholy temper, or upon the same man as he is differently disposed; but rather how, among the successive variety of appearances, every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 254.

¹³⁵ *Lives*, I. 253.

¹³⁶ *Preface to Shakespeare*, p. 49.

¹³⁷ See *Johnson’s Milton*, p. 175.

¹³⁸ *Lives*, I. 279.

Johnson's argument is that unlike Theobald's interpretation of the bifurcated consciousness of lovesick Orsino, for whom the same music is a source of both pleasure and pain, l'Allegro does not respond cheerfully to the selfsame prompts that make il Penseroso pensive. Rather, he chooses landscapes and objects that stimulate him to cheer – 'scenes of splendour, gay assemblies, and nuptial festivities' – while il Penseroso 'walks the cloister or frequents the cathedral'.¹³⁹ Although he does not say so, then, there is a sense in which Johnson is arguing here that Milton exceeds Shakespeare, or, at least, Theobald's (possibly impoverished) idea of what Shakespeare does with Orsino's speech, in terms of psychological realism.

Eager once more to link Johnson's depressive nature with his feelings about Milton's poetry, Rees writes that 'it is difficult to escape the conclusion ... that Johnson's ultimate preference, like that of many eighteenth-century readers, lies with *Il Penseroso*'.¹⁴⁰ Johnson's personal preference for lonesome contemplation over sociable amusement seems to be less evident, here, than his wish to subdivide Theobald's over-simple argument further, by suggesting that the weight of Milton's skill is focused on 'Il Penseroso'. Johnson calls l'Allegro's night-time entertainments 'the fanciful narratives of superstitious ignorance',¹⁴¹ while he sees il Penseroso, in a scholarly scene, 'contemplating the magnificent or pathetick scenes of tragick and epick poetry',¹⁴² and he implicitly critiques Milton's less than exhaustive exploration of the cheerful man's life, as opposed to that of il Penseroso, saying, 'For the old age of Chearfulness he makes no provision; but Melancholy he conducts with great

¹³⁹ *Lives*, I. 280.

¹⁴⁰ *Johnson's Milton*, p. 171.

¹⁴¹ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 280.

¹⁴² *Lives of the Poets*, I. 280.

dignity to the close of life.¹⁴³ Johnson's closing remarks on the companion poems praise them as 'two noble efforts of imagination', and we see his usual discriminatory zeal satisfied by the observation that, internally at least, 'through these two poems the images are properly selected, and nicely distinguished'. Johnson uses the same vocabulary of discrimination and distinction, however, to express uncertainty about whether *l'Allegro* and *il Penseroso* are different enough from each other:

The colours of the diction seem not sufficiently discriminated, and I know not whether the characters are kept sufficiently apart. No mirth can, indeed, be found in his melancholy; but I am afraid that I always meet with some melancholy in his mirth.¹⁴⁴

We can make sense of this by reading 'I am afraid' as not regretful, but rhetorical, and a touch disingenuous. In these remarks, Johnson is not complaining that the companion poems are equally intermingled and therefore indistinguishable, but observing that the melancholy of 'Il Penseroso' bleeds into the mirth of 'L'Allegro'. In this way, despite appearing to complain of a lack of discrimination, Johnson is actually admitting that Milton did choose between 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. He would not have been comfortable assessing these poems as truly balanced, with Milton really not having come down on one side or another: his demarcatory imagination much prefers to wrangle with the possibility that the Allegro-Penseroso split was false all along.

'The dawn, or twilight of *Paradise Lost*' – Johnson on *A Mask*

Johnson's most lengthy critique of Milton's shorter works in the *Life* is focused on *A Mask*. His first reference to it uses the occasion to poke fun at the supposed extent of Milton's reading as a young man:

¹⁴³ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 280. In this Johnson is also paraphrasing Thyer's comment, as quoted in Newton's *Poems* (1752), p. 380, about Milton 'conducting the Penseroso so happily to the last scene of life, as leaves the reader's mind fully satisfied'.

¹⁴⁴ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 280.

When he left the university he returned to his father, then residing at Horton in Buckinghamshire, with whom he lived five years; in which time he is said to have read all the Greek and Latin writers. With what limitations this universality is to be understood who shall inform us?

It might be supposed that he who read so much should have done nothing else; but Milton found time to write the Masque of *Comus* [...].¹⁴⁵

Johnson is teasing; but there is some truth in his wish to bring Milton down to earth from the excessive approbations of those who would seek to ‘shift and palliate’ his faults.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, this can seem Johnson’s whole aim in the *Life*, and in all of his *Lives of the Poets*, which are always careful to point out the flaws in people or works he believes have been unfairly praised. But – as is implied by his sardonic use of it as evidence that Milton cannot have spent *all* his time reading – *A Mask* is a slightly different matter. As we shall see, although Johnson does not stint from criticizing this work (and while he defines it as ‘the greatest of [Milton’s] juvenile performances’,¹⁴⁷ all this, arguably, means is that it is the longest),¹⁴⁸ in the critique that follows he is nevertheless curiously disposed to parse *A Mask*’s good qualities from what he sees as its failures, particularly its failure to live up to its own generic requirements. Given his troubled relationship with genre, this could be seen to amount to a kind of special treatment from Johnson, the reasons for which merit examination.

From the outset, Johnson is keen to mention the attributes of *A Mask* that might make it worthy of inclusion in the canon, confirming that it

was presented at Ludlow, then the residence of the Lord President of Wales, in 1634, and had the honour of being acted by the Earl of Bridgewater’s sons and daughter. The fiction is derived from Homer’s *Circe*; but we never can refuse to any modern the liberty of borrowing from Homer:

¹⁴⁵ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 245.

¹⁴⁶ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 253.

¹⁴⁷ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 280.

¹⁴⁸ Lonsdale points out that ‘when using “greatest” of literary works SJ usually means “longest” or “most elaborate”, rather than “most excellent”, though this can be ambiguous.’ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 412.

‘ – a quo ceu fonte perenni
Vatum Pieriis ora rigantur aquis.’

[by whom the mouths of poets are moistened as if by eternal waters from the fountain of the Muses].¹⁴⁹

Rather than be irritated with Milton for lacking originality, as he is in relation to *Lycidas*, Johnson endorses his borrowing from Homer as an act of *imitatio*. The quotation he chooses is a sombre one, from Ovid’s *Amores* III. 9. Ovid’s poem is an elegy for the poet Tibullus, which compares his loss to that of Orpheus, Apollo, and Homer, remarking that even their poetic gifts could not save them, since ‘*omne sacrum mors inportuna profanat*’ [‘greedy death desecrates all sanctuaries’].¹⁵⁰ The poem’s tone is simultaneously bitter that even the talented and the virtuous must die, apostrophizing Tibullus to ask, ‘*Quid vos sacra iuvant? quid nunc Aegptia prosunt / sistra? quid in vacuo secubuisse toro?*’ [‘What help are your rites? What use are your Egyptian sistrums? Or your having slept in an empty bed?’],¹⁵¹ uncertain about the possibility of an afterlife, for poets or anyone, wondering ‘*Si tamen e nobis aliquid nisi nomen et umbra / resta?*’ [‘if something of us remains apart from a shadow and a name’],¹⁵² and convinced that poetry itself, at least, survives beyond the death of its creator: ‘*defugiunt avidos carmina sola rogos*’ [‘poems alone escape the hungry grave’].¹⁵³ These ideas are present, of course, in Milton’s own elegies, in his fearful engagement with the indiscriminancy of death, the apparent irrelevance to the Fates of having lived one’s life well or badly, and the possibility of defending against this with a well-crafted poetic legacy. Tonally, this allusion is in keeping with the project of the *Works of the English Poets*, and Johnson’s accompanying *Lives*, as an idea; but it is also inherently nostalgic, hearkening back to an earlier, more typically sixteenth- or seventeenth-century

¹⁴⁹ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 245.

¹⁵⁰ Ovid, *Amores* III. ix, l. 19, in *Heroides and Amores*, ed. Grant Showerman (Cambridge, MA, 1947), p. 486.

¹⁵¹ *Amores*, III. ix. 33–34. *Heroides and Amores*, p. 488.

¹⁵² *Amores*, III. ix. 59–60. *Heroides and Amores*, p. 490.

¹⁵³ *Amores*, III. ix. 28. *Heroides and Amores*, p. 488.

understanding of literary history as an inherently ethical discipline, rather than the more selective, scholarly practice Johnson's project came to exemplify. This could be said to demonstrate, further, Johnson's ambivalence about the criteria by which authors and works had been chosen for canonisation in the *Works of the English Poets*.

Johnson's next mention of the masque is more obviously querulous. Tracing Milton's descendants, he describes a granddaughter, Elizabeth Foster, for whom a benefit performance of Dalton's musical adaptation of the *Mask, Comus*, was staged in 1750, and rather makes it seem as if Milton, a cranky, misogynistic fussy, was to blame for her impoverishment:

She knew little of her grandfather, and that little was not good. She told of his harshness to his daughters, and his refusal to have them taught to write; and, in opposition to other accounts, represented him as delicate, though temperate, in his diet. In 1750, April 5, *Comus* was played for her benefit. She had so little acquaintance with diversion or gaiety, that she did not know what was intended when a benefit was offered her. The profits of the night were only one hundred and thirty pounds ... This was the greatest benefaction that *Paradise Lost* ever procured the author's descendents; and to this he who has now attempted to relate his Life, had the honour of contributing a Prologue.¹⁵⁴

Leaving aside Johnson's evident pleasure at having ratified his beliefs about Milton's 'Turkish contempt of females,'¹⁵⁵ and a hint about his financial imprudence, there is also the remark, broader in its implications, that £130 from a charity performance of *Comus* was 'the greatest benefaction *Paradise Lost* ever procured the author's descendents'. While at one level the point is clear – Milton's greater work brought his offspring no financial security, and his lesser work was of only meagre assistance – Johnson is also rhetorically conflating *A Mask* with *Paradise Lost* here, a dubious honour, but one he does not bestow on any other of the *Poems*.

As he says, Johnson wrote the preface for this performance of *Comus*, and it is a

¹⁵⁴ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 277.

¹⁵⁵ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 276.

composition worth examining. His opening lines essentially ask support for this work on the basis of the audience's (patriotic) admiration for *Paradise Lost*:

Ye patriot Crouds, who burn for *England's* Fame,
Ye Nymphs, whose Bosoms beat at MILTON's Name,
Whose gen'rous Zeal, unbought by flatt'ring Rhimes,
Shames the mean Pensions of *Augustan* Times;
Immortal Patrons of succeeding Days,
Attend this prelude of perpetual Praise!¹⁵⁶

'Prelude' in Johnson's dictionary is either 'some short flight of music played before a full concert,' or 'something introductory; something that only shews what is to follow.'¹⁵⁷ The word, therefore, can apply both to Johnson's preface to this performance, and to the way in which Johnson views *A Mask* relating to *Paradise Lost*. This possible, elliptical allusion is the only moment where Johnson could even be speculated to be mentioning the masque itself in his preface: the rest is all exhortations to the audience to 'crown desert – beyond the grave', by financially supporting Milton's granddaughter on account of her grandfather's genius. There is a sense in which Johnson's endorsement of this performance – his request that the audience borrow from their love of Milton to bestow some kindness on his descendant – partakes in, or at least requires his audience to partake in, the very activity for which he will later censure Milton's admirers, 'forc[ing] their own judgement into false approbation of his little pieces'¹⁵⁸ out of a displaced admiration for *Paradise Lost*.

Johnson does not properly assess *A Mask* in the *Life* until later, with his more detailed survey of the early poetry. He builds up to it, via 'Lycidas', 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' and introduces it as 'the greatest of [Milton's] juvenile performances ... in

¹⁵⁶ Samuel Johnson, *A New Prologue Spoken by Mr. Garrick, Thursday, April 5, 1750. At the Representation of Comus* (1750), p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ 'Prelude', in *Dictionary*, p. 1556, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=1556.

¹⁵⁸ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

which may very plainly be discerned the dawn or twilight of *Paradise Lost*.¹⁵⁹ In the *Dictionary*, Johnson defines ‘twilight’ as ‘the dubious or faint light before sunrise, and after sunset; obscure light; uncertain view’.¹⁶⁰ this accords with his idea of *A Mask* as containing, in nascency, ‘that system of diction, and mode of verse, which [Milton’s] maturer judgement approved’, and which is exhibited in *Paradise Lost*.¹⁶¹ But there is something disjointed about the relationship between Johnson’s clear-cut assurance of what may ‘plainly be discerned’ in the masque, and the somewhat nebulous foreshadowings of *Paradise Lost* with which he illustrates that claim. The highest praise Johnson gives *A Mask* is to say:

A work more truly poetical is rarely found; allusions, images, and descriptive epithets, embellish almost every period with lavish decoration. As a series of lines, therefore, it may be considered as worthy of all the admiration with which the votaries have received it.¹⁶²

While pausing to note that Johnson finds ‘truly poetical’ in *A Mask* some of the very qualities he disdained in ‘Lycidas’ (its allusiveness, for instance), we note the stipulation ‘as a series of lines,’ for the conditions under which *A Mask* may justly be appreciated, as well as by the word ‘votary’ to describe admirers of the work. It may be worth observing that Johnson illustrated ‘votary’ in his dictionary exclusively with examples of excessive, fatuous adulation (rather than usages conveying simply wholehearted worship).¹⁶³ It is also an exaggeration on Johnson’s part to suggest that *A Mask* – the original masque, not *Comus*, the bowdlerized play – had many ‘votaries’ at all. While from 1740 onwards it had been more common for parts of *A Mask*, often unattributed, to be collected in poetical compilations, Dalton’s adaptation was far better known than Milton’s original. Some of Johnson’s comments suggest he is not always scrupulous to distinguish between the two.

¹⁵⁹ *Lives of the Poets*, I, 280.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Twilight’, in *Dictionary*, p. 2117, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=2117.

¹⁶¹ *Lives of the Poets*, I, 280.

¹⁶² *Lives of the Poets*, I, 280.

¹⁶³ See entries under ‘Votary’, *Dictionary*, p. 2222, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=2222.

Indeed, the terms of Johnson's criticism of *A Mask*, once he has gone so far as to confirm his admiration for it 'as a series of lines,' reflect an impatience with the work that resembles the impatience of those adaptors who turned Milton's original into a musical, believing that 'pure Poetry unmixed with passion, however admired in the closet, has scarce ever been able to sustain itself on the stage.'¹⁶⁴ Sometimes, too, as with 'Lycidas,' it is hard to tell whether Johnson is angrier with *A Mask* for flouting the constraints of its genre, or for obeying them. As Rees points out, there is evidence to suggest the latter:

[Johnson's] dictionary definition [of 'masque'], 'A dramattick performance, written in a tragick stile without attention to rules or probability,' may be inadequate by later scholarly standards, but it does imply that to blame any example of masque because 'the action is not probable' – Johnson's initial objection to *Comus* – is illogical, like blaming a species for displaying its defining characteristic. Johnson deliberately chooses to expect more of *Comus* than its genre appears to allow.¹⁶⁵

Johnson's assessment of *A Mask* in the *Life*, though, is more complicated than these remarks suggest. He writes:

As a drama *Comus* is deficient. The action is not probable. A Masque, in those parts where supernatural intervention is admitted, must indeed be given up to all the freaks of imagination; but, so far as the action is merely human, it ought to be reasonable, which can hardly be said of the conduct of the two brothers; who, when their sister sinks with fatigue in a pathless wilderness, wander both away together in search of berries too far to find their way back, and leave a helpless Lady to all the sadness and danger of solitude. This however is a defect overbalanced by its convenience.¹⁶⁶

Johnson has different criteria for judging drama than for judging the masque, and he could not be clearer in establishing this than with his definition of drama in the *Dictionary*, which calls it 'a poem accommodated to action; a poem in which the action is not related, but represented; and in which therefore such rules are to be observed as make the representation probable.'¹⁶⁷ Johnson does blame *Comus* for

¹⁶⁴ *Comus: a Masque* (1772).

¹⁶⁵ *Johnson's Milton*, p. 175.

¹⁶⁶ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 281.

¹⁶⁷ 'Drama', *Dictionary*, p. 645, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=645.

displaying the characteristics of a masque; but this is because he insists – we might say, unfairly – on judging it not as a masque, but as a drama.

Tellingly, ‘drama’ in a slightly broader sense is what Johnson found missing from almost the whole of Milton’s oeuvre. As Rees notices, the above-quoted remark about the ‘deficiency’ of *Comus* is echoed by what Johnson later says of *Paradise Lost*, that ‘original deficiency cannot be supplied.’¹⁶⁸ For Rees:

Although in *Comus* it is attributed to genre and in *Paradise Lost* to subject, at root it is the same deficiency. Johnson’s case against Milton’s masque could be summed up in the phrase he uses for the greater work: ‘want of human interest.’¹⁶⁹

In this respect, Johnson’s quarrel with *Paradise Lost* lies more with its premise than with its execution:

[*Paradise Lost*] comprises neither human actions nor human manners. The man and woman who act and suffer are in a state which no other man or woman can ever know. The reader finds no transaction in which he can be engaged, beholds no condition in which he can by any effort of imagination place himself; he has, therefore, little natural curiosity or sympathy.¹⁷⁰

In one view, the more successful Milton’s rendering of his prelapsarian theme, the less successful Johnson would have found the poem from the point of view of ‘human interest’. In a way he dislikes *Paradise Lost* for being itself; we could say this of ‘Lycidas’, and certainly of *A Mask*, too, whose stylised improbability, integral to the masque as a genre, offends Johnson because he is determined to read Milton as a dramatist here instead, not necessarily out of any special allegiance to drama as a genre, but rather out of a wish to find correspondences between the masque and *Paradise Lost*.

¹⁶⁸ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 290.

¹⁶⁹ *Johnson’s Milton*, p. 179.

¹⁷⁰ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 289.

Johnson's conclusion: 'a greater work calls for greater care'

Johnson closes his literary assessment of Milton's *Poems* with a brief, feinting look at the sonnets – 'of the best it can only be said, that they are not bad' – during which he repeats an opinion offered first in the *Dictionary*, that the sonnet form is 'not very suitable to the English language'. Though the *Dictionary* quotes Milton's Sonnet XI in full, by way of illustrating what a sonnet is, having stated that the form 'has not been used by any man of eminence since *Milton*',¹⁷¹ this interacts curiously with the fact that it is during his biography of Milton, discussing the mediocrity of Milton's sonnets, that Johnson chooses to place a more detailed explanation of his dislike of the form: 'The fabrick of a sonnet, however adapted to the Italian language, has never succeeded in ours, which, having greater variety of termination, requires the rhymes to be often changed.'¹⁷² This is one last instance of a tendency we have seen all the way through Johnson's discussion of Milton's shorter poems, which is to take each one as simultaneously disrespecting and instantiating their genre – a tendency noticed immediately upon the *Life*'s publication by William Cowper, who wrote in a letter of 1779 that Johnson had

passed sentence of condemnation of *Lycidas*, and ... taken occasion, from that charming poem to expose to ridicule (what is indeed ridiculous enough) the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions, as if *Lycidas* was the prototype and pattern of them all.¹⁷³

Even in the *Life*'s most quarrelsome moments, we are altogether struck by a certain credulity on Johnson's part, as when, (mis)quoting Milton's afterword to 'The Passion' – 'This Subject the Author finding to be above the years he had, when he

¹⁷¹ 'Sonnet', in *Dictionary*, p. 1882, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/?page_id=7070&i=1882.

¹⁷² *Lives of the Poets*, I. 282.

¹⁷³ William Cowper to the Rev. William Unwin, 31st October, 1779, in *Complete Works of William Cowper*, ed. T. S. Grimshawe (1876), p. 40. Quoted in Warren Fleischauer, 'Johnson, *Lycidas* and the Norms of Criticism', in Mahba Wagdi, ed., *Johnsonian Studies* (Cairo, 1962), pp. 236–256 (p. 241).

wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished' –¹⁷⁴ he resentfully jokes, as evidence of his subject's self-regard:

What [Milton] has once written he resolves to preserve, and gives to the publick an unfinished poem, which he broke off because he was *nothing satisfied with what he had done*, supposing his readers less nice than himself.¹⁷⁵

The apparent cynicism of Johnson's joke here relies, however, on an initial act of naivety in taking Milton at his word that, 'nothing satisfied' with 'The Passion', he put it into the *Poems* out of pure thoroughness. Johnson could actually be said to swallow wholesale the preparatory myth of the *vates futurus* that the 1645 volume embeds from its title-page on; the promise made in 'Ad Patrem' that Milton will one day be 'crowned with laurels, a true epic poet,'¹⁷⁶ with his juvenile compositions not dismissed, nor utterly forgotten, but seen in the context of their poet's ultimate oeuvre.¹⁷⁷ When Johnson speaks somewhat dismissively of the *Poems* – "These little pieces may be dispatched without much anxiety; a greater work calls for greater care. I am now to examine *Paradise Lost* ...' –¹⁷⁸ he is, at one level, doing no more than following Milton's instructions, reading his career backwards from the crowning achievement of *Paradise Lost*, via the curious '*gemelle liber*' that is Milton's first, multilingual, multigeneric offering.¹⁷⁹

Johnson does not approach any of Milton's individual works with reverence, not even *Paradise Lost* – he is too particular for that – and he displays an animatedly, if not always consistently, antagonistic attitude to the genre experimentation of these poems. But by reading the *Poems* so determinedly in the light of their author's greater

¹⁷⁴ CSP, p. 125.

¹⁷⁵ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

¹⁷⁶ 'Ad Patrem', ll. 101–101: 'Ergo ego iam doctae pars quamlibet ima catervae / Victrices hederas inter, laurosque sedebo'. CSP, p. 158.

¹⁷⁷ 'Ad Patrem', ll. 115, 119–120: 'Et vos, O nostri, iuvenilia carmina ... Forsitan has laudes, decantatumque parentis / Nomen, ad exemplum, sero servabitis aevo.' CSP, p. 158.

¹⁷⁸ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 282.

¹⁷⁹ 'Ad Joannem Rousium', l. 1, CSP, p. 303.

work, Johnson ultimately embodies the believing half of the ‘anguished doubter’ / ‘strenuous believer’ dichotomy. Cavilling at the *Poems* (1645) for failing to live up to the standard of *Paradise Lost*, Johnson is profoundly faithful to Milton’s wishes: he recognizes that the poet’s own trajectory is his subject matter, but he does not interrogate the self-involvement implicit in this fact; he takes Milton at his own self-confident word. That contemporary and subsequent readers and editors of Milton found his assessment of the early poems so offensive was probably due to its personal nature, the early poems seeming fairer game for that sort of criticism, as I have suggested, than the epic or its two successors. Johnson’s successor in close examination of the *Poems* was Thomas Warton, whose assessment of them is much kinder. Yet in his own way, Warton is just as tendentious in his approach: his banishment of *Paradise Lost* from the text of his edition, even as a reference point, is so comprehensive as to seem an article of faith. Warton’s edition of the *Poems* identifies Johnson’s bias, but does not always recognise its own.

Chapter 4: 'Fictions more valuable than reality' – Thomas and Joseph Warton on the *Poems* (1645)

Introduction: 'Turning the tide against politeness and wit'

When Thomas Warton published his *Poems* (1777), his first collection of original verse for over twenty years (a period during which he had mostly been occupied with literary criticism), Samuel Johnson wrote the following epigram:

Whereso'er I turn my view,
All is strange, yet nothing new;
Endless labour all along,
Endless labour to be wrong;
Phrase that time has flung away,
Uncouth words in disarray;
Trickt in antique ruff and bonnet,
Ode and elegy and sonnet.¹

Although directed at Warton's poetry rather than his critical method, this jaunty octet is a useful guide to the brothers Thomas and Joseph Warton's approach to Milton's *Poems*.² The Wartons (Joseph, 1722–1800; Thomas, 1728–1790) were poet-critics, sons of Thomas Warton the Elder, who had been Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1718 to 1728. Joseph Warton was eventually Headmaster of Winchester College, while Thomas followed his father in becoming Oxford's Professor of Poetry, from 1756–1766, and was Poet Laureate from 1785 until his death five years later. Both of the brothers were classical scholars and critics of contemporary poetry, as well as poets in their own right; their respective bodies of work, certainly mutually semblant, are often grouped together as having instituted and defined a 'school of Milton' in English poetry. (The phrase is Thomas Warton's, and will be discussed below). Thomas and Joseph Warton both wrote poetry in acknowledged imitation of

¹ Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. during the Last Twenty Years of his Life* (1786), in William Shaw and Piozzi, *Memoirs of Dr Johnson*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (1974), p. 81. The poem is quoted in Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford and New York, 1986), pp. 19–20.

² Anecdotes suggest that Johnson meant the ditty affectionately: Piozzi reports Johnson introducing the lines with the disclaimer, 'Remember that I love the fellow dearly, now – for all I laugh at him.' *Memoirs*, p. 81.

early Milton, as well as writing critically about him; and in 1785 Thomas produced an edition of the *Poems*, the first of its kind for over thirty years.

In different but related ways, the two Wartons strove to develop, and then to propound, a perspective on Milton's early poetry which would both foreground and attempt to account for the very 'strangeness', 'uncouthness', and 'disarray' which Johnson deplored in Thomas Warton's verse. Perhaps the major contribution by Thomas Warton, in particular, to Milton studies was to assert this strangeness and uncouthness as virtues, claiming them on behalf of the romance genre – the late medieval, chivalric tradition hearkened back to by, for example, Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, of which work Warton had already made a critical study.³ In the preface to his edition of Milton's *Poems upon Several Occasions*, Warton suggests that 'Romances and fabulous narratives ... not yet driven away by puritans and usurpers' were a far greater influence on the *Poems* than had hitherto been noted, and that, 'comparatively, the classical annotator has here but little to do.'⁴ Warton's political and critical preferences are much in evidence in these remarks about romance, 'puritans' and 'usurpers'; his differentiation of himself and his ideas from previous critics of the *Poems* is also symptomatic of a broader reaction, shared by both Warton brothers, against what they see as the mannered classicism and politesse of the previous generation of poets and literary critics. David Fairer refers to this as the brothers' 'joint project to turn the tide against politeness and wit.'⁵

Joseph Warton never edited Milton nor wrote as concertedly as Thomas about him. But in his scholarly work he too makes frequent reference to Milton's shorter poems,

³ Thomas Warton, *Observations on the Faerie Queene* (1754).

⁴ *PSO* (1785), xx–xi.

⁵ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700–1829* (London and Edinburgh, 2003), p. 153.

demonstrating an attitude subtly different from, yet critically compatible with, that of his brother. While this chapter will focus principally on the edition of Milton's poems by Thomas Warton, it will also embrace some of Joseph Warton's poetry and literary criticism, with the aim of reconstructing, explicating, and analysing an attitude to the *Poems* that can be seen as distinctively Wartonian. It will present the Wartons' project, to canonize a specific incarnation of Milton (namely, pre-*Paradise Lost*), to locate him in a certain (romance) tradition, and to re-evaluate his early poems according to particular criteria: the poems' adherence or otherwise to formal and generic constraints; their peculiar 'Englishness', and their situation as forgotten or abandoned relics of an innately nostalgic poetic past. In this respect the Wartons can be seen responding to, and shaping, the wider changes in literary-critical fashion that would ultimately emerge as Romanticism. But they also take Milton very personally, exemplifying a critical approach to which the *Poems* have always been vulnerable. Not only do the Wartons, in keeping with almost every critic since the *Poems*' publication, see many events described in the volume as straightforwardly, biographically factual. They also project their personalities, their own poetic, critical, and political preoccupations, onto the figure of Milton as it emerges from the poems pre-*Paradise Lost*. Sometimes this is easy, but at other times tension results between the figure of Milton (however shadowy) that emerges from the volume, and the person Thomas Warton, in particular, needs him to be. That tension, and the contradictory ways in which Warton variously ignores, acknowledges, seeks to overcome it or surrenders to it, will be the main subject of this chapter.

Wartonian readings of Milton: the interplay of the subjective and objective

The approach of the Wartons towards early Milton is informed by an attitude of ‘historical sympathy,’ as Fairer calls it – a kind of historicism, whereby the reader must imagine himself into the chronological setting of the work he is studying.⁶ This enables the literature of the past, in theory at least, to be interpreted on its own terms, and freed from any anachronistic objections. So Joseph Warton remarks, in his 1756 *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, that ‘we can never completely relish, or adequately understand any author ... except that we constantly keep in our eye his climate, his country, and his age.’⁷ Thomas Warton puts it in similar terms in his *Observations on the Faerie Queene* (1754):

In reading the works of an author who lived in a remote age, it is necessary, that we should look back upon the customs and manners which prevailed in his age; that we should place ourselves in his situation, and circumstances; that so we may be the better enabled to judge and discern how his turn of thinking, and manner of composing were biass’d, influence’d, and, as it were, tinctur’d, by very familiar and reigning appearances, which are utterly different from those with which we are at present surrounded.⁸

Writing about this passage, Fairer identifies its paradoxicality: that, ‘typically of Warton, it subtly combines the subjective with the objective’ because, by emphasizing the past’s ‘very familiar and reigning appearances’, he also perforce emphasizes their difference and distance from the features of the present day. There is ‘an imaginative response, but it is based not on sympathetic identification, but on contrast.’⁹ For Fairer, this precarious balance between subjectivity and objectivity is characteristic of the poetry, as well as the literary criticism, of this time, and of the Wartons in particular. He writes: ‘Practitioners of the early eighteenth-century

⁶ Thomas Warton, *A History of English Poetry* (1774), ed. David Fairer, 4 vols. (1998), vol. I, p. 49. All further references will be to this edition.

⁷ Joseph Warton, *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756), in Adam Rounce, ed., *Alexander Pope and his critics*, 2 vols. (London and New York, 2004), vol. I, p. 5. All further references will be to this edition.

⁸ *Observations on the Faerie Queene*, p. 217, quoted in *A History of English Poetry*, I, 48–49.

⁹ *History of English Poetry*, I, 49.

romantic mode were not pretending that the objective and the subjective were the same but were ... experiencing an interplay between them.¹⁰ This is undoubtedly true of both Joseph and Thomas Warton's poetic compositions, which seek to express and externalize, objectively, what are highly subjective experiences – experiences frequently occasioned by encounters with remote and ancient items and places whose appeal lies in their distinctness from the ordinary and contemporary. It is true of their criticism too, which works both to identify what is special and distinct about Milton's *Poems* and also to bend them into the service of broader narratives about English poetry.

If I refer to Thomas and Joseph Warton as 'pre-Romantic' poets, I do so mainly in recognition of their chronological position in relation to first-generation Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge.¹¹ Where I discuss a 'romantic' sensibility or mode I will be obeying Thomas Warton's own definition from his manuscript 'Essay on Romantic Poetry':

The principal use which the ancients made of poëtry, as appears by their writings, was to imitate human actions & passions, or intermix here and there descriptions of Nature. Several modern authors have employed a manner of poëtry entirely different from this, I mean in imitating the actions of spir[it]s, in describing imaginary scenes, & making persons of abstracted things, such as Solitude, Innocence, & many others. A Kind of Poëtry which perhap[s] it would not be improper to call a Romantic Kind of Poëtry, as it [is] altogether conceived in the spirit, (though with more Judgement & less estrangement) & affects the Imagination in the same Manner, with the old Romances.¹²

Warton's vocabulary is far from scientific, and he conflates descriptive with literary-critical terms when discussing 'imaginary scenes' of 'spirits' as being conceived in a certain 'spirit' and affecting the 'Imagination.' Greater exactitude comes with his

¹⁰ *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 112.

¹¹ For a discussion of this group, see, for instance, Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford, CA, 1991).

¹² Thomas Warton, *Essay on Romantic Poetry* (1745); MS Trinity Ox, Bod. MS dep. d. 611, fol. 5^v. Quoted in *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 156.

excavation of the romantic sources for the work of the ‘modern authors’ whose writing he deems ‘Romantic’ in its affective qualities.

Fairer defines Warton’s idea of romanticism as follows (albeit referring to Spenser, rather than early Milton, whom we can, however, sensibly substitute):

For Thomas Warton, Spenser was specifically a romantic poet because he drew material from medieval romance and aroused the imagination of his reader. It was this linking of romance sources to romantic ‘affect’ that was the vital move in legitimizing romance for the eighteenth-century poet.¹³

This romanticism, both literal and affective, imbues the Wartons’ (particularly Thomas’) characterization of Milton’s early poems as romantic by virtue of being antique and dilapidated, having lain long undisturbed but also unappreciated; so that reading and interpreting them is both an act of service and a kind of violation. There is something of this dualism in Thomas Warton’s own poetry too, which Fairer describes as full of ‘springs and sources, sacred removed places where a mouldering text is still partly visible, or where an ancient language can yet be heard; a recovery of, and germination from, a hidden older text.’¹⁴ Warton’s poetic treatment of these ‘springs and sources,’ however, demonstrates his ambivalence towards the digging up of the past and the fruits of that exhumation.

A good example of this ambivalence as it plays out in poetry is Thomas Warton’s ‘Ode written at Vale-Royal Abbey in Cheshire,’ a lament for the ruined abbey, its ‘forgotten graves and scatter’d tombs,’¹⁵ in which the phrase ‘no more’ (a prominent phrase in ‘Lycidas’, of course) is repeated in a version of the *ubi sunt* motif, and where the speaker bewails:

¹³ *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 156.

¹⁴ David Fairer, ‘Thomas Warton, Thomas Gray, and the Recovery of the Past,’ in *Thomas Gray – Contemporary Essays*, ed. W. B. Hutchings and Williams Ruddick (Liverpool, 1993), pp. 146–170, p. 148.

¹⁵ Thomas Warton, ‘Ode written at Vale-Royal Abbey in Cheshire,’ l. 24, in *Poems* (1777). All further references will be to this edition, embedded in the text.

The golden fans, that o'er the turrets strown,
Quick-glancing to the sun, quaint music made,
Are reft, and every battlement o'ergrown
With knotted thorns, and the tall sapling's shade.
(ll. 9–12)

But Warton surprises us. After 72 lines of this kind of elegiac reflection, he reveals the identity of his speaker with the phrase 'Thus sings the muse' (echoing Milton's 'Thus sang the uncouth swain' at the end of 'Lycidas,' and fulfilling the same narrative function):¹⁶

Thus sings the Muse, all pensive and alone;
Nor scorns, within the deep fane's inmost cell,
To pluck the grey moss from the mantled stone,
Some holy founder's mouldering name to spell.
(ll. 73–76)

So far this is in keeping with Fairer's assessment, that dereliction and abandonment provoke the pre-Romantic imagination. But the lines that ensue, closing the poem, are almost palinodic:

Thus sings the Muse: – yet partial as she sings,
With fond regret surveys these ruin'd piles:
And with fair images of antient things
The captive bard's obsequious mind beguiles.

But much we pardon to th'ingenuous Muse;
Her fairy shapes are trick'd by Fancy's pen:
Severer Reason forms far other views,
And scans the scene with philosophic ken.

From these deserted domes, new glories rise;
More useful institutes, adorning man,
Manners enlarg'd, and new civilities,
On fresh foundations build the social plan.

Science, on ampler plume, a bolder flight
Essays, escap'd from Superstition's shrine:
While freed Religion, like primeval light
Bursting from chaos, spreads her warmth divine.
(ll. 77–92)

In this poem Warton characterizes the Muse as 'partial' and 'fond,' both words suggesting folly and ignorance in addition to mere preference; he ramps this up by

¹⁶ 'Lycidas', l. 186, *CSP*, p. 256.

accusing the Muse of deliberately deceiving the suggestible poet, when she ‘the captive bard’s obsequious mind beguiles.’ There follows the observation that the Muse’s ‘fairy shapes are trick’d by Fancy’s pen’, although the sense is slightly unclear: is the primary meaning of ‘trick’d’ here ‘bedecked’ (as in Johnson’s poem about Warton’s own poetry being ‘trick’d in antique ruff and sonnet’), or ‘deceived’? If the latter, the buck has been passed again, first from the poet to the muse and then from the muse to ‘Fancy’, who inspires the poet’s imagination via the Muse, but also leads him away from the path of reason. Fancy’s possession of a pen seems to prioritize the former definition of ‘trick’d’; a near-contemporary source, William Mason’s *Caractacus* (1764), bears out the currency of this meaning.¹⁷

Fancy, then, uses her pen for adornment; Science, in a continued play on the image of the quill, has an ‘ampler plume’ on which to take flight; Reason, it is implied, flies too, able from her vantage to ‘scan the scene with philosophic ken.’ There are notes of uncertainty – Science only ‘essays’ a bolder flight, how successfully we are not told; Reason is ‘severer’ than Fancy; the ‘social plan’ is prosy-sounding, even if it does ‘adorn man’ – but the poem ends on the confident image of Religion, ‘freed’ from whatever had confined her before, spreading her divine warmth, and Enlightenment rebirth after the age of Superstition. Problematizing as well as dramatising the imaginative effects of a romantic, ruined landscape, the ode on Vale-Royal Abbey altogether suggests a deep Warntonian ambivalence about the true role in contemporary poetry of this ancient, romantic past, whose obscurity was bound up with its lack of spiritual and social illumination.

¹⁷ Mason’s hero *Caractacus*, discussing with one Aulus Didius his request for mercy from the emperor Claudius, suggests that if Claudius pardons him, ‘his clemency, / When trick’d and varnish’d by your glossing penmen, / Will shine in honour’s annals.’ William Mason, *Poems* (Dublin, 1764), p. 212.

In the following statement from his (unfinished) *History of English Poetry*, Warton resembles no-one so much as his own fond regretful muse:

Ignorance and superstition, so opposed to the real interests of society, are the parents of imagination ... we have parted with extravagancies that are above propriety, with incredibilities that are more acceptable than truth, and with fictions that are more valuable than reality.¹⁸

Just as in the Vale-Royal Abbey ode, Warton admits in these elegiac lines that the ‘social plan’ is not well served by the sort of literature he anachronistically favours, and that this is why such ‘extravagancies’ and ‘incredibilities’ have fallen by the wayside. Yet he still considers those fictions, in some sense, to be ‘more valuable than reality.’ Admittedly the choice of words might be ironic: some of what Warton objected to in the previous generation of poets and critics was the allotment of commercial ‘value’ to works of fiction in the first place. (Warton does not discuss the role of certain of Milton’s *Poems* in miscellany and anthology culture, but these observations give a clue as to how he must have felt about it.) As part of his preface to the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, Warton accounts for his forebears’ lack of interest in Milton’s *Poems* in just these terms:

It was late in the present century, before [the *Poems*] attained their just measure of esteem and popularity. Wit and rhyme, sentiment and satire, polished numbers, sparkling couplets, and pointed periods, having so long kept undisturbed possession in our poetry, would not easily give way to fiction and fancy, to picturesque description, and romantic imagery.¹⁹

Warton is talking about two things at the same time here. The flaws he perceives as characteristic of the previous generation’s approach to poetry – ‘wit and rhyme, sentiment and satire, polished numbers, sparkling couplets, and pointed periods’ – are opposed not only to the qualities he vociferously lauds in Milton’s early work, but also to the qualities he pursues and would like to see praised in his own. Warton wants to enlist the *Poems* in his cause, the counterpointing of Augustan polish and wit with honesty and unmannered naturalism; that he does this by ignoring, as far as he

¹⁸ *History of English Poetry*, II. 462–63.

¹⁹ *PSO* (1785), iii.

can, all those of Milton's *Poems* that do not fit his required profile, is perhaps evidence of a fiction being more valuable to him than reality.

Joseph Warton, perhaps less tortuously than Thomas, imitates many of the 'romantic' features of Milton's *Poems* in his own work. His poem 'The Enthusiast: Or The Lover of Nature' is a paean to the tradition of the lonesome bard in a desolate landscape, with a speaker who is keener, for example, on spending time on 'some pine-tip'd precipice / Abrupt and shaggy' than basking among the beauties of Versailles.²⁰ The word 'shaggy,' along with its cognate 'shagg'd,' crops up twice more in the poem, and warrants attention for its meaning, its etymological derivation, and its source in Milton's masque. Joseph Warton's whole poem rests on its speaker drawing unfavourable comparisons between man-made art, of various kinds, and the delights of nature; so he would be

More pleas'd he slept in poor Evander's cott
On shaggy skins, lull'd by sweet nightingales,
Than if a Nero, in an age refin'd,
Beneath a gorgeous canopy had plac'd
His royal guest, and bade his minstrels sound
Soft slumb'rous Lydian airs, to sooth his rest.
(ll. 81–86)

Moreover, we are told, 'great Aeneas gaz'd with more delight / On the rough mountain shagg'd with horrid shades ... / Than if he enter'd the high Capitol / On golden columns rear'd' (ll. 74–75, 78–79), in a near-verbatim echo of Milton's 'caverns shagg'd with horrid shades' from *A Mask*.²¹ The word stands out, in the masque too, as an old-fashioned usage, the word 'shag' deriving from the Old English 'sceacga', which was rare even in its own time, as the *OED* notes:

²⁰ Joseph Warton, 'The Enthusiast: Or the Lover of Nature' (1744 rev. 1748), ll. 29–30, in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA, 2004). All further references will be to this edition, embedded in the text.

²¹ *A Mask*, l. 428, *CSP*, p. 202.

The Old English word occurs once (in a gloss), and the derivative *scæcgede* shagged *adj.1* twice. Otherwise neither the noun nor any of its derivatives has been found before the latter part of the 16th cent.²²

Unlike Thomas Warton's more tortured poetic engagement with antique, romantic techniques and attitudes, this poem by Joseph Warton appears to be a wholesale embrace of Milton as a romantic poet. Possibly it is a little too wholesale: both Warton brothers, as will be seen, criticised Alexander Pope for 'plagiarising' Milton; even the closest of Pope's admittedly close Miltonic imitations in 'Eloisa to Abelard' – 'Ye grotts and caverns shagg'd with horrid thorn' –²³ is no closer than Joseph Warton's imitation here. Yet, in his literary criticism if not his poetry, Joseph Warton seems to join his brother in recognising the need to reconcile the modern reader to potentially off-putting features in the works he is discussing. In Joseph's case, these works are mostly, though not only, classical; and in his capacity as editor of Virgil's *Aeneid* and translator of the *Georgics* and *Eclogues*, he frequently resorts to historicism as a kind of prophylactic, seeking anxiously to remove potential impediments to the modern reader's enjoyment of the text. This approach characterises both Thomas and Joseph Warton's approach to Milton's *Poems*, too.

'A marvel of differentiation': the Wartons on form and the canon

Joseph Warton's ready admission of historical difference, analogous to what Fairer calls Thomas Warton's 'imaginative response ... based on contrast', is identified by Trevor Ross as 'a marvel of differentiation.'²⁴ In his 1753 edition of the *Works of Virgil*, on the gruesome moment in *Aeneid* III where Aeneas tears at the roots and branches of the Thracian tree, causing it to ooze blood, Joseph Warton comments:

²² 'shag, *n.1*'. *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/177257?rskey=CfECP9&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 05, 2013).

²³ Alexander Pope, 'Eloisa to Abelard', l. 20, in *Selected Poetry*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford, 1994), p. 56.

²⁴ Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon* (Montreal, QC, 1998), p. 259.

The only way to judge truly of the ancients, in points that are purely ancient, is to imagine ourselves in their places, with the same sort of ideas they had, and the same circumstances of things about us. As we can very seldom do this, we are very often mistaken about them.

I cannot say that I approve this passage; but is not the fault in myself? Would it have shock'd me had I been born a Roman, in the time of Augustus, and had read it soon after the *Æneid* was published?²⁵

Despite his attempted historicism, there is something touchingly contemporary about Joseph Warton's approach here – his idea that the *Aeneid* was 'published' in the same way as an eighteenth-century book of poems might be, for example. His relativism works both ways, though, which is further evidence of his anxiety: he is at curious pains, for instance, to remind his reader that the Bible is better than the *Aeneid*, remarking that Book II's depiction of the destruction of Troy is 'sublime and pathetic; but how infinitely is it excelled by a passage in the prophet Isaiah, where he is speaking of the destruction of Babylon?'²⁶

At about the same time as preparing his edition of Virgil, Joseph Warton was authorized by his peers to undertake some pieces of English literary criticism. It was Samuel Johnson, in fact, who wrote to him on 8th March 1753, asking him to contribute seven essays on Shakespeare's plays for the *Adventurer* serial. In his letter, Johnson informs Warton that the *Adventurer* editors have already commissioned writers to deal with the 'imaginative' side of the plays, but 'the province of criticism and literature they are very desirous to assign to the commentator on Virgil.'²⁷

Jonathan Brody Kramnick writes of this episode:

The choice of Warton for the 'province of criticism and literature' is suggestive for several reasons. For one, it is predicated on his credentials as an editor of Virgil, which authorizes his criticism with the aura of the Greco-Roman classics and with the sort of philological 'commentary' practised on these texts. While Warton's 'fund

²⁵ *The Works of Virgil, in Latin and English*, with notes on the whole by Joseph Warton, 4 vols. (1753), vol. II, pp. 191–92. All further references will be to this edition, shortened to *The Works of Virgil*.

²⁶ *The Works of Virgil*, vol. II, p. 46.

²⁷ Samuel Johnson, *Letters*, ed. Bruce Redford, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1994), vol. I, pp. 67–68. We must assume that although Warton's edition of Virgil had not yet been published when Johnson wrote his letter, it was already widely known about and his work highly regarded.

of literature' is drawn from the ancients, the essays Warton eventually wrote were devoted to Homer *and* Shakespeare. Shakespeare now has the authority of the ancients and the critic has the quasi-professional status of the scholar.²⁸

A significant part of Kramnick's thesis is that the mid-to-late eighteenth century saw great English writers canonised, taking on 'the authority of the ancients' for the first time. As we have already seen, Milton was central to this developing idea of the canon. I would add that the rejection of what they saw as Augustan decorum and rigidity also allowed the particular classicism of Joseph Warton and those like him – form-conscious yet tolerant of experimentation – to be carried over into the treatment of more modern authors, notably Milton. The process is typified by Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, which compares Milton favourably with Pope while conceding that the latter is more respectful of formal distinctions:

Shall I offend any rational admirer of Pope by remarking, that these juvenile descriptive poems of Milton [the Nativity Ode, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'], as well as his Latin elegies, are of a strain far more exalted than any the former author can boast? Let me add at the same time, what justice obliges me to add, that they are far more incorrect. For in the very ode before us, occur one or two passages, that are puerile and affected, to a degree not to be paralleled in the purer, but less elevated, compositions of Pope.²⁹

What Joseph Warton lovingly but firmly refers to as 'incorrect' here, we might call heterogeneous. The heterogeneity of the *Poems*, seen both in the volume as a whole and within individual poems, had long been a sticking-point for critics of Milton; Johnson in particular had seemed to find it insuperable. What is striking about both Joseph and Thomas Warton's approach is that, offended as they too might be by generic unconformity, they have a much greater willingness to work around it, imaginatively reframing it until it no longer offends them. This amounts to a kind of special treatment, a critical favouritism, and perhaps it started out that way. Joseph wrote the following upon some compositions by his brother:

²⁸ *Making the English Canon*, p. 129.

²⁹ *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, in *Pope and His Critics*, I. 40.

Your Ode to Contemplation possesses true poetry, and a great deal of fine imagination; but I am not sure whether it is proper to write Odes in long blank verse: Lyrics must certainly be metrical; however call it an hymn, and all will be well.³⁰

The ode was a touchstone for the Wartons; they both composed in the form, and when editing the *Poems upon Several Occasions* Thomas Warton devoted an entire section (the first) of the volume to Milton's odes, which had never before been grouped together in that way. It is significant that the ode has Greek origins, too. Reaching back further in time to their form's authentic source, Pindar, suited the *ad fontes* temperament of these poets and critics: Joseph Warton's 'Ode to Fancy' even ends with the exhortation, 'O bid Britannia rival Greece!'³¹ But by venturing that Thomas should reframe his ode as a hymn, Joseph Warton seems to be suggesting that some things – 'true poetry' and 'fine imagination,' for instance – are more important than genre. He refuses to allow a formally incorrect poem to be labelled an ode, but circumvents this worry by suggesting the problem can be corrected simply by calling the ode a hymn instead. This may be its own act of pre-Romantic, highly personal appreciation, since according to Fairer, 'to follow Pindar emphasized striking out independently ... The key idea was not imitation but emulation.'³² But it also signals a subordination of the general to the particular, or perhaps the objective to the subjective, and this has implications for the literary criticism of both Warton brothers.

From the point of view of canon formation Joseph Warton's tendency to categorize and discriminate, often along lines of genre, is (perhaps counter-intuitively) markedly

³⁰ *The Correspondence of Thomas Warton*, ed. David Fairer (Athens, GA, 1995). Letter 23, Joseph Warton to Thomas Warton, 7 June 1753. All further references will be to this edition.

³¹ Joseph Warton, 'To Fancy,' l. 148. *Odes on Various Subjects*. 2nd ed. (1747). All further references will be to this edition, embedded in the text.

³² David Fairer, 'Lyric and Elegy,' *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, ed. David Hopkins and Charles Martindale (Oxford, 2012), vol. III, pp. 519–545 (p. 524).

non-judgemental. Ross remarks on this ‘marvel of differentiation’, basing his assessment on the conclusion of Joseph Warton’s essay on Pope, which divides writers into four ranks or ‘species’ (the first of which Pope narrowly fails to qualify for). In addition, Warton’s essay distinguishes between the ‘five divergent norms or conditions of canonicity’: form, genre, historical context, aestheticism, and moral and ideological import.³³ The third of these, given what we have seen of the Wartons’ anxious historicism, is perhaps the most significant. Kramnick understands the canonization of Chaucer and Spenser, in particular, as part of a more general change in England’s narrative of the history of its own literary development. Hitherto, the story had been one of continuous improvement, of English literature refining and bettering itself uninterruptedly since its origins. In the mid-eighteenth century, this began to be revised, and older literature looked upon as, potentially, superior to modern. ‘Canonical works,’ Kramnick writes, ‘were honoured on the terms of their former rejection. The idea of the past was turned on its head.’³⁴

Kramnick explains this move as having taken place, at least in part, on sociolinguistic grounds:

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century uniform Latinity breaks down as the cultural capital of the elite classes and variously cultivated vernaculars take its place. The first such vernacular makes a fetish out of grammar and politeness. Yet once politeness is seen as too common and modernizing, too much like conversation as such, critics discover an abstruse, quasi-Latinate vernacular in older, canonical English.³⁵

This surely applies to Thomas Warton, a significant part of whose project was philological, involving the recuperation of Old and Middle English sources, etymologies and variants for English words, with a thoroughness that had heretofore

³³ *The Making of the English Literary Canon*, pp. 258–59.

³⁴ *Making the English Canon*, p. 3.

³⁵ *Making the English Canon*, p. 43.

been the preserve of scholars of Classics.³⁶ It also recalls the debate surrounding literary ‘value,’ suggesting once again Thomas Warton’s reaction against the commodification of literature. While John Dryden had criticized Milton for ‘digging from the Mines of *Chaucer* and *Spencer*’ to find ‘Antiquated Words,’ rather than, in Fairer’s well-chosen paraphrase, ‘use the verbal currency of the present’,³⁷ this is something Warton seems keen to do on his own and Milton’s behalf. But, as we have already seen, the reconfiguration of the previously murky, ‘rough’ English past into an ‘antiquity’ worth properly understanding is a precariously contradictory act. Ross too registers the inconsistency between Warton’s ‘mourning,’ as he calls it, for the age of romance, and his insistence in the preface to his *History* on ‘the progress of our national poetry, from a rude origin and obscure beginnings, to its perfection in a polished age.’³⁸ It is true that, at an abstract level, Warton’s attempted challenge to canonicity is compromised by his reinforcement of the narrative of continuous progress. Though contradictory in theory, however, Warton’s position seems by all the evidence not to have been unsustainable in reality: he did nurse an affection for romantic literature while both tacitly espousing and, at times, vocally endorsing the critical vantage offered by his own period. It is the fact of this perspective, which Warton sees as having clicked into place around the middle of the eighteenth century, that enables him to justify his new edition of Milton’s poems in 1785.

‘The school of Milton’: Thomas Warton’s (anti-)methodology

In his preface to the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, Thomas Warton describes the mid-eighteenth-century’s re-engagement with Milton in the following terms:

³⁶ *Making the English Canon*, p. 141.

³⁷ *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 145.

³⁸ *A History of English Poetry*, I. ii–iii.

A visible revolution succeeded in the general cast and character of the national composition. Our versification contracted a new colouring, a new structure and phraseology; and the school of Milton rose in emulation of the school of Pope.³⁹

Warton's poetic schema does not in any meaningful sense really admit of 'schools' in the sense that Pope and, later, Thomas Gray intended; Ross points out that in the preface to the *History of English Poetry*, Warton even discusses his rejection of Pope's and Gray's way of thinking. Warton writes of being granted access to

Mr POPE's scheme of a History of English Poetry, in which our poets were classed under their supposed respective schools. The late lamented Mr. GRAY had also projected a work of this kind ... he most obligingly condescended to favour me with the substance of his plan, which I found to be that of Mr POPE, considerably enlarged, extended, and improved.

It is vanity in me to have mentioned these communications. But I am apprehensive my vanity will justly be thought much greater, when it shall appear, that in giving the history of English poetry, I have rejected the ideas of men who are its most distinguished ornaments. To confess the real truth, upon examination and experiment, I soon discovered their mode of treating my subject, plausible as it is, and brilliant in theory, to be attended with difficulties and inconveniencies, and productive of embarrassment both to the reader and the writer. Like other ingenious systems, it sacrificed much useful intelligence to the observance of arrangement; and in the place of that satisfaction which results from a clearness and fulness of information, seemed only to substitute the merit of disposition, and the praise of contrivance.⁴⁰

Warton's bold contradiction of his forebears is, on the one hand, a piece of rhetoric, necessary to justify his compilation of so ambitious a work as the *History of English Poetry*. But it is also an attempt to enshrine a kind of anti-methodology, with chronological order as its only acknowledged lynchpin, which implicitly endorses the narrative of continuous improvement discussed above. Warton asks his reader to look back on the age of chivalry and romance as imaginatively superior to their own, yet also to consider the present day superior in terms of scholarship: as Ross notes, 'in being itself an unsurpassed display of information, the *History* amply demonstrated this disproportion, as if the knowledge of past learning confirmed the

³⁹ *PSO* (1785), x–xi.

⁴⁰ *History of English Poetry*, I. v.

relative superiority of modern erudition.⁴¹ This is as true of Warton's edition of Milton's *Poems upon Several Occasions* as it is of the *History of English Poetry*, since in treating the *Poems* Warton is keen to chronicle thoroughly, yet also to play down the abilities of, those who came before him – at least until the mid-eighteenth century, which Warton, along with his brother, sees as a turning-point in Milton studies.

Discussing the emergence of the 'school of Milton,' Thomas Warton first looks at instances where the shorter poems are adduced in support of Milton's most famous work, as in Pearce's *Review of the Text of PARADISE LOST*, where 'they frequently furnish collateral evidences in favour of the established state of that text'. He refers to 1734's *Explanatory Notes on the PARADISE LOST*, by Jonathan Richardson *père et fils*; and goes on to invoke 'such respectable names as Jortin, Warburton, and Hurd, [who] conspired in examining [the shorter poems'] excellencies, in adjusting their claims to praise, and extending their reputation.'⁴² Thomas Warton is a little more thorough than his brother who, in his essay on Pope, justifies his focus on the Nativity Ode on the rather ill-supported grounds that this poem has been

much less celebrated than L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, which are now universally known; but which by a strange fatality lay in a sort of obscurity, the private enjoyment of a few curious readers, till they were set to admirable music by Mr Handel. And indeed this volume of Milton's miscellaneous poems has not till very lately met with suitable regard.⁴³

Thomas Warton too mentions the poems' musical adaptation, though in terms which reveal something else about his attitude to the poems from the point of view of form and genre. He writes of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' (but quoting 'Lycidas') that they

⁴¹ *The English Literary Canon*, p. 262.

⁴² *PSO* (1785), ix–x. See my Chapter 2.

⁴³ *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, in *Pope and His Critics*, vol. I, p. 40.

were set to music by Handel; and his expressive harmonies here received the honour which they have so seldom found, but which they so justly deserve, of being *married to immortal verse*.

Regarding *Comus*' potential for adaptation, Warton is more circumspect, saying,

In 1738, COMUS was presented on the stage at Drury-lane, with musical accompaniments, and the application of additional songs, selected and adapted from L'ALLEGRO, and other pieces of this volume: and although not calculated to shine in theatric exhibition for those very reasons which constitute its essential and specific merit, from this introduction to notice it grew popular as a poem.⁴⁴

Warton elaborates on this rather oblique assessment of *Comus* in his notes to the masque proper. Just as Joseph Warton wrote to Thomas suggesting he rename his ode a hymn, Thomas Warton suggests to readers that they will enjoy *Comus* more if they think of it not as a masque, or a play, but as a poem:

We must not read COMUS with an eye to the stage, or with the expectation of dramatic propriety. Under this restriction, the absurdity of the Spirit speaking to an audience in a solitary forest at midnight, and the want of reciprocation in the dialogue, are overlooked.⁴⁵

COMUS is a suite of Speeches, not interesting by discrimination of character; not conveying a variety of incidents, nor gradually exciting curiosity: but perpetually attracting attention by sublime sentiment, by fanciful imagery of the richest vein, by an exuberance of picturesque description, poetical allusion, and ornamental expression. While it widely departs from the grotesque anomalies of the Mask now in fashion, it does not nearly approach to the natural constitution of a regular play ...

We must not too scrupulously attend to the exigencies of situation, nor suffer ourselves to suppose that we are reading a play, which Milton did not mean to write. These splendid insertions [some speeches, the dispute between the Lady and Comus among them] will please, independently of the story, from which however they result; and their elegance and sublimity will overbalance their want of place. On the whole, whether COMUS, be or be not, deficient as a drama, whether it is considered as an Epic drama, a series of lines, a Mask, or a poem, I am of opinion, that our author is here only inferior to his own PARADISE LOST.⁴⁶

This is a prime instance of the selective, highly personal attitude to Milton that would come to irritate Warton's readers. Unlike Johnson, who was famously annoyed by the failure of *Comus* to live up to the demands of its genre – or, more properly, the genre

⁴⁴ *PSO* (1785), ix–x.

⁴⁵ Earlier in his commentary on *Comus*, Warton has censured the Spirit's Prologue as lacking dramatic propriety. 'The Spirit's Prologue is introduced after the manner of the Greek Tragedy. But Milton did not recollect, that the Spirit was opening the business of the drama to a solitary forest, without an audience. But in a Greek tragedy, this objection would have been obviated by the Chorus, which was always present.' *PSO* (1785), p. 129.

⁴⁶ *PSO* (1785), pp. 264–65.

he had reassigned it (complaining, ‘As a drama it is deficient. The action is not probable’),⁴⁷ Warton asks his reader to consider *Comus* not on its own generic terms, but instead on terms which, he believes, make it more successful. The qualities he lists as belonging to *Comus* – ‘sublime sentiment,’ ‘fanciful imagery,’ ‘an exuberance of picturesque description’ – are all features he values in (strictly lyric) poetry. These attributes all have an aesthetic, imaginative tilt; we may remember the ‘true poetry’ and ‘fine imagination’ by virtue of which Joseph Warton exempted his brother’s poem from the constraints of the ode. In fact ‘imagination’ seems to be Warton’s dominant criterion for judgement, here, in the double sense of an interest in a work’s imaginative qualities, and in the qualities of the imagination that produced them.

In the preface to his *Odes on Various Subjects* in 1746, Joseph Warton had aligned himself with this trend, by way of accounting for his own poetic practices:

The Public has been so much accustom’d of late to didactic Poetry alone, and Essays on moral Subjects, that any work where the imagination is much indulged, will perhaps not be relished or regarded. The author therefore of these pieces is in some pain lest certain austere critics should think them too fanciful and descriptive. But as he is convinced that the fashion of moralizing in verse has been carried too far, and as he looks upon Invention and Imagination to be the chief faculties of a Poet, so he will be happy if the following Odes may be look’d upon as an attempt to bring back Poetry into its right channel.⁴⁸

Joseph Warton’s assertion is audacious, but it is the claim of a poet rather than a critic. It was another ten years, with his essay on Pope, before Warton was confident enough to be more professionally programmatic; Kramnick ascribes this development to the Johnson-commissioned *Adventurer* essays, which he says marked ‘an important and lasting change in Warton’s writing.’⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 281.

⁴⁸ Joseph Warton, *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746), p. 4.

⁴⁹ *Making the English Canon*, pp. 129–30.

Joseph Warton states in his preface to the *Essay on Pope* that ‘we do not, it should seem, sufficiently attend to the difference there is, betwixt a MAN OF WIT, a MAN OF SENSE, and a TRUE POET.’⁵⁰ He is eager to emphasize that ‘the most solid observations on human life, expressed with the utmost elegance and brevity, are MORALITY, and not POETRY ... and that it is a creative and glowing IMAGINATION ... and that alone, that can stamp a writer with this exalted and very uncommon character.’⁵¹ By contrast, Thomas Warton’s *Poems* – those upon which Johnson composed his mocking octave – have no preface; nor, even in his work as a critic, does he ever assert so expressly as his brother his beliefs about the role of the imagination in poetry. Instead, as the example of *Comus* shows, these beliefs are implicit in the terms of his assessment of Milton’s poems.

The Wartons were not alone in taking a critical interest in the imagination, nor even in applying that interest to Milton’s *Poems* (1645), but it is instructive to compare their treatment of this idea with that of a contemporary. The poet and critic John Scott, whose *Critical Essays* were posthumously published the same year as Warton’s edition of the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, has an essay about ‘Lycidas’ containing an extended meditation on the role of imagination in poetry:

Imagination, properly directed, will not be employed in producing impossible fictions, but in exploring real existence, and selecting from it circumstances grand or beautiful, as occasion may require.

Scott footnotes his own sentence: ‘Without imagination, no man can be a poet at all; without imagination and judgement, no man can be a good poet.’⁵² He differs, then, from Joseph Warton, who suggests that imagination is essential, and is all that’s required, to make a true poet; he differs too from Thomas Warton, who extends this

⁵⁰ *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, I. iv.

⁵¹ *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, I. v–vi.

⁵² ‘On Milton’s *Lycidas*’, *Critical Essays*, pp. 37–64 (p. 59).

axiom to the effect that imagination is a requirement, indeed the only requirement, of a true reader. Scott is less apologetic for Milton's vagaries than either of the Wartons; we see this also in his defence of 'Lycidas' against the disapprobations of Johnson – the criticism that, for instance, it must be an inauthentic expression of grief, since 'passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions.'⁵³ To this, Scott responds:

When our above-mentioned ingenious critick [Johnson] thinks that Lycidas cannot be considered as an effusion of real grief, he seems to have mistaken the nature of the poem. There is an anxiety from apprehension of losing a beloved object; and there is a grief immediately subsequent to its actual loss, which cannot be expressed but in the shortest and simplest manner. There is a grief softened by time, which can recapitulate past pleasures in all their minutiae of circumstance and situation, and can select such images as are proper to the kind of composition, wherein it chuses to convey itself. It was no sudden impetus of passion, but this mellowed sorrow, that effused the verses now under consideration.⁵⁴

Noticeably foreshadowing Wordsworth's remarks in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* about poetry as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', Scott attends to 'Lycidas' on its own generic terms rather than attempting to reframe it.⁵⁵ He admits that the strictures of 'ancient' genres might be alienating to the modern reader, but does not view these strictures as separate from what makes the work enjoyable:

The manners of antiquity differed so widely from ours, that some species of poetry, which to the ancients were just representations of nature, appear to us improbable; such poetry nevertheless does not cease to please. There is an inherent improbability in modern tragedy, and in modern pastoral; families do not discourse in blank verse, nor do shepherds converse in rhyme; yet a well written drama, and a well written eclogue, will always be read with delight.⁵⁶

This is rather different from Thomas Warton's defence of the poem in his edition:

It is objected, that [the poem's] pastoral form is disgusting. But this was the age of pastoral: and yet LYCIDAS has but little of the bucolic cant, now so fashionable. The Satyrs and Fauns are but just mentioned. If any trite rural topics occur, how are they heightened!⁵⁷

⁵³ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

⁵⁴ *Critical Essays*, pp. 40–41.

⁵⁵ William Wordsworth, 'Preface' (1800 ed.), in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A.R. Jones (1963, rev. 1991), pp. 287–314, p. 307.

⁵⁶ 'On Milton's *Lycidas*', p. 39.

⁵⁷ *PSO* (1785), p. 34.

Warton soft-pedals here, apparently accepting Johnson's deprecations of the pastoral *per se*, and excusing 'Lycidas' for partaking in the genre on the grounds that 'this was the age of pastoral.' He then swerves into a quarrel with the literary fashions of the present day, though it is unclear whether the 'bucolic cant' he disapproves of is 'ancient' pastoral literature now in vogue, or modern poetry written in imitation of it.

A theory by Fairer supports the latter possibility:

One reason these critics found eighteenth-century pastoral cold and fictional and may have looked to *Lycidas* for passion and realism is the rise of competing genres, poems of natural description such as Thomson's *Seasons*, and local or topographical poems such as *Cooper's Hill*, *Windsor Forest*, and *Grongar Hill* ... Thus the narrowing of pastoral to elegance and smoothness, to manifest unreality or enervated rusticity, and the rise of new forms available to the poet who wanted to write about rural nature, combined to make *Lycidas* seem not a viable model but, as Warton put it, the work of 'an old English poet.'⁵⁸

What Johnson disliked in Warton's poetry, therefore – the sense that 'all is strange, yet nothing new' – was also a calculated feature of Warton's critical method, and the reason for that method's effective failure. By imaginatively recreating the conditions of the past writer and past readers, Warton ends up revealing a poetry out of step both with its own time and with the present day. He can bring his own readers closer to an understanding of the anomalous status of the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, but he cannot heal the breach between Milton and the romantic era he sees as having been so influential on these poems, nor the breach between Milton's time and his own. His edition is therefore inherently nostalgic, even melancholy, in its exhaustiveness.

⁵⁸ *History of English Poetry*, I. 54–55.

The edition: *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1785)

39.g.

2

P O E M S
U P O N
S E V E R A L O C C A S I O N S,
E N G L I S H , I T A L I A N , A N D L A T I N ,
W I T H T R A N S L A T I O N S ,
B Y
J O H N M I L T O N .

Viz. LYCIDAS, L'ALLEGRO, IL PENSEROSO, AR-
CADES, COMUS, ODES, SONNETS, MISCELLA-
NIES, ENGLISH PSALMS, ELEGIARUM LIBER,
EPIGRAMMATUM LIBER, SYLVARUM LIBER.

W I T H N O T E S C R I T I C A L A N D E X P L A N A T O R Y ,
A N D O T H E R I L L U S T R A T I O N S ,

B Y T H O M A S W A R T O N ,

F E L L O W O F T R I N I T Y C O L L E G E
A N D L A T E P R O F E S S O R O F P O E T R Y A T O X F O R D .

L O N D O N ,
P R I N T E D F O R J A M E S D O D S L E Y I N P A L L M A L L E .
M D C C L X X X V .

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Thomas Warton's edition of Milton's shorter poems was published in 1785. We know from Warton's correspondence that he had been nursing the project for

twenty or even thirty years: as early as 1757 he was writing to Robert Bedingfield about the meaning of the phrase *'fronte licet gemina'* in *'Ad Joannem Rousium'*.⁵⁹ The volume is an octavo, very plain by comparison with earlier editions of Milton's *Poems*. (The last major edition, that by Newton, had several large illustrations). Its title-page sets the tone, text-heavy, visually uniform, entirely composed of majuscules, without an epigraph or even a printer's device. *Comus* has its own title page in the edition, as do the *Poemata*, but these too are exceptionally plain by comparison with Newton's and others. The volume's outstanding feature comes in its prodigious footnotes, which typically take up much more space on the page than the text itself; both by their content and their size they seem intent upon proving Warton's legitimacy as an editor of Milton.

It is late in Warton's preface before much mention is made of the practical, editorial choices he has taken in compiling the volume. He begrudgingly introduces the topic by saying, 'I must add one or two more circumstances relating to my revisal of this volume, which, although superficial and extrinsic, are necessary parts of previous information.' Warton continues,

I have found it expedient to alter or enlarge Milton's own titles, which seemed to want fulness and precision, yet preserving their form and substance. Nor have I scrupulously followed the order used in his own editions, which yet I have not greatly violated. In disturbing the series of the pieces, my meaning was, not to study capricious and useless novelty, but to accommodate the reader, and to introduce uniformity, by a more methodical but obvious arrangement. I have endeavoured to render the text as uncorrupt and perspicuous as possible, not only by examining and comparing the authentic copies published under the author's immediate inspection, but by regulating the punctuation, of which Milton appears to have been habitually careless.⁶⁰

A significant change that Warton makes to the order of his acknowledged copy-texts, the 1645 and 1673 editions of Milton's *Poems*, is to place at the head of the volume, in

⁵⁹ See *Correspondence*, p. 64, Robert Bedingfield to Thomas Warton, 3 March 1757: 'Dear Warton, I am extremely obliged to you for your two letters: I own I never had so clear a notion of the *Fronte licet gemina*, as you have given me.'

⁶⁰ *PSO* (1785), xxiii.

this order, 'Lycidas,' 'L'Allegro,' 'Il Penseroso,' *Arcades*, and *Comus* (restyled from *A Maske* on the grounds that the new title 'has had the full sanction of use').⁶¹ These works – with the exception of *Arcades*, which presumably was placed before *Comus* on the grounds of their generic kinship – had long been the most quoted, anthologized, and discussed of Milton's early poems. Putting them at the beginning of the volume looks like a commercial choice; it is also, probably, a sign that Warton simply liked them best too, considering them above generic classification where the other poems were not. He quotes in his preface, after a discussion of 'Lycidas,' the remarks of his brother, who seems to have shared this preference. The passage runs:

If I might venture to place Milton's Works, according to their degrees of Poetic Excellence, it should be perhaps in the following order; PARADISE LOST, COMUS, SAMSON AGONISTES, LYCIDAS, L'ALLEGRO, IL PENSEROSO. The three last are in such an exquisite strain, says Fenton, that though he had left no other monuments of his genius behind him, his name had been immortal. Dr. J. Warton.⁶²

Otherwise, Warton does not substantially reorder the poems, but he does group the English ones under generic headings for the first time (this, we must assume, is what he means by 'a more methodical but obvious arrangement'), the Latin *Poemata* being already divided into the *Elegiarum liber* and the *Sylvarum liber*. In Warton's edition *Odes* come first, then *Miscellanies* (including the epitaph on Shakespeare and the Hobson poems), then *Sonnets*, then *Translations*, which include some fragmentary items collected from among Milton's prose works.

Warton's discussion of the *Poemata* also emphasizes his wish to open up Milton's poetry to as wide a modern readership as possible. He writes:

For obvious reasons, the Latin poems of this volume can never acquire the popularity of the English. But ... it is my wish that they may be better known than before, and ... they are in this edition, partly on that account, and for the first time,

⁶¹ *PSO* (1785), p. 126.

⁶² *PSO* (1785), p. 34.

accompanied with a series of Notes of proportionably equal extent with those attached to the English text.⁶³

Warton remarks especially on the fact that he has annotated Latin poems with English-language notes:

That English notes are joined with a Latin text, may be censured as an inconsistency, or as an arbitrary departure from the customary practice. But I know not any satisfactory reason, why books in a learned or unfamiliar language should always be explained in a language equally difficult.⁶⁴

At one level, this is a slightly unnecessary protestation, since for an example of Latin poetry annotated in English we need only look as far as Joseph Warton's edition of Virgil, which is a parallel text with English-language notes printed underneath the original Latin. Still, it is remarkable that Thomas Warton feels it necessary to make the emphasis. We have already noticed that he is anxious to shepherd the reader through Milton's potentially alienating poetic experimentation. Part of his hope, in annotating the Latin poems so copiously, is to give his readers all the information they require to realize that Milton has surpassed his classical masters, achieving excellence and originality in Latin as well as English. He writes,

It also seemed useful to shew, which of the antient Roman poets were here Milton's models, and how far and in what instances they have been copied. Here a new source of criticism on Milton, and which displays him in a new light and character, was opened. In the Elegies, Ovid was professedly Milton's model for language and versification. They are not, however, a perpetual and uniform tissue of Ovidian phraseology. With Ovid in view, he has an original manner and character of his own, which exhibit a remarkable perspicuity of contexture, a native facility and fluency. Nor does his observation of Roman models oppress or destroy our great poet's inherent powers of invention and sentiment. I value these pieces as much for their fancy and genius, as for their style and expression.⁶⁵

In this passage, although he does not say so, Warton seems to be responding directly to Samuel Johnson, who wrote in his *Life of Milton* that the Latin poems did not have much to offer in the way of originality:

⁶³ *PSO* (1785), xiii–xiv.

⁶⁴ *PSO* (1785), xxi–xxii.

⁶⁵ *PSO* (1785), xxi.

The Latin pieces are lusciously elegant; but the delight which they afford is rather by the exquisite imitation of the ancient writers, by the purity of the diction, and the harmony of the numbers, than by any power of invention, or vigour of sentiment.⁶⁶

Moreover, by treating the Latin poems in this thorough and attentive way Warton is also defying his editorial predecessor Newton, who on this point simply says,

As they can be read only by the learned there is the less occasion for any notes and observations upon them. Some few are added, which were thought no more than necessary.⁶⁷

If Warton's greater effort than his predecessors to enumerate Milton's sources for the Latin poems is directed at proving how much those poems do that is original and unique to them, the terms in which he praises that originality – 'invention and sentiment', 'fancy and genius' – are proof of the personally inflected nature of his criticism. It suits both Warton's ideas about who Milton was as a person, and his own beliefs about the fanciful, almost supernatural origins of poetic inspiration, to describe the Latin poetry as sublimely inspired, as well as legitimately Ovidian. The same dual focus, on origins and originality, persists into the main body of the edition.

'A most romantic projection': Warton's preface and notes to the *Poems upon Several Occasions*

Introducing the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, Thomas Warton wastes little time before deprecating their treatment by previous generations. His greatest scorn is reserved for the period immediately after publication:

The poems which compose the present volume were published almost thirty years before the appearance of the PARADISE LOST. During that interval, they were so totally disregarded, at least by the general reader, as scarcely to have conferred on their author the reputation of a writer of verses; much less the distinction and character of a true poet. After the publication of the PARADISE LOST, whose acknowledged merit and increasing celebrity might have naturally contributed to call other pieces of the same author, and of a kindred excellence, into a more conspicuous point of view, they long continued to remain in their original state of neglect and obscurity.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Lives*, I. 278.

⁶⁷ *Poems* (1752), iv–v.

⁶⁸ *PSO* (1785), iii.

Warton's remarks here about the total critical inattention to the *Poems* are not accurate, nor did they escape censure when his edition was published. In part, he is romanticizing – 'neglect and obscurity', ruin and disrepair are sources of poetic as well as critical inspiration for him – as well as rhetorically strengthening the scholarly necessity of his own edition. Perhaps more striking, though, is the next part of the passage in which Warton attempts to account for the oversight:

At the infancy of their circulation, and for some years afterwards, [the shorter poems] were overwhelmed in the commotions of faction, the conflict of religious disputation, and the professional ignorance of fanaticism. In succeeding years, when tumults and usurpations were at an end, and leisure and literature returned, the times were still unpropitious, and the public taste was unprepared for their reception.⁶⁹

Warton's explanation has several curiously interconnected parts. First, he suggests that the political disruptions of Milton's own period meant that his poems were overlooked. Next, he avers that the generation following Milton's was not temperamentally suited to the poems either. But he also stresses the length of time for which 'wit and rhyme, sentiment and satire' and so on had dominated. This implies that political upheaval aside, the public taste in Milton's own period might anyway have been opposed to the kind of poems he wrote in his youth: their characterization as vehicles of 'fiction and fancy,' 'picturesque description, and romantic imagery' – in other words, as throwbacks to an already bygone epoch – bears this out. We have already seen that Warton's critical methodology is paradoxical, aiming for immersion in a period from which he must also emphasize his and his readers' distance; the paradox is heightened by Warton's further suggestion that Milton was poetically out of step with his own times, romantic by nature, and therefore subject to a different set of literary criteria from those applied

⁶⁹ *PSO* (1785), iii.

to him upon publication, or at any time since.⁷⁰ This, of course, is also how Warton sees himself, an act of projection that results in sympathetic and personally motivated readings and reinterpretations.

One major instance of this critical sympathy is the reinterpretation of the *Poems* along the lines of form, genre, and subject matter. This is almost always mixed up in Warton's political disagreement with the author he otherwise adulates. Later in the preface, lamenting how 'few of his early blossoms' Milton has left behind, Warton says that this was because

[t]he vigorous portion of his life, ... those years in which imagination is on the wing, were unworthily and unprofitably wasted on temporary topics, on elaborate but perishable dissertations in defence of innovation and anarchy. To this employment he sacrificed his eyes, his health, his repose, his native propensities, his elegant studies. Smit with the deplorable polemics of puritanism, he suddenly ceased to gaze on *such sights as youthful poets dream*.⁷¹

Quoting from 'L'Allegro' (l. 129) to bemoan the paucity of Milton's early lyric compositions, Warton is sorrier still about the direction the poet's career took subsequently. The terms of his lamentation are, again, about the difference between the romantic past and the unstable, inelegant present; instead of spending his 'vigorous' imaginative years on old-fashioned, romantic poetry, Milton wrote 'elaborate but perishable dissertations of innovation and anarchy' – two concepts equally distasteful to Warton, whose mistrust of revolution and fear of the new go hand in hand. Claiming that his subject squandered those years writing polemic prose for the Commonwealth, Warton blames on this the fact that Milton's plan for a British epic never saw fruition. He writes:

The numerous and noble plans of tragedy which he had deliberately formed with the discernment and selection of a great poetical mind, were at once interrupted and abandoned; and have now left to a disappointed posterity only a few naked outlines,

⁷⁰ Commenting on 'At a Vacation Exercise', Warton observes, 'At so early an age, Milton began to conceive a contempt for the poetry in vogue; and this he seems to have retained to the last.' *PSO* (1785), p. 313.

⁷¹ *PSO* (1785), xi.

and confused sketches. Instead of embellishing original tales of chivalry, of cloathing the fabulous achievements of the early British kings and champions in the gorgeous trappings of epic attire, he wrote *SMECTYMNUUS* and *TETRACHORDON*, apologies for fanatical preachers and the doctrine of divorce.⁷²

For Warton, Puritanism, unlike the ‘fabulous achievements of the early British kings and champions’, is ‘repugnant and unpoetical’.⁷³ He never admits the possibility that Milton’s partisan affiliations could have been the subject matter for an epic (which makes one wonder what his critical perspective would have been had he edited *Paradise Lost*). Just as when he twins ‘leisure and literature’ as preconditions for the enjoyment of Milton’s shorter poetry, Warton’s nostalgia, here and elsewhere, for the age of chivalry and romance and his mistrust of republicanism suggest an aristocratic, conservative idea of poetry. If some of his findings are radical, asking readers to accept Milton’s own anachronism and, by implication, to valorize a relatively under-appreciated period of English literature, Warton also asks that they should see this period as less developed than their own. Like Joseph Warton, who apologizes for the savagery of the Romans while extolling their poetic refinement, Thomas balances, unsteadily at times, between praise for and discomfort at these early poems’ lack of polish and ‘propriety’. This unease shows itself particularly in questions of form and genre, since Warton steers between seeing hybridity as the prerogative of the canonical poet, and a sign of barbarism.

A remark on ‘Lycidas’ from the preface demonstrates the nature of the variegation:

Our author has been censured for mixing religious disputes with pagan and pastoral ideas. But he had the authority of Mantuan and Spenser, now considered as models in this way of writing. Let me add, that our poetry was not yet purged from its Gothic combinations; nor had legitimate notions of discrimination and propriety so far prevailed, as sufficiently to influence the growing improvements of English composition. These irregularities and incongruities must not be tried by modern criticism.⁷⁴

⁷² *PSO* (1785), xi–xii.

⁷³ *PSO* (1785), p. 95.

⁷⁴ *PSO* (1785), p. 35.

Warton takes two tacks to defend Milton against accusations of generic anomaly. First, he uses literary precedents to suggest that the pagan-Christian combination in 'Lycidas' has 'the authority of Mantuan and Spenser'. This coupling is advised and cumulative, since Mantuan's eclogues, the *Adulescentia*, are known to have influenced Spenser, especially in *The Shepherdes Calender*; they also contain an attack, unsurprisingly popular in Protestant England, on papal corruption, which is naturally in keeping with Milton's condemnation of the corrupted clergy in 'Lycidas'. But having made a virtue of that admixture, Warton then reverts to the narrative of continuous improvement with an apologia that takes over the rest of the paragraph. He is striving for relativism, asking readers not to judge by contemporary standards but by those of Milton's own period, when English poetry 'was not yet purged from its Gothic combinations'; yet this relativism is muddled anyway, since at times Warton has asked us not to judge Milton by those standards either, but to view him as, in his sympathies at least, a late medieval, romantic poet.

We altogether see in Thomas Warton's approach to Milton's *Poems* a struggle for systematization. Whenever he attempts to provide general precepts for reading the material at hand, he is forced to qualify and relativise, in response to that material's frequent unclassifiability. Warton is at his most authoritative by far when working in specifics rather than abstractions; his edition focuses, profitably, on textual minutiae, analysing the poems with extraordinary attention to language, and mining them for allusions both classical and romantic. His personal sympathies do sometimes subtend such readings; he is especially keen, for example, to find latent royalism in his inconveniently republican subject. Discussing the 'scepter'd pall' of Tragedy in line 98 of 'Il Penseroso,' Warton reads beyond Newton's suggestion that this alludes to the '*palla honesta* of Horace,' which 'means simply a *decent robe*,' claiming that 'by

cloathing Tragedy in her SCEPTERED Pall, [Milton] intended specifically to point out REGAL STORIES [as] the proper arguments of the higher drama.’ To back up this assertion, Aristotelian in origin, Warton quotes lines 37–38 from *Elegia prima*, in which, he claims, Milton is ‘implying the distresses of kings’ by giving Tragedy a bloody sceptre: ‘SIVE CRUENTATUM furiosa Tragedia SCEPTRUM / Quassat, et effusis crinibus ora rotat.’ He goes further by citing *Of Education*, in which Milton ‘recommends “Attic Tragedies of STATELIEST and most REGAL argument,”’ before (perhaps tenuously) stating that ‘Ovid, whom Milton in some of his prose-pieces prefers to all the Roman poets besides, has also marked the true, at least original, province of tragedy, by giving her a Scepter’.⁷⁵

Warton may be giving voice to his own royalist sympathies in this case, but elsewhere he applies his exhaustive historicism in a less, or less expressly, political direction. Explicating the ‘great vision of the guarded mount’ from ‘Lycidas,’ he rehearses what is already critically known about the context of this image, before announcing, with the etiological pride of the pre-Romantic scholar: ‘I flatter myself I have discovered Milton’s original and leading idea.’

Just by the Land’s End in Cornwall, is a most romantic projection of rock, called SAINT MICHAEL’S MOUNT, into a harbour called MOUNTS BAY. It gradually rises from a broad basis into a very steep and narrow, but craggy, elevation ... There is still a tradition, that a vision of saint Michael seated on this Crag, or saint Michael’s CHAIR, appeared to some hermits: and that this circumstance occasioned the foundation of the monastery dedicated to saint Michael. And hence this place was long renowned for its sanctity, and the object of frequent pilgrimages ... Nor should it be forgot, that this monastery was a cell to another on a Saint Michael’s Mount in Normandy, where was also a Vision of Saint Michael.

But to apply what has been said to Milton. This GREAT VISION is the famous Apparition of Saint Michael, whom he with much sublimity of Imagination supposes to be still throned on this lofty crag of SAINT MICHAEL’S MOUNT in Cornwall looking towards the Spanish coast. The GUARDED MOUNT on which this Great Vision appeared, is simply the fortified Mount, implying the fortress above-

⁷⁵ *PSO* (1785), pp. 79–80.

mentioned. And let us observe, that *Mount* is now the peculiar appropriated appellation of this promontory.⁷⁶

Warton makes his poetic allegiances clear in this note, first, when he refers to the promontory in question as ‘most romantic’, and secondly, when he says Milton showed ‘much sublimity of imagination’ by invoking the apparition of St Michael. These two phrases, commonplaces in the literary criticism of the period, are perhaps less important than the shape of Warton’s handling of this textual crux. Fairer remarks that Warton’s language ‘recalls the ambulatory mode of the picturesque traveller’: he quotes in evidence the phrase, ‘I often stand still to give some general view’ from the *History of English Poetry*.⁷⁷ Warton’s description of the Cornish coast is certainly ambulatory, almost perambulatory: he gives an immersive picture, rich in topographical detail, sweeping back in time to ancient English (and Norman) myth, before re-lighting on the salient matter of the guarded mount itself. There is method in Warton’s leisurely process, though, too, which is its own kind of romantic projection: it lets him prove without being prescriptive that ‘Lycidas’, hitherto interpreted mostly as a mixture of pagan pastoral and Protestant polemic (the terms, indeed, on which he defended it with reference to Mantuan and Spenser), has old English, romantic roots.

An analogous process is Warton’s investigation into the etymology of notable words in Milton’s lexis. In his preface he has observed,

Among the English poets, those readers who trust to the late commentators will be led to believe, that our author imitated Spenser and Shakespeare only. But his style, expression, and more extensive combination of diction, together with many of his thoughts, are also to be traced in other English poets, who were either his contemporaries or predecessors, and of whom many are now not commonly known. Of this it has been a part of my task to produce proofs.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ *PSO* (1785), pp. 27–30.

⁷⁷ *History of English Poetry*, I. 9.

⁷⁸ *PSO* (1785), xx.

True to his promise, although Warton does enumerate Milton's references to Spenser and Shakespeare (possibly favouring Spenser), he makes an obvious effort throughout his edition to bring into focus the Old and Middle English origins of Milton's words, certainly privileging these over Latin derivations. His dissection of the word 'gadding' is an apt example, from line 40 of 'Lycidas': 'With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown'. Warton begins with precedent, offering the opinion of his editorial predecessor: 'Doctor Warburton here supposes, that the vine is here called GADDING, because, being married to the elm, like other wives she is fond of GADDING ABROAD, and seeking a new associate.' This is light-hearted, with perhaps the merest suggestion of misogyny on the part of Warburton, whose theory is not exactly displaced by the notes that follow, but significantly expanded.

Warton proceeds carefully, factually, but also conversationally to list other uses and derivatives of 'gadding,' in a manner reminiscent of his St Michael's Mount explication. He even uses the same word – peculiar – to describe Milton's use of gadding, as he used to talk about the 'peculiar appropriated appellation' of St Michael's Mount.

I have met with a peculiar use of the word GADDING, which also shews its antient and original spelling. From the Register of a Chantry at Godderston in Norfolk, under the year 1534. 'Receyvid at the GADYNG with Saynte Marye Songe at 'Crismas' Blomf. NORF. iii. 404. That is, 'AT GOING ABOUT from house to house at christmas with a Carol of the Holy Virgin, &c.'

It seems as if there was such an old verb as GADE, a frequentative from GO. Chaucer, ROM. R. 938.

These bowis two held Swete-Loking,
That ne semid like no GADLING ...

That is, 'no gadder, idler, &c.'

And in the COKE'S TALE of Gamelyn, v. 203.

Stondith stille thou GADILING.⁷⁹

This linguistic survey, along with the almost innumerable others like it scattered throughout the edition, serves to prove the thoroughness of Warton's scholarship.

⁷⁹ *PSO* (1785), p. 9.

(The 1791 edition has even more on ‘gadding’, as well as its (possible) Latin equivalent, *erratico*.)⁸⁰ He also confers a certain solemnity on these English-language poems, by using tools more traditionally associated with scholars of Classics. Mostly, though, by offering a plausible back-story tracing a Miltonic word to its medieval origins, Warton substantiates his claim about the romantic lineage of these early poems, and his own claim to be a serious critic of them. This claim was not accepted by all readers when the *Poems upon Several Occasions* were published in 1785.

‘The Persons are indeed respectable, but what is the Story?’ Contemporary responses to Warton’s edition

Joseph Warton wrote to his brother just after the publication of *Poems upon Several Occasions*, ‘Dearest Tom, I received your Milton on last Wednesday, & have most carefully read the whole, & do like it exceedingly – depend on it it will take and be very popular.’ But the loyal brother adds a note of caution: ‘It will be thought you have mauled the Puritans and their Principles.’⁸¹ Joseph was right on both counts. Most of Thomas Warton’s contemporaries do seem to have enjoyed the edition. Richard Hurd wrote to tell Warton how much pleasure the ‘admirable Edition’ had given him, and that it ‘abounds with curious information of all sorts, & with exquisite criticism.’ Hurd also seems to have been the first to suggest an extension of Warton’s project:

I cannot help adding a wish, that You would find time to give us The Par. Reg. & the Sampson Ag. (for I dare not mention the Par. Lost, tho’ You are by no means prevented by Bishop Newton) in the same form & manner that You have obliged us with his minor poems. Milton would then have complete justice done to him.⁸²

Warton wrote back to Hurd within two days:

⁸⁰ See *PSO* (1791), p. 8: ‘GADELYNG occurs in Hearne’s GL. to Robert of Gloucester, *stragling, renegade, &c.* p. 651. Tully, in a beautiful description of the growth of the vine, says, that it spreads itself abroad, “multiplici lapsu et ERRATICO.” DE SENECTUT. XV. OPP. tom. iii. p. 311. edit. Oxon. 1783, 4to.’

⁸¹ Joseph Warton to Thomas Warton, 13 March 1785. *Correspondence*, p. 508.

⁸² Richard Hurd to Thomas Warton, 4 April 1785. *Correspondence*, p. 517.

From your Lordship's recommendation of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* to my revisal, I feel the strongest inducements to undertake these two poems. It is my wish to bring forward every piece of Milton, who has been deprettiated by Dr Johnson, a specious and popular writer, without taste.⁸³

Warton's unambiguous swipe at Johnson is striking, since it marks a shift from their previous rapport. Both Warton brothers were friends with Johnson at first, Joseph quoting him almost slavishly in the *Essay on Pope*; and even Thomas mingling criticism of some of Johnson's opinions with respectful references to him as 'an excellent writer' and 'a great critic' in the edition itself.⁸⁴ Warton discloses here how personal, in at least two senses, his quarrel with Johnson is: he is determined to avenge every Miltonic work that Johnson has insulted, as if personally offended by that 'deprettiation'; and he uses the term 'popular' as an insult, a qualifier of 'specious'. This continues Warton's own self-definition as a poet and critic who may not be popular, who may be out of fashion, but has depths his contemporaries do not. The response typifies what we might call Warton's identification with Milton.

Warton's enthusiastic acceptance of Hurd's idea that he edit *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* marks a shift from his previous attitude, too. We know that Warton intended to take Hurd up on this challenge and that he had gone some way towards accomplishing the project: the 1791 *Poems upon Several Occasions*, published posthumously on the basis of the revisions he had managed to make before his death, frequently alludes to his notes, since lost, on those other two works. This additional project necessitated a bit of backsliding on Warton's part, since in his 1785 preface he had made a feature of his decision to handle the shorter poems on their own, not, as many previous editors had done, simply append them to *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Below is the relevant passage from the preface,

⁸³ Thomas Warton to Richard Hurd, 6 April 1785. *Correspondence*, p. 518.

⁸⁴ *PSO* (1785), pp. 117, 286.

emboldened parts reflecting phrases that were, unsurprisingly, redacted from the 1791 edition:

My volume exhibits those poems of Milton, of which a second edition, with some slender additions, appeared in 1673, while the author was yet living, under the title, 'Poems upon several occasions, by Mr. John Milton. Both English and Latin, &c. Composed at several times.' In this collection our author did not include his PARADISE REGAINED and SAMSON AGONISTES, as some later editors have, **perhaps improperly**, done. Those two pieces, forming a single volume by themselves, had just before been printed together, in 1671. Milton here intended only an edition of his Juvenile Poems: **and to this plan the present edition is confined, except only that two or three Latin epigrams, and a few petty fragments of translation selected from the prose works, are admitted.**⁸⁵

Warton also, apparently, had in mind the transferral of some of his observations from the 1785 *Poems upon Several Occasions* to his putative edition of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. On the 'sunshine holy-day' of 'L'Allegro' line 98, Warton's 1785 footnote is really a footnote to *Samson Agonistes*, reading:

Milton, in SAMSON AGONISTES, speaks with much less complacency of Holidays, which he insinuates, under the character of the persecuted Samson, to be of heathen institution. The passage is a concealed attack on the ritual of the church of England. But he first expresses his contempt of a Nobility and an Opulent Clergy, that is, Lords both temporal and spiritual, who by no means coincided with his levelling and narrow principles of republicanism and calvinism, and whom he tacitly compares with the lords and priests of the idol Dagon. SAMS. AGONIST. v. 1418.

- Lords are LORDLIEST in their wine:
And the WELL-FEASTED priest then soonest sir'd
With zeal, if aught religion seem concern'd.
No less the people on their HOLYDAYS,
Impetuous, insolent, unquenchable, &c.⁸⁶

In 1791 this is cut down to 'Holiday-sports are still much encouraged in the counties to which Milton was used. See note on SAMS. AGON. v. 1418.' Since Warton's notes have been lost, we cannot be sure how fully he would have transferred the 1785 'L'Allegro' footnote to his 1791 edition of *Samson Agonistes*. The faithful replication of most other such notes from one edition to the next, though, suggests that these observations would have made it into the 1791 *Poems*.

⁸⁵ *PSO* (1785), xix.

⁸⁶ *PSO* (1785), p. 51.

Joseph Warton's second prediction, that Thomas's overt anti-Puritanism would irk some readers, proved to be the case. Two acute commentators in particular picked up on this aspect of the edition and saw it as symptomatic of a broader editorial tendentiousness on Warton's part. These were Samuel Darby, who saw fit to publish a whole, initially anonymous, pamphlet of his views on the edition; and Horace Walpole, whose heavily annotated copy of the edition was the subject of a study by William Colgate in 1953. Darby writes,

You are led by Taste and Inclination, and urged by your Interest as an Editor, to speak highly of Milton the Poet; but you shew no mercy (I had almost said Justice) to Milton the Calvinist. You seem always disposed, with the honest Knight in the Play, 'to beat him like a Dog, for being a Puritan.' For which if you have no *exquisite* Reason, his being so perhaps alone may be thought Reason 'good' enough.⁸⁷

Darby could be said to have identified the limits of Warton's identification with Milton here: poetic 'taste and inclination' and editorial interest take Warton only so far, and he falters at the hurdle of Milton's puritanism; in doing so, he betrays his otherwise consistent practice of looking at the *Poems* as an entity distinct from *Paradise Lost*.

Darby's barbed allusion to *Twelfth Night* is illuminating. He is referring to the animosity felt by Toby Belch, Andrew Aguecheek, and Olivia's maid Maria towards Olivia's steward, Malvolio, and the plot they hatch to torture Malvolio by convincing him that his mistress is in love with him. All this cruelty takes place on the grounds of Malvolio's unpermissive attitude towards the drunken carousal of Sir Toby and Andrew – the fact that, as Maria puts it, 'sometimes he is a kind of puritan.'

SIR TOBY Possess us, possess us; tell us something of him.
MARIA Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of puritan.
SIR ANDREW O, if I thought that, I'd beat him like a dog!
SIR TOBY What, for being a puritan? thy exquisite reason, dear knight?
SIR ANDREW I have no exquisite reason for't, but I have reason good enough.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ [Samuel Darby,] *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. T. Warton, on his late edition of Milton's Juvenile Poems* (1785), p. 37.

⁸⁸ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, II.iii.136–43. *Arden Shakespeare*, p. 1200.

Twelfth Night's subplot is an oddly sinister parallel to its major narrative of confused identities, failures of interpretation, and unrequited love. The revellers' lack of 'mercy' in administering what they see as 'justice' to Malvolio is cruelly disproportionate, and symptomatic of their failure to realise that if he is 'a kind of Puritan,' he is also a person, susceptible to the same hurts and desires as anyone else. Darby's use of the words 'justice' and 'mercy' also advisedly recall *The Merchant of Venice*, which similarly wrangles with the question of religious prejudice and the possibility of a universal human nature. Clearly Warton is prejudiced against Puritans, especially those who led the English Revolution, but there is something psychologically revealing about his refusal to believe that a Puritan could have written the *Poems*, and his conclusion instead that Milton must have 'turned Puritan' some time after the majority of them were composed.⁸⁹ Besides, in an edition so selective about which elements of Milton's poetry to foreground, and which to downplay, Warton could have omitted to talk about Milton's Puritanism at all. But he does talk about it, for reasons, and in terms, that are highly personal.

Walpole notices this fixation, objecting to Warton's footnote to line 29 of '*Ad Joannem Rousium*', '*Tollat nefandos civium tumultus*':

I fear Milton is here complaining of evils, which his own principles contributed either to produce or promote. But his illustrations are so beautiful, that we forget his politics in his poetry.⁹⁰

Walpole responded to this in the margins of his own copy: 'I wish Warton had forgotten Milton's politics in his poetry, but his own courtly politics makes him

⁸⁹ *PSO* (1785), p. 95. See William Colgate, *Horace Walpole on Milton – A summary of his annotations on the work of Thomas Warton concerning the Poems of John Milton from the London edition of James Dodsley, 1785* (Toronto, ON, 1953), p. 12.

⁹⁰ *PSO* (1785), p. 582.

remember them till he is tiresome.⁹¹ He also underlines Warton's phrase 'Smit with the deplorable polemics of puritanism' from the preface;⁹² places a mark beside Warton's assertion, in the notes to 'Il Penseroso', that 'no man was ever so disqualified to turn Puritan as Milton';⁹³ and draws a long exclamation point in the margin against the following emotive footnote to *Comus*'s line 299, 'And sits as safe as in a senate-house':

Not many years after this was written, Milton's friends shewed that the safety of a senate-house was not inviolable. But, when the people turn legislators, what place is safe against the tumults of innovation, and the insults of disobedience?⁹⁴

In the first place, it is instructive that Walpole and Darby, contemporaries of Warton, see his anti-Puritanism as egregious, and so does his own brother. While other critics at this time censured Milton's religious politics too (Johnson, for instance, refers to him having 'adopted the puritanical savageness of manners' by 1642),⁹⁵ Warton's remarks stand out as a lone, harsh note in his work, an affirmation that there is one place where his fellow-feeling for Milton does not extend. Warton's wish to enshrine an idea of young Milton as sympathetic to 'courtly politics', which he himself favours, requires that he fiercely distance both himself and young Milton from the much more famous, entrenched idea of the mature poet as a puritanical zealot.⁹⁶ This can seem to end in a bifurcation of early and late Milton, and *ad hominem* attacks on the latter.

However, as both Walpole and Darby notice, in this volume Warton does not confine his personal attacks to the revolutionary Milton. Both are also struck by the obvious unfairness of Warton's attitude towards Alexander Pope. Darby focuses on

⁹¹ *Horace Walpole on Milton*, pp. 7–8.

⁹² See *Horace Walpole on Milton*, p. 2.

⁹³ *PSO* (1785), p. 95.

⁹⁴ *PSO* (1785) p. 182. See *Horace Walpole on Milton*, pp. 12–13.

⁹⁵ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 250.

⁹⁶ Recently, it has not seemed so far-fetched to reassess young Milton's politics. See, for instance, Nicholas McDowell's 'How Laudian was the Young Milton?', *Milton Studies*, vol. 52 (2011): 3–33.

the imputation, cast by Warton in the preface to the *Poems upon Several Occasions*, that Pope was able to ‘steal’ material for his own poetry from the *Poems* (1645) due to their being only little known in his period. Darby pivots stylishly from a demurral that Warton has drawn without acknowledgement on Newton’s ideas about the ‘two-handed engine’ crux in ‘Lycidas’ – saying, ‘The good Bishop [Pearce, who discovered Laud] might have fairly asked on this Occasion, Thou that preachest, a Man should not steal, dost thou steal?’⁹⁷ – to his irritation with Warton for accusing Pope of ‘theft’ from Milton’s early poetry. Darby gives an example from Pope himself of an imputation of plagiarism:

I have, I know not how, entertained a Suspicion, that the Words, *steal* and *pilfer*, though we are apt to deal them about very liberally to others, have but a jarring disagreeable sound when applied to a Man’s own private Person, whether they respect his moral, or (what some are as loth to part with) his literary Reputation. Mr Pope certainly, when he called Philips,
 - The Bard whom pilfer’d Pastorals renown -
 meant to stigmatise him as a Plagiary; and to justify a Punishment of this kind, it is necessary that the Theft should be *certain*, and that it should be of *considerable Value*. You have whipped Mr. Pope, for an extream Petit Larceny indeed, in your Preface, and the Operation is repeated in your Note, P. 185.⁹⁸

Pope does allude heavily to Milton in ‘Eloisa to Abelard’ (though, as discussed above, no more so than Joseph Warton in his ‘Enthusiast’), and Warton comments on this in his preface to the *Poems upon Several Occasions*:

My brother remembers to have heard my father say, that when he once, at Magdalene college Oxford, mentioned this volume to Mr. Digby, the intimate friend of Pope, Mr. Digby expressed much surprise that he had never heard Pope speak of them, went home and immediately gave them an attentive reading, and asked Pope if he knew any thing of this hidden treasure. Pope availed himself of the question: and accordingly, we find him soon after sprinkling his ELOISA TO ABELARD with epithets and phrases of a new form and sound, pilfered from COMUS and the PENSEROSO. It is a phenomenon in the history of English poetry, that Pope, a poet not of Milton’s pedigree, should be their first copier. He was however conscious, that he might borrow from a book then scarcely remembered, without the hazard of a discovery, or an imputation of a plagiarism. Yet the theft was so slight, as hardly to deserve the name: and it must be allowed, that the experiment was happily and judiciously applied, in delineating the sombrous scenes of pensive Eloisa’s convent, the solitary Paraclete.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. T. Warton*, p. 22.

⁹⁸ *Letter to the Rev. Mr. T. Warton*, pp. 22–23.

⁹⁹ *PSO* (1785), viii–ix.

Darby objects to the anecdotal quality of this evidence, saying sardonically that ‘the Form of this Charge seems to have been *borrowed*, (for I will use no harsher Expression) from Brother Peter, in the Tale of a Tub,’ and quoting this moment of multiple narrative removes from Swift’s book: ‘Brothers, said Peter, you may remember, that once, when we were Boys, we heard a Fellow say, that he heard my Father’s Man say, that he heard my Father say, that he would advise his Sons to wear Gold Lace on their Coats, &c.’¹⁰⁰

In Darby’s estimation,

The Persons are indeed respectable, but what is the Story? A hearsay Tale, passing through three or four Hands, and ending in nothing. For when once Mr Digby has communicated his Intelligence to Mr Pope, the Evidence is closed. What remains, is nothing more than bare Conjecture; and we may believe as much of it as we chuse. It is certain, that Tonson’s elegant Octavo came out in 1705; and probable that Mr Pope’s Epistle was written much later. But, to proceed, the Gold lace which Mr. Pope had thus pilfered for the Trimmings of Eloisa’s Robe is confessed to have sat handsomely upon her; and after all, ‘the Theft was so slight, as hardly to deserve the Name.’ Or, to use your own Metaphor, if ‘he sprinkled Eloisa with Epithets and Phrases, pilfered from Comus and the Penseroso,’ only three or four Drops, at most, fell upon her Vest; but they were of so high a Perfume, that they enriched the Air all around them, and could not escape the Sagacity of the staunch Critic; who, when once he has a Poet in the Wind, seldom quits his Chace, till he has seized his Prey, but follows it.¹⁰¹

Reading between the lines of Darby’s dismissal of Warton, we can see that he is mostly galled by the highly personal, nepotistic, conjectural, and unverified nature of his accusation against Pope. He cannot really be concerned that Pope’s reputation will suffer, since he even quotes Warton’s admission that ‘the Theft was so slight, as hardly to deserve the name.’ What Darby does not say in so many words, but what we might notice, is that by characterising Pope’s engagement with the *Poems* as theft, rather than appreciation, Warton is attempting to sidestep the possibility that

¹⁰⁰ Darby is slightly misquoting the following passage from Section II of *A Tale of a Tub*: ‘For, brothers, if you remember, we heard a fellow say when we were boys that he heard my father’s man say that he heard my father say that he would advise his sons to get gold lace on their coats as soon as ever they could procure money to buy it.’ Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. Marcus Walsh (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 55–56.

¹⁰¹ *Letter to the Rev. Mr. T. Warton*, pp. 23–25.

someone, a whole generation before him or his family, understood the merit of these works. Pope's delicate, imaginative 'sprinkling' of 'Eloisa to Abelard' with allusions to the *Poems* (1645), including the plaintive line 'I have not yet forgot myself to stone', drawn from 'Il Penseroso's 'forget thyself to marble',¹⁰² impermissibly contravenes Warton's presentation of himself and his brother as newly, uniquely, perceptive and sensitive readers of Milton's early work.

Darby likewise takes issue with what he calls Warton's '[a]ttempt to depreciate the Character of Mr Addison.' He is responding to the moment in the preface to the *Poems* where Warton, recounting 'the first printed encomium which this volume of Milton seems to have received' (a *Spectator* piece written by Addison in 1711),¹⁰³ suggests that the particular lines Addison quoted in that piece, from 'L'Allegro,' were poorly chosen. To unravel the reasons for Darby's annoyance, it will be necessary to look in some detail first at the relevant passages from Warton's preface, then to set them alongside the terms in which Darby frames his argument. Warton writes, pulling his punches at first, of Addison's choice:

This specimen and recommendation, although from so favourite a writer, and so elegant a critic, was probably premature, and I suspect contributed but little to make the poem much better known.¹⁰⁴

Darby allows that 'this Sentence is too well guarded, to fear the Assaults of Criticism. The Victim is here brought forth, and, as is usual before a Sacrifice, besprinkled with a few choice Words and *flowery* Epithets. But, *the huge two-handed Weapon is at the Door.*'¹⁰⁵ Darby is saving his own weapon for the next part of the preface, in which Warton

¹⁰² 'Il Penseroso', l. 42. *CSP*, p. 146.

¹⁰³ This seems to be Addison's essay of 15 December, 1711, on the subject of 'laughter and ridicule', which ends by quoting lines 11–16 and 25–42 of 'L'Allegro'. *Spectator*, I. 468–69. As we have seen, however, this was far from the first mention in print of the *Poems*.

¹⁰⁴ *PSO* (1785), viii.

¹⁰⁵ *Letter to the Rev. Mr. T. Warton*, p. 25.

venture[s] to pronounce, that although the citation immediately resulted from the subject of Addison's paper, he thought it the finest groupe or description either in this piece or its companion the PENSEROSO. Had Addison ever entered into the true spirit and genius of both poems, he certainly did not want opportunities of bringing them forward, by exhibiting passages of a more poetical character. But such passages would not have coincided with Addison's subordinate ideas of poetry.¹⁰⁶

Darby is right to notice that this is odd: Warton cannot possibly know what he 'ventures to pronounce,' here, and he qualifies his pronouncement before he has even made it by admitting that the lines were chosen because of Addison's subject matter. Darby picks up on this, paraphrasing the passage in the voice, as he says, of 'a severe Critic':

I can find no Fault with Mr Addison's Observation, *for it was just*; nor with his Application of it, *for it was proper*; nor with his Omission of any other Passages, *for they would not have been in Place*. all that remains then is to say, that he might have *brought forward* the Penseroso, (and why not Lycidas, Comus, nay and Sampson too, though it were by Head and Shoulders) but they would not have coincided with his *subordinate Ideas of Poetry*.¹⁰⁷

Darby continues in his own voice:

The word *subordinate*, here seems to want it's [*sic*] correlative. Are we to understand, subordinate to the Ideas of Mr Warton, or of *us*, Poets of the Miltonian School? ... Or is it to be taken more generally, as when we say, such a one is a Man of *superior*, or of *inferior* Talents, where there is always a tacit Comparison with the Bulk of Mankind, or at least of Persons of his Rank and Profession? In either Sense, it may be easier to assert than to prove this Subordination. Mr. Pope, who was not indeed of your School, thought differently of his Powers, when in his severe Satire on him, he yet allows him to be one, -- whose Fires true Genius kindles; -- and Dr. J. Warton, after censuring some of his Poems, candidly owns, 'that in various Parts of his Prose Essays are to be found many Strokes of genuine and sublime Poetry; many Marks of a vigorous and exuberant Imagination.'¹⁰⁸

Defending Addison against what does seem to be a spurious attack, and incidentally recognising that the already maligned Pope, even when satirising Addison, called him a genius, Darby is also alluding sidelong to the big claim in Warton's preface that locates at around the middle of the eighteenth century the emergence of the 'school of Milton ... in emulation of the school of Pope.' Walpole too seems to have taken

¹⁰⁶ *PSO* (1785), viii. The Wartons seem altogether to have disliked Addison; Joseph Warton's 'The Enthusiast' compares him unfavourably to Shakespeare, by way of an allusion to Milton ('L'Allegro', l. 134) with the couplet: 'What are the lays of artful Addison, / Coldly correct, to Shakespear's warblings wild?' (ll. 168–69).

¹⁰⁷ *Letter to the Rev. Mr. T. Warton*, pp. 26–27.

¹⁰⁸ *Letter to the Rev. Mr. T. Warton*, p. 27.

note of this Wartonian assertion: the passage comes in for an underlining in his copy of the *Poems*.¹⁰⁹ It is instructive to remember here that David Fairer characterises the pre-Romantics' engagement with their sources as 'not imitation but emulation', which is to say, intrinsically rivalrous. Thomas and Joseph Warton both draw, and admit they draw, on the scholarship and poetry of forerunners like Pope; but Warton is so caught up in the myth of himself as uniquely qualified to analyse early Milton that he occasionally oversimplifies his forebears into straw men. It does seem, however, that in deference to some of his peers' responses, Warton attempted to rectify some of this unfairness in his 1791 edition of the *Poems upon Several Occasions*.

'A sane posterity will know what I merit': differences between the 1785 and 1791 editions of the *Poems upon Several Occasions*

Some of the differences between Warton's two editions of the *Poems upon Several Occasions* are to be expected. For one thing, Warton was dead and himself consigned to posterity before the 1791 edition was published, which possibly accounts for the inclusion on the front page of the motto, from 'Ad Joannem Rousium', 'Si quid meremur sana posteritas sciet' [a sane posterity will know what I merit].¹¹⁰ An addendum to the preface explains:

This new edition of Milton's *Poems* was completely finished for the press, and delivered to the printer, with the many alterations and large additions that now appear, some months before the lamented death of the editor. Among the additions will be found Remarks on the Greek Verses of Milton, by the learned Mr. C. Burney; and also, what the lovers of this great poet will look upon as a curiosity, his last Will and Testament, in which will be seen, many circumstances of his Life, Manners, and Habits, not known before.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Horace Walpole on Milton, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ PSO (1791), sig. A1r.

¹¹¹ PSO (1791), xxvi.

Charles Burney's contribution to the edition of 1791 is a curiosity. Burney sets out in a letter to Warton his prescription as to how Milton's Greek poems should be handled:

Dear Sir,

At length I have concluded the transcribing of my notes on Milton. – They are long – but as this is the first attempt at a Commentary on them, I thought, that it was best to *quash* the subject at once, and not leave any *gleanings* for future Critics. – on the Psalm, I could have been more diffuse, but I was unwilling to censure what Dr Warton has honoured with his commendation.

With these remarks you are perfectly at liberty to act, as seems right to yourself. – I resign them wholly to you. – The whole may be printed, if you please, in its present form or be made to assume any other shape. In short, add, curtail, retrench, and alter, as you will. –

If I were to recommend any mode of arrangement, it should be the following. I would begin with this title.

POEMATATA GRECA.

REMARKS ON MILTON'S &c.

Then the Introduction contained in p. 1, 2 and 3 of my MS.

Then the Psalm – and after your note, printed in p. 542 the remarks in p. 4 of the MS.

Then – Philosophus ad regem and the Notes from p. 5 to p. 19 –

Then – In Effigiei Sculptorem - & the Notes from p. 20 of MS to the end. –

and then your curious and excellent note, printed in p. 544.

or else, the whole of the remarks might be put at the end of the Sylvarum liber.- But the former idea seems the best. – Do you judge! – If the notes *are* separated, my name may be added to each portion. If *not*, it may stand at the end.¹¹²

Warton accepted Burney's recommendations wholesale, writing him a grateful note immediately.¹¹³ Behind the scenes, Burney was expressing his opinions less diplomatically to a friend:

I have been writing some observations on Milton's Greek poetry, which, by the way, is abominably bad. They are for Tom Warton, who is going to publish a second edition of his Milton's poems. I shall say but little about the Psalm, as Dr. J. Warton has been pleased to commend it; but for the other two pieces, I must let slip the dogs of war at them.¹¹⁴

Generally, Thomas Warton's voice is not much different between the first printing and the next. Occasionally he softens his assertions, on the basis, we must assume

¹¹² Charles Burney to Thomas Warton, 4 April 1789. *Correspondence* pp. 618–619, letter 565.

¹¹³ See Thomas Warton to Charles Burney, 6 April 1789, *Correspondence*, p. 619, letter 566.

¹¹⁴ Charles Burney to Samuel Parr, 3 March 1789, in John Johnstone, ed., *The Works of Samuel Parr*, 7 vols. (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Browne, and Green, 1828), vol. 7, p. 408. Cited in *Correspondence*, p. 594.

(and sometimes, we can confirm), of suggestions or corrections from readers. For example, he declares in 1785 that ‘the first printed encomium which this volume seems to have received, was from the pen of Addison’;¹¹⁵ he changes this in 1791 to ‘one of the earliest encomiums [...]’.¹¹⁶ In places he moderates his attitude to Milton the man, too – as when, having written in 1785 that ‘when Milton copies the antients, it is not that he wants matter of his own, but because he is fond of shewing his learning’,¹¹⁷ by 1791 he has added the qualifier, ‘or rather, because the imagery of the antients was so familiar to his thoughts.’¹¹⁸

Notably, where the Latin motto of *Comus* goes unremarked in the 1785 edition, in 1791 it is footnoted (or, rather, asterisked on the facing page) with the remarks from ‘H,’ whose identity is not disclosed:

This motto is delicately chosen, whether we consider it as being spoken by the author himself, or by the editor. If by the former, the meaning, I suppose, is this. ‘I have, by giving way to this publication, let in the breath of public censure on these early blossoms of my poetry, which were before secure in the hands of my friends, as in a private inclosure.’ If we suppose it to come from the editor, then application is not very different: only to *floribus* we must then give an encomiastic sense. The choice of such a motto, so far from vulgar in itself, and in its application, was worthy Milton. H.¹¹⁹

Even Warton’s anti-Puritanism is occasionally toned down by the time of the 1791 edition. Warton’s original 1785 footnote to *Comus*’s ‘Of riot and ill-manag’d merriment’ (l. 172) is a slightly ill-fitting invective against Puritanism:

We have here an early symptom of Milton’s propensity to puritanism, and of his rigid reforming principles ... The puritans so far succeeded in their scheme, as to have made Sunday a day of gravity and severity in England ever since Cromwell’s usurpation. There is many a staunch observant of the rites and practices of the Church of England, and even a bigotted advocate for the general spirit of her system, who little suspects, that he is conforming to the Calvinism of an English Sunday.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ *PSO* (1785), viii.

¹¹⁶ *PSO* (1791), ix.

¹¹⁷ *PSO* (1785), p. 14.

¹¹⁸ *PSO* (1791), p. 14.

¹¹⁹ *PSO* (1791), p. 114. One strong possibility for ‘H’ is William Hayley, who was friends with both Warton brothers and collaborated with them on his own *Life of Milton*, as will be seen below.

¹²⁰ *PSO* (1785), pp. 151–52.

In 1791, by contrast, that line is not footnoted at all.

There are a few more comments on individual poems new to the 1791 edition, such as the observation on ‘At a Vacation Exercise’ that ‘it is hard to say why these [lines] did not first appear in edition 1645. They were first added, but misplaced, in edit. 1673. See table of ERRATA to that edition.’¹²¹ Aesthetic judgements are passed in 1791 that were not in 1785, such as the remark regarding the end of Sonnet V, that ‘the forced thoughts at the close ... are intolerable’ – though Warton magnanimously concedes that this might be because Milton ‘was now in the land of conceit, and was infected by writing in its language.’¹²² Noticeably, Warton barely engages with the Italianism, not to mention the literal Italianness, of some of the *Poems*, but this aside hints at his attitude to them. We are also told, with unusual uncharitableness, that ‘On Shakespeare’ is

but an ordinary poem to come from Milton, on such a subject. But he did not yet know his own strength, or was content to dissemble it, out of deference to the false taste of his time. The conceit, of Shakespeare’s *lying sepulcher’d in a tomb of his own making*, is in Waller’s manner, not his own.¹²³

This idea, of Milton being at variance with the poetic tastes of his own time and producing his best work when actively ignoring those tastes, is important to the Wartonian project of redefining him as a romantic and therefore intrinsically old-fashioned poet. Since Waller had once been the more popular of the two poets, his 1645 *Poems* far outselling Milton’s at the time,¹²⁴ and since Warton disdains popularism, it makes sense that he would characterise lines of which he disapproves as imitative of Waller. It is also understandable that ‘On Shakespeare’, a poem far from pure homage, offends Warton, who often wishes to see early Milton as drawing

¹²¹ *PSO* (1791), p. 307.

¹²² *PSO* (1791), p. 332.

¹²³ *PSO* (1791), p. 317.

¹²⁴ See William Riley Parker, *Milton’s Contemporary Reputation* (Columbus, OH, 1940), p. 23.

on Shakespeare. In general, though, the 1791 edition seems to have toned down some of the more outstandingly personal elements of Warton's criticism, and this slightly gentler tendency continues in the work of subsequent readers of the *Poems*, as the eighteenth century draws to a close.

'Endless labour to be wrong': last eighteenth-century thoughts on Thomas Warton's edition

The two main works to treat the *Poems* before the end of the eighteenth century were William Hayley's *Life of Milton* (1794) and Henry John Todd's edition of Milton's *Poetical Works* (1801). While Todd happily incorporates almost all of Warton's work on the *Poems* (1645), Hayley is more circumspect. He dedicates the second edition of his *Life* (1796) to Joseph Warton, and addresses him directly about Thomas Warton's tendency to over-criticise Milton for his politics:

I remember, with peculiar gratification, the liberality and frankness, with which you lamented to me the extreme severity of the late Mr. Warton, in describing the controversial writings of Milton. I honour the rare integrity of your mind, my candid friend, which took the part of injured genius and probity against the prejudices of a brother, eminent as a scholar, and entitled also, in many points of view, to your love and admiration. I sympathise with you most cordially in regretting the severity to which I allude, so little to be expected from the general temper of the critic, and from the affectionate spirit, with which he had vindicated the poetry of Milton from the misrepresentations of cold and callous austerity. But Mr. Warton had fallen into a mistake, which has betrayed other well-disposed minds into an unreasonable abhorrence of Milton's prose; I mean the mistake of regarding it as having a tendency to subvert our existing government.¹²⁵

Hayley thanks Joseph Warton for putting aside his 'love and admiration' for his brother in order to 'take the part of injured genius and probity' when it came to noticing Thomas Warton's political prejudices against Milton. In other words, he praises Joseph Warton for being dispassionate where Thomas could not. Hayley notes, too, how unusual Thomas Warton's harshness is in the context of his otherwise 'affectionate' approach to Milton, and interestingly ascribes this to a lack of historical relativism on Warton's part; he guesses that Warton was panicked by

¹²⁵ William Hayley, *Life of Milton*, 2nd ed. (1796), p. vi. Hereafter *Life of Milton* (1796).

Milton's revolutionary attitude because he 'regarded it as having a tendency to subvert our existing government.'

Given what we have seen of both Thomas and Joseph Warton's conscientious attempts to impress on their readers the difference between their own time and the period of the literary work under discussion, Hayley's comments might be unexpected. But he is not wrong. Thomas Warton's historicism, like everything else about his criticism, is partial, depending on a wish to connect the past with the present as much as to differentiate between them. In order for Warton's identification with Milton to work, a split has to be effected between one incarnation of Milton and another, between his early, romantic youth, and his revolutionary, Puritanical maturity. The disharmony of such an interpretation is an inevitable consequence of Thomas Warton's apparently urgent need to see his own poetical project as exemplified by young Milton; and this is the sense in which Samuel Johnson's cruel rhyme about Warton's poetry rings true of his criticism. In one sense Warton's is 'endless labour to be wrong', because of the logically contradictory nature of his narratives. It is not possible for Milton to be both a courtly, romantic poet and an unromantic revolutionary; and nor is it possible for Warton, an English literary historian, to uphold both the narrative of continuous improvement and the necessity of a return to the poetic methods of several hundred years before. Marshall Brown sees this impossibility as the intrinsic plight of the 'preromantic', in contrast to the fully-fledged Romantic, poet; Fairer quarrels with that argument on the grounds that it too complacently assumes as its telos 'forward-looking hope', the absence of which immediately equates to failure.¹²⁶ It is possible to take a position between those two perspectives: Warton's is an early version of the intensely personal, partisan

¹²⁶ See Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford, CA, 1991), and Fairer, 'Thomas Warton, Thomas Gray, and the Recovery of the Past', p. 147.

sensibility of the Romantic poet, but he is too rueful about his own romanticism, too conscious that the world he is seeking to recreate is irreparably gone, to be a dispassionate literary critic.

If Warton's approach flared and sank – with the *Poems* receiving no separate edition between 1791 and 1957 – then one perhaps even more unsatisfying took its place. A kind of complacent typology all but took over, whereby the early poems were seen, it seemed once and for all, as inherently inferior practice pieces for the crowning Miltonic achievement of *Paradise Lost*. This reductive reading of Milton's poetic *cursus* is reflected in the *Poems*' total embrace into editions of Milton's *Poetical Works*, of which Todd's is the last eighteenth-century iteration. This approach of course has its own partiality, granting cogency where Warton had invoked incoherence, and cheer where Warton had evoked misery, offering (in Hayley's words) the possibility that 'the subsequent portion of [Milton's] life, however gloomy and tempestuous, will be found to correspond, at least in the close of it, with the radiant promise of his youth.'¹²⁷

¹²⁷ *Life of Milton* (1796), p. 53.

Coda: *Poems* at the beginning of the nineteenth century

William Hayley and Henry John Todd: the *Poems* as the basis of Milton's nineteenth-century reputation

Milton's *Poems* began the nineteenth century newly affirmed in their role as heralds of their author's future greatness. As Chapter 4 began to suggest, this is largely due to the efforts of William Hayley and Henry John Todd at the end of the eighteenth century, who are always at pains to thread a clear line through the poet's early development to the climactic achievement of his later life. To judge by both these critics' vociferous repudiation of Samuel Johnson, the *Poems* were still suffering from his disapprobations; Hayley's and Todd's determined narrative embrace of the early poems can be seen as an act of defiance against the *Life of Milton*, too. But although they are almost contemporaneous, Hayley and Todd go about their biographical recuperation of Milton in different ways, both of which can be seen as exerting an influence on early nineteenth-century readings of the *Poems*. Todd was a scrupulous bibliographical editor of early Milton, having produced a critical edition of *Comus* in 1798,¹ and in his *Complete Poetical Works* of 1801 he pays the same meticulous attention to the *Poems* as he does to *Paradise Lost*. His narrative embrace of the *Poems* is felt in the parity between his treatment of them and the rest of Milton's oeuvre. Hayley's method is rather different: all his discussion of the *Poems* comes in the *Life of Milton* that accompanies his own edition of the *Poetical Works*. This choice, which necessarily emphasises the biographical, also reflects an approach to Milton that, though it is not as systematically individual as that of Thomas Warton, nonetheless tends in a discernibly personal direction.

¹ Henry John Todd, ed., *Comus, a Mask, Presented at Ludlow Castle 1634* (Canterbury, 1798). This was reprinted in 1799 with the addition of Thomas Warton's speculations on the 'Origins of Comus', and the texts of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'.

‘Incessant hope and preparation for astonishing productions’:² the *Poems* in Hayley’s *Life of Milton* (1794)

Although Hayley reprints a variety of paratextual material in his edition – including Milton’s ‘Of that Sort of Dramatick Poem Which is Called ‘Tragedy’ from *Samson Agonistes*, Humphrey Moseley’s ‘The Stationer to the Reader’ from *Poems* (1645), and the letter between Henry Lawes and Viscount Brackley originally published with *A Maske* in 1637 – there are no critical notes to the volume at all.³ The biography, however, is copious, especially in its sympathetic coverage of Milton’s early poetry, in which we find barely a hint of the assumption that the poems need excuses made for them on account of their juvenility. If anything, for Hayley, these early works are seen as especially valuable due to the clues they provide about Milton’s character, which the all-encompassing excellence of *Paradise Lost* has tended to overshadow, and which Johnson has insulted. Hayley explains his method in the following terms:

I dwell the more zealously on whatever may elucidate the moral character of Milton, because, even among those who love and revere him, the splendour of the poet has in some measure eclipsed the merit of the man; but in proportion as the particulars of his life are studied with intelligence and candour, his virtue will become, as it ought to be, the friendly rival of his genius, and receive its due share of admiration and esteem.⁴

A happy side-effect of this recuperative biographical project is a greater interest in Milton’s foreign-language poetry for what it can show us about the poet’s developing character. As well as making it clear that he did *not* believe Milton’s virtue to rival his genius, Johnson in his *Life* had brushed the Italian poems entirely aside; Hayley’s sympathetic understanding of Milton’s Italianism, and his Italian experiences, is in that sense a double retort. Hayley places this emphasis from the epigraph of his *Life of Milton* onwards, a quotation from Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata*: ‘L’età precorse, e la

² William Hayley, ed., *The Poetical Works of John Milton. With a life of the Author*. 3 vols. (1794–97), vol. I, xvi. Hereafter *Life of Milton* (1794).

³ It is supposed, and Hayley’s own frequent references to his friend William Cowper suggest, that Cowper had been due to furnish the notes. Hayley quotes from, and warmly acknowledges, Cowper’s English translations of the Latin and Italian poems in the *Life*.

⁴ *Life of Milton* (1794), I. xxxviii.

speranza; e presti / pareano i fior, quando n'usciro i frutti? ['age runs ahead, and so does hope; and it seems early for the flowers when the fruits are already out'].⁵ Taken from a description of the young Rinaldo, who towers above all the rest of the knights in his beauty and regality, this epigraph is thematically appropriate for the depiction of Milton as preternaturally talented, towering above all his peers, producing fruits, as it were, before he could even be expected to have flowered. These ideas of prematurity are drawn from the volume itself, both its English and Latin halves; the use of Tasso is apt, since he had been a poetic prodigy, and it also recalls Milton's friendship, as dramatised in *Mansus*, with Manso who had also been Tasso's patron. Indeed, at the outset of the *Life* Hayley describes how, in an effort to differentiate his biography of Milton from all those that have gone before, he has borrowed his methodology from Manso (and others):

There remains, perhaps, one method of giving a degree of interest and illustration to the life of Milton, which it has not hitherto received; a method which his accomplished friend of Italy, the Marquis of Villa, in some measure adopted in his interesting life of Tasso; and which two engaging biographers of later date, the Abbé de Sade and Mr. Mason, have carried to greater perfection in their respective memoirs of Petrarch and of Gray. By weaving into their narrative selections of verse and prose from the various writings of those they wished to commemorate, each of these affectionate memorialists may be said to have taught the poet he loved "to become his own biographer;" an experiment that may, perhaps, be tried on Milton with the happiest effect! as in his works, and particularly in those that are at present least known, he has spoken frequently of himself. – Not from vanity, a failing too cold and low for his elevated mind; but, in advanced life, from motives of justice and honour, to defend himself against the poisoned arrows of slander; and, in his younger days, from that tenderness and simplicity of heart, which lead a youthful poet to make his own affections and amusements the chief subject of his song.⁶

Hayley's idea of Milton as 'his own biographer,' even if it too starkly divides Milton's 'life-writings', and their motives, into the defensiveness of his 'advanced life' and the confessionalism of his 'younger days', nonetheless importantly emphasises the

⁵ Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, ed. Franco Tomasi (Milan, 2009), Canto I, verse 58, ll. 5–6. Translation mine.

⁶ *Life of Milton* (1794), I. iii–iv.

element of self-presentation in the *Poems*.⁷ Hayley is also the first critic to suggest what would become a commonplace of Milton criticism in the late twentieth century, that the Latin and Italian Poems can be seen as especially revealing, the choice of language part of their poet's self-expression:

There is an ampler field for the study of his early temper and turn of mind in his Latin and Italian Poetry: here the heart and spirit of Milton are displayed with all the frankness of youth. I select what has a peculiar tendency to shew, in the clearest light, his native disposition, because his character as a man appears to have been greatly mistaken.⁸

Hayley follows Milton's early biographers in valuing the foreign-language poems for what he takes (with some, if not total, justification) as their straight-facedly biographical use, 'from making us acquainted with several interesting particulars of his youth, and many of his opinions, which must have had considerable influence on his conduct.'⁹ As well as apparently revealing a 'tenderness and simplicity of heart' in young Milton, by contrast with the more severe image of the mature poet, the Italian poems in particular provide evidence of Milton's 'steadiness and unconquerable integrity of character' in the face of his youthful infatuations.¹⁰ For instance, Sonnet VI, which begins '*Giovane piano e semplicetto amante*' ['a plain young man, and most simple lover'], is presented by Hayley as 'a sketch of [Milton's] own character, so spirited and singular as to claim a place in this narrative'.¹¹ Hayley prints an entire translation of Sonnet VI, as prepared by Cowper, suggesting:

The most eloquent of the passions, which is said to convert almost every man who feels it into a poet, induced the imagination of Milton to try its powers in a foreign language, whose difficulties he seems to have perfectly subdued by the united aids of genius and of love.¹²

⁷ See my Ch. 1.

⁸ *Life of Milton* (1794), I. iv.

⁹ *Life of Milton* (1794), I. xiv.

¹⁰ *Life of Milton* (1794), vii.

¹¹ *Life of Milton* (1794), I. xxxi.

¹² *Life of Milton* (1794), I. xxxi.

Like Richardson, who in 1734 had used Sonnet VI as evidence of the ‘Dignity and Gravity’ present even in Milton’s youthful poems about more frivolous matters, Hayley tends to ignore the professions of uncertainty in these early poems, so concerned is he to extol the character of his author. Every bit as eulogistic as Milton’s early eighteenth-century admirers, Hayley has a harder task than they did, from the point of view of literary criticism. He must banish the spectre of Johnson, ‘an insidious enemy’ of Milton, as he calls him in the dedication of a 1796 printing of the *Life*, vengefully predicting that one day,

Whenever a poet arises with as large a portion of spleen towards the critical writers of past ages, as Johnson indulged towards the poets in his poetical biography, the literature of England will be enriched with ‘the Lives of the Critics’.¹³

Having quoted Johnson’s comment that ‘the products of [Milton’s] vernal fertility have been surpassed by many, and particularly by his contemporary Cowley’,¹⁴ Hayley rebuts it by adducing the perhaps unlikely testimony of the German scholar Daniel Morhof, last seen praising Milton’s Latin poems in his 1690 *Polyhistor*.¹⁵

In the preceding citation it is evidently the purpose of Dr. Johnson to degrade Milton below Cowley, and many other poets, distinguished by juvenile compositions; but Mr. Warton has, with great taste and judgement, exposed the error of Dr. Johnson, in preferring the Latin poetry of Cowley to that of Milton. An eminent foreign critic has bestowed that high praise on the juvenile productions of our author, which his prejudiced countryman is inclined to deny. Morhoff has affirmed, with equal truth and liberality, that the verses, which Milton produced in his childhood, discover both the fire and judgement of maturer life: a commendation that no impartial reader will be inclined to extenuate, who peruses the spirited epistle to his exiled preceptor, composed in his eighteenth year.¹⁶

Hayley’s rebuttal of Johnson’s comments is the denial of one very famous person’s expression of taste (Johnson’s) with another’s, rather more obscure (Morhof’s). The obscurity is rhetorically advantageous, since Hayley can use it to suggest that Johnson, Milton’s ‘prejudiced countryman’, is unpatriotic for refusing to see what

¹³ *Life of Milton* (1796), xi, xlv.

¹⁴ Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, I. 243, quoted in Hayley, ed. *Poetical Works* (1794), x.

¹⁵ See my Ch. 1.

¹⁶ *Poetical Works* (1794), xi–xii.

even a foreigner can. It is also, though, further evidence of an incipient cosmopolitanism, or at least Europeanism, in readings of Milton's *Poems*; another example is Hayley's favourable comparison of the Nativity Ode to *El nacimiento de Cristo* (1613–15) by the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega.¹⁷ This wish to set the *Poems* in their European context would, as we shall see, be taken up again by the brief vogue for translations of them in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Before this came the intervention of Henry John Todd.

The *Poems* in Todd's variorum (1801)

In his edition of Milton's *Poetical Works*, Todd does a thorough, respectful job of incorporating the notes of previous editors of Milton, adding his own remarks as he sees fit. Todd devotes the last two of the six volumes of his edition to the *Poems*, which he keeps in Warton's rearrangement (with *Comus* marking the end of volume V). He is as careful to defend the poems against the attacks of critics like Johnson, although not nearly so fierce as Hayley when doing so; on the matter of Milton's having 'annexed the date of his age' to some of the early poems, he reports, 'It has been uncandidly supposed, that he intended, by this method, to obtrude the earliness of his own proficiency on the notice of posterity,' proceeding calmly to answer that supposition:

But who will deny, that in these Translations [the Psalms] the dawning of real genius may be discerned; or that his Ode, *On the Death of a fair Infant*, written soon after, displays, as a poetical composition, the vigour and judgement of a mature life?¹⁸

Todd talks about the 1645 publication of the *Poems* mostly as it helps or hinders the dating of individual poems – 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' had been thought

¹⁷ 'At the age of twenty-one ... he composed his Ode on the Nativity; a poem that surpasses in fancy and devotional fire a composition on the same subject by that celebrated and devout poet of Spain, Lopez de Vega.' *Poetical Works* (1794), xvi.

¹⁸ *The Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. with Life by Henry John Todd*, 6 vols. (1801), vol. I, pp. 7–8. Hereafter *Poetical Works* (1801).

products of the 1640s, but Todd points out their placement before *Lycidas* and *A Mask* in the original volume, ‘both of which refer to matters of a much earlier date than 1640.’¹⁹ Answering, one feels, Johnson’s allegations of arrogance, Todd also refers to the *Poems* (1645), specifically Moseley’s preface discussing Milton’s reluctance to be published: ‘Moseley was not more discerning than Milton was modest. But modesty was a principal feature in Milton’s character. He affixed only his initials to *Lycidas*: he acknowledged, with hesitation, *Comus*.’²⁰

Even Thomas Warton, whose edition of the *Poems* is the bedrock of Todd’s own, is sometimes taken to task (albeit gently) for being too harsh about Milton’s character. Todd quotes Warton’s suggestion, regarding the omission of Henry Lawes’s letter to Viscount Brackley from the 1673 *Poems*, that ‘Milton was perhaps unwilling to own his early connections with a family, conspicuous for its unshaken loyalty, and now highly patronized by King Charles the Second,’ and answers it:

Milton, in his edition of 1673, omitted also the letter written by Sir Henry Wotton. Yet it has not been supposed that, by withdrawing the letter, he intended any disrespect to the memory of his learned friend: nor might the dedication perhaps have been withdrawn through any unwillingness to own his early connections with the Egerton family. It might have been inexpedient for him at that time openly to avow them; but he would not, I think, forget them.²¹

Only at one moment, and then rather generally, does Todd compare Milton’s achievements in the *Poems* with those of *Paradise Lost*; commenting on the deficiencies of ‘Upon the Circumcision’, he remarks, ‘Milton is puzzled how to reconcile the transcendent essence of angels with the infirmities of men,’ and adds that a similar question obtains in his representation of angels in the epic poem.²²

¹⁹ *Poetical Works* (1801), I. 28.

²⁰ *Poetical Works* (1801), I. 94.

²¹ *Poetical Works* (1801), V. 176.

²² *Poetical Works* (1801), VI. 35–36.

Todd does not consider Milton to be faultless; more graciously than Hayley, he admits just criticisms of the early poems, often by way of quoting them, especially those of Richard Hurd, whose occasionally prickly remarks about the quality of Milton's youthful poetical judgement regularly find their way into this variorum. *Comus* especially seems to have struck Hurd as imperfect, and Todd represents this view, including his objection to the masque's use of stichomythia:

The Greeks, doubtless, found a grace in this sort of dialogue. As it was one of the characteristics of the Greek drama, it was natural enough for our young poet, passionately fond of the Greek tragedies, to affect this peculiarity. But he judged better in his riper years; there being no instance of this dialogue, I think, in his *Samson Agonistes*.²³

Possibly Todd includes this remark for its suggestion that Milton was humble enough to change his mind, and alter his work on the basis of a better, second thought. He later quotes Hurd's observation that 'if this *Mask* had been revised by Milton, when his ear and judgement were perfectly formed, it had been the most exquisite of all his poems.'²⁴ While Hayley wishes to make Milton as perfect a person as a poet, Todd is possibly even more concerned to embed the image of Milton as a decent person, using his early poetry as evidence of humility and enthusiasm, as well as accomplishment. Yet Todd's comments on the *Poems* are generally more dispassionate than those of Hayley; in part, this is a function of his different task, as variorum editor rather than defensive biographer. His edition of the *Poetical Works* would go through new editions in 1809 and 1826, and be consistently written about as the definitive Milton throughout those years. Todd's could be said to be the steadiest and most reliable analysis of Milton's *Poems* during these years; at the same time, though, others would pick up on the quality of foreignness and the issue of translatability that had been foregrounded by William Hayley.

²³ *Poetical Works* (1801), V. 289.

²⁴ *Poetical Works* (1801), V. 411.

European translations of the *Poems* throughout the eighteenth century

Translations of some of Milton's *Poems* had been appearing, off and on, since William Hog's Latinized *Lycidas* in 1694.²⁵ *Paradise Lost* was the most frequently translated, but there had also been a few notable instances of translations of the English *Poems* in Europe during the eighteenth century. In France, in 1730, Pierre de Mareuil had produced, in prose, *Le Paradis Reconquis, traduit de l'Anglois de Milton, avec quelques autres pieces de Poësies* – these 'other pieces' were 'Lycidas', 'L'Allegro', 'Il Penseroso', and 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity'.²⁶ Mareuil's translations are mostly quite literal, the texts he chooses, unsurprising; in the preface, quoting Elijah Fenton in his *Life of Milton* that had been published five years before,²⁷ he reports that they are 'Pièces, dit l'Auteur de la Vie de Milton, d'une si grande beauté, qu'elles auroient suffi pour immortaliser son nom, quand même il n'auroit point laisse d'autres preuves de son grand génie' ["pieces", says the author of the Life of Milton, "of such great beauty that they would have sufficed to immortalise his name, even if he had not left behind other proofs of his great genius"].²⁸ He adds that these poems are 'pleines d'esprit, & d'un goût délicat' [full of spirit, and of a delicate taste].²⁹ Mareuil makes a few curious errors and omissions: for example, in a footnote to 'Lycidas', he writes: 'Milton sous le nom de Thyrsis avoit déjà écrit un Idile Latin sur la mort de Charles Deodate, jeune Italien Anglois d'origine' [under the name of Thyrsis, Milton had already written a Latin pastoral on the death of Charles Diodati, a young Anglo-Italian] – when, of course, Charles Diodati had not died yet, never mind been eulogised, when 'Lycidas' was composed.³⁰ Mareuil also decisively addresses the ambiguous lines about the 'two-handed engine', translating them: 'et la mort, la faux à la main, assise à la porte de la bergerie, est toujours prête à frapper une fois pour ne

²⁵ See my Ch. 1.

²⁶ Pierre de Mareuil, *Le Paradis Reconquis* (La Haye, 1730), sig. A1r.

²⁷ See my Ch. 2.

²⁸ *Le Paradis Reconquis*, ix–xx.

²⁹ *Le Paradis Reconquis*, xx.

³⁰ *Le Paradis Reconquis*, p. 227.

frapper plus [‘and Death, scythe in hand, seated at the gate of the sheepfold, is always ready to strike once and for all’].³¹

Elsewhere, Mareuil omits the proem to the Nativity Ode (*‘Sur la Feste de Noël’*), beginning straight away with *‘L’Emmanuel paroît sur la terre. Heureux Hyver, tu l’as vu naître’* [Emmanuel appeared on the earth. Happy Winter, you saw him born].³²

Curiously, when a German prose translation of the same poems was produced in 1752, its translator appears at least partly to have copied from that of Mareuil, repeating the erroneous claim that ‘Lycidas’ was composed after the *Epitaphium Damonis*.³³ The *Wiedererobertes Paradies ... und einigen andern Gedichten* differs from its French predecessor in that the translation of the Nativity Ode is in verse, not prose, and by the inclusion of *Samson Agonistes*. *L’Allegro* had also been translated into Italian in 1785 by Domenico Testa.³⁴

Translations into English of Milton’s foreign-language poetry were likewise rare. Aaron Hill’s translation of the *canzone* appears in his posthumous *Works* in 1753, titled ‘A Translation, from some Italian Verses, of Mr. Milton; sent to a Lady, when he was in Florence’.³⁵ John Langhorne produced an English translation of the Italian poems in 1776, ‘addressed to a gentleman of Italy’, who is the addressee of his dedicatory poem, ‘Signor Mozzi of Macerata’ (probably the politician and poet Giulio Mozzi). Langhorne’s translations are mostly unremarkable, although he does take the Miltonic liberty of breaking off before rendering the sestet of Sonnet IV (as he labels it; in the context of the *Poems* as a whole, in which Sonnet I is in English, it is more

³¹ *Le Paradis Reconquis*, p. 238.

³² *Le Paradis Reconquis*, p. 268.

³³ Simon Grynaeus, *Johann Miltons Wiedererobertes Paradies, nebst desselben Samson und einigen andern Gedichten* (Basel, 1752).

³⁴ Domenico Testa, trans., *L’allegro. Poemetto di Gioanni Milton* (Pisa, 1785)

³⁵ *Works of the Late Aaron Hill, Esq.*, 4 vols. (1753), vol. III, p. 86.

usually called Sonnet V). Instead of attempting to translate these lines, Langhorne remarks: ‘The *Concetti* of the Italian in the Conclusion of this Sonnet were so obstinate, that it seemed scarce possible to reduce them into any reputable Form of Translation. Such trifling Liberties as the Translator shall appear to have taken with these Poems, must be imputed to a Desire of getting over Blemishes of the same Kind.’³⁶

Cowper’s *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton* (1808)

William Cowper was approached by a publisher in 1791 to prepare an edition of Milton which, it seems, was envisioned as being a variorum along the lines of the one produced by Todd 10 years later. Cowper died in 1800 before the work could be completed, leaving behind his translations of the Latin and Italian poems, which had been due to be slotted in as part of the much larger project. In 1808, these were edited and published by Cowper’s friend William Hayley as *The Latin and Italian Poems of Milton*, reframing the work as an exercise in translation, despite its initial remit. Some of Cowper’s own testimony about the translating process, in the form of letters to friends, is excerpted and cited by Hayley in his preface to the volume. For example, a letter is quoted in which Cowper writes excitedly to James Rose, a friend, shortly after being commissioned:

I have been called to a new literary engagement ... A Milton, that is to rival, and if possible to exceed in splendour Boydell’s Shakespeare,³⁷ is in contemplation; and I am in the editor’s office. Fuseli is the painter. My business will be to select notes from others, and to write original notes; to translate the Latin and Italian poems, and to give a correct text. I shall have years allowed me to do it in.³⁸

³⁶ John Langhorne, *Milton’s Italian Poems translated and addressed to a gentleman of Italy* (1776), p. 14.

³⁷ This comparison also gives a clue to the magnitude of the proposed project, since John Boydell’s original scheme, only just begun in 1791, was to produce not only an illustrated edition of Shakespeare’s plays, but also a gallery of paintings of scenes from Shakespeare, and a collection of prints from those paintings.

³⁸ William Cowper to Samuel Rose, 14 September 1791, quoted in William Hayley, ed., *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton translated into English Verse ... by the late W. Cowper* (1808), x–xi. Hereafter *Latin and Italian Poems*.

A few months later, Cowper's task was beginning to pall on him, yet he persisted, it seems, essentially out of loyalty to Milton. This is clear from another letter to a friend:

Unless I could find another Homer, I shall promise (I believe) and vow, when I have done with Milton, never to translate again. But my veneration for our great countryman is equal to what I feel for the Grecian; and consequently I am happy, and feel myself honorably employed whatever I can do for Milton. I am now translating his Epitaphium Damonis; a pastoral, in my judgement, equal to any of Virgil's bucolics, but of which Dr Johnson (so it pleased him) speaks as I remember contemptuously [sic.]. But he, who never saw any beauty in a rural scene, was not likely to have much taste for a pastoral. – *In pace quiescat!*³⁹

It is worth considering the possibility that Hayley, an opinionated defender of Milton against Johnson's deprecations, selected this letter for his own reasons as much as for a fair representation of Cowper's opinions. Nonetheless, the two men do seem to have been in accord; Hayley reports a harmonious collaboration during the summer of 1792, in which they shared their respective works in progress, and were 'so happily in unison, that we had no difference of opinion upon any one poem of the diversified collection' of Latin and Italian works.⁴⁰ While Thomas Warton had found it hard to forget Milton's Puritanism, and Hayley would historicise it away in his *Life of Milton*,⁴¹ Cowper's solution is to avoid translating any contentious material on the grounds that it is no longer relevant, since 'We and the Papists are at present on amicable terms. They have behaved themselves peaceably many years ...', and why stir up old animosities? Hayley records him saying,

The poems on the subject of the Gunpowder Treason I have not translated; both because the matter of them is unpleasant, and because they are written with an asperity, which, however it might be warranted in Milton's day, would be extremely unseasonable now!⁴²

³⁹ William Cowper to James Hurdis, 10 December 1791. *Latin and Italian Poems*, xii–xiii.

⁴⁰ *Latin and Italian Poems*, xv.

⁴¹ See the end of my Ch. 4.

⁴² *Latin and Italian Poems*, xii.

Hayley's preface ends by ruefully reflecting on Cowper's descent into mental illness in his later years, a state of depression which prevented him from completing his edition of Milton; Hayley stresses too the temperamental correspondence between translator and poet, 'who not only resembled each other in the purity and prevalence of their poetical talents, but in suffering as authors, tho' in very different degrees, both detraction and neglect.'⁴³ We might call this an act of projection on behalf of another, unlike Warton's obvious self-identification with his poet. But Hayley's peroration combines this vindication of Cowper's uncompleted project with a justification of his own, more biographical, approach to Milton:

The reputation of Milton in particular, after sinking like a Titan overwhelmed under mountains of obloquy and oppression, has arisen with all the energy of a giant refreshed by slumber, and taken its proper place of pre-eminence among the few names of universal celebrity, that are privileged to sleep no more.⁴⁴

The strong implication is that the Latin and Italian poems have an important role to play in solidifying Milton's newly awakened reputation; this is further suggested by the fact that Cowper's volume opens with translations of the Italian encomia that preface the original 1645 *Poemata*. A footnote remarks, doubtless alluding to Samuel Johnson, that

[t]hese complimentary pieces have been sufficiently censured by a great authority, but no very candid judge either of Milton or his panegyrists. He, however, must have a heart sadly indifferent to the glory of his country, who is not gratified by the thought that she may exalt in a son, whom young as he was, the Learned of Italy thus contended to honour.⁴⁵

This opinion unsurprisingly recalls Hayley's previous remarks in his own *Life of Milton* about Johnson's failure to notice what the foreign critic Daniel Morhof clearly saw, the excellence of Milton's Latin poems. Once again, translation becomes necessary in order for English scholars to understand, so they can begin to emulate, the opinions of their European colleagues and to reassess Milton's reputation. A contemporary

⁴³ *Latin and Italian Poems*, xxvi–xxvii.

⁴⁴ *Latin and Italian Poems*, xxvii.

⁴⁵ *Latin and Italian Poems*, p. 8.

review of Cowper's volume, though, does not agree with Hayley that translator and poet suffered comparable fates, finding Milton to have been much worse off. He remarks, 'It is difficult to observe the names of Milton and Cowper united, without indulging in a moment's reflection on the different doom which has been assigned to the two poets by their contemporaries and survivors.'⁴⁶

The reviewer continues in terms which make it clear that Johnson's attack on Milton's character was continuing to reverberate; having declared that, unlike Milton, the 'neglected genius', Cowper 'was hailed during his life with general admiration, and followed to his grave with enthusiastic applause', the reviewer exclaims:

How opposite to the fate of his great predecessor! whose memory was persecuted, even more than a century after his death, with a rancorous inveteracy which party-spleen itself never exceeded and cannot palliate. Dr. Johnson's virulent attack on the character of Milton must necessarily qualify the pride, with which we contemplate the superiority of the present age over that of Charles the Second in refinement and liberality, as exemplified in the general treatment of these distinguished men.⁴⁷

Almost immediately there follows the suggestion that 'a more complete knowledge of this prince of English poetry' would be 'naturally superinduce[d]' by readers familiarising themselves with his Latin and Italian poems, and that this familiarity, in itself, would be

an important and most valuable object, and at this time the more deserving of attention, when the sneers of graver critics, and the vitiated taste of effeminate sciolists, have conspired to persuade the countrymen of Milton that *Paradise Lost* is not an interesting, nor even a valuable, poem!⁴⁸

Even if *Paradise Lost* is still invoked here as the ultimate touchstone, it is notable that the Latin and Italian poems are increasingly considered as, potentially, conducive to Milton's good name, and, further, that practical steps are being considered to bring these works to the notice of more readers. This reviewer goes so far as to

⁴⁶ *Monthly Review*, LVIII (1809): 285–302 (285).

⁴⁷ *Monthly Review*, LVIII, 285–86.

⁴⁸ *Monthly Review*, LVIII, 302.

‘recommend their introduction into schools, as a part of the classical studies of the British youth’, despite their prosodic incorrectness –⁴⁹ this recommendation brings the *Poemata* into line with at least some of the English *Poems* that had long been included in educational miscellanies and anthologies; it suggests a real step forward in the Latin poems’ canonisation. When we remember that it had not even been Cowper’s intention to produce a translation of these poems *per se*, it is all the more remarkable that there was a receptive readership for them. This receptivity is confirmed by the fact that in 1814, another verse translation of the Latin and Italian poems was published by J. G. Strutt, responding to Cowper’s work and to a translation of some of the *Poemata* by Charles Symmons, which had appeared in 1809.⁵⁰ Considering that there was still work to be done, since ‘the translations of Mr. Cowper and Dr. Symmons, high as they stand in the public estimation, are yet but partial, several important poems being omitted by both’,⁵¹ Strutt is nonetheless able to say that ‘the importance and beauty of these long-neglected poems are too well known, and admitted, to require any comment or demand any praise’.⁵² Critical opinion has shifted; Milton’s foreign-language poetry is included in his canon, but this was not to last.

Poems in the 1820s and after

It appears that the publication of *On Christian Doctrine* in 1825 (it had been discovered in 1823)⁵³ heralded another remarkable shift in public opinion of Milton, and one by which the *Poems* were comprehensively sidelined. An 1826 review of the work in the *Quarterly Christian Spectator* opens by announcing, ‘After the lapse of almost two

⁴⁹ *Monthly Review*, LVIII, 302.

⁵⁰ J. G. Strutt, *The Latin and Italian Poems of Milton, Translated into English Verse* (1814). Hereafter *Latin and Italian Poems* (1814).

⁵¹ *Latin and Italian Poems* (1814), iv.

⁵² *Latin and Italian Poems* (1814), iii.

⁵³ See Erik Gray, *Milton and the Victorians* (Ithaca, NY, 2009).

centuries from his death, it has fallen to the lot of this age to contemplate Milton in the new character of a theologian.⁵⁴ It would be an exaggeration to say that Milton was only seen in this newly theological light for the remainder of the nineteenth century; but the intensified focus on his prose, and an ever-growing interest in determining the doctrinal contents of *Paradise Lost*, did conspire to keep the *Poems* from receiving much attention. Even before 1825, sustained interest in these works was starting to dwindle; the *Poemata* and the Italian sonnets are particularly absent from what little critical discussion the *Poems* do enjoy during the 1810s and '20s. Milton's English sonnets, though, were taken up by Wordsworth as a model –⁵⁵ he considered them 'manly and dignified compositions, distinguished by simplicity and unity of object and aim' –⁵⁶ and Hazlitt too wrote in praise of them: 'the beauty of Milton's sonnets is their sincerity, the spirit of poetical patriotism which they breathe'.⁵⁷ In his 1815 Essay Supplementary to the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth repeats the canard that the *Poems*, 'though on their first appearance they were praised by a few of the judicious, were afterwards neglected to that degree, that Pope in his youth could borrow from them without risk of its being known';⁵⁸ this mistake suggests that, despite advances earlier in the century, critical discourse on the *Poems* had not progressed much further since.

⁵⁴ 'Milton's Treatise on Christian Doctrine', *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, vol. 8: 80–94 (80).

⁵⁵ See James G. Nelson, *The Sublime Puritan – Milton and the Victorians* (Madison, WI, 1963), p. 23.

⁵⁶ Letter from William Wordsworth to unknown recipient, November 1802, in Earnest De Selincourt and Chester L. Shaver, eds., *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Vol. I: The Early Years (2nd rev. ed., 1967), letter 179.

⁵⁷ William Hazlitt, *On Milton's Sonnets* (1821), quoted in Joseph A. Wittreich, ed., *The Romantics on Milton – Formal Essays and Critical Asides* (Cleveland, OH, 1970), p. 390.

⁵⁸ William Wordsworth, 'Essay Supplementary to Preface', quoted in *The Romantics on Milton*, p. 125.

We know Wordsworth also enjoyed ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’,⁵⁹ while ‘Lycidas’ was beloved by Hazlitt as his ‘greatest favourite’,⁶⁰ and by Charles Lamb who, however, was dismayed to see the poem in draft, writing in the *London Magazine*:

There is something to me repugnant, at any time, in written hand. The text never seems determinate. Print settles it. I had thought of the *Lycidas* as a full-grown beauty – as springing up with all its parts absolute – till, in evil hour, I was shown the original written copy of it, together with the other minor poems of its author, in the Library of Trinity, kept like some treasure to be proud of. I wish they had thrown them in the Cam [...].⁶¹

Lamb’s distress at seeing the Trinity Manuscript, expressed in 1820, contrasts markedly with Thomas Newton’s winsome response, in 1749, to the sight of Milton’s handwriting and his imperfect punctuation.⁶² Lamb’s naivety, even if it is affected, combines with Wordsworth’s sense of the *Poems*’ relative obscurity to suggest that the distance between most of the reading public and these earlier Miltonic works was growing, not shrinking. Joseph Wittreich writes that ‘the Romantic poets and critics represent one massive response to Johnson’s critical biography of Milton’,⁶³ this may be so, but the response was not sufficient to silence Johnson, because no critic arose who could provide a comprehensive enough reading of Milton’s early poetry to refute him.

Barely banished in the previous generation by the efforts of Warton, Hayley, and Todd, Johnson continues throughout the early part of the nineteenth century to loom over critical opinion of the *Poems*. Hazlitt frequently strives to repudiate him, especially his suggestion that ‘Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace’,⁶⁴ commenting in 1815, ‘Dr Johnson’s general remark, that Milton’s genius had

⁵⁹ See journal entries by Dorothy Wordsworth about ‘reading Milton’s *Penseroso* to William’, as quoted in *The Romantics on Milton*, pp. 110–111.

⁶⁰ William Hazlitt, ‘*Comus*’ (1815), quoted in *The Romantics on Milton*, p. 366.

⁶¹ Charles Lamb, ‘Oxford at the Vacation’, *London Magazine* 2 (October 1820): 365–69 (367).

⁶² See my Ch. 3.

⁶³ *The Romantics on Milton*, ix.

⁶⁴ *Lives of the Poets*, I. 278.

not room to show itself in his smaller pieces, is not well-founded',⁶⁵ and writing in 1821 that 'there could not have been a greater mistake or a more unjust piece of criticism than to suppose that Milton only shone on great subjects'.⁶⁶ Coleridge, writing in 1817, echoes Hayley in finding it remarkable that while Johnson should censure Milton's Latin poems, Italian critics should praise them; he cites a contemporary Italian critic this time:

That Dr Johnson should have passed a contrary judgement, and have even preferred Cowley's Latin Poems to Milton's, is a caprice that has, if I mistake not, excited the surprise of all scholars. I was much amused last summer with the laughable *affright*, with which an Italian poet perused a page of Cowley's *Davideis*, contrasted with the enthusiasm with which he first ran through, and then read aloud, Milton's *Mansus* and *Ad Patrem*.⁶⁷

Landor would echo this sentiment, remarking, 'It is wonderful that a critic, so severe in his censures on the absurdities and extravagances of Cowley, should prefer the very worst of them to the gracefulness and simplicity of Milton.'⁶⁸

More remarkable, we might say, is that a fifty-year-old argument, with which nobody had ever seemed to agree, was yet to be conclusively defeated. For a long time, the last word on Milton's early works rested with Johnson, because no persuasive, cohesive argument was ventured that could counter him. The intercession of the prose, and the renewed focus on *Paradise Lost*, seem to have meant that the clock stopped for the *Poems* in 1825, with only fitful attention, at best, paid them after that, and no new editions at all throughout the nineteenth century. It was only with the work of New Critics Cleanth Brooks and Edward Hardy, in the middle of the twentieth century, that there arrived an edition of Milton's *Poems* treating them as a coherent, albeit inwardly conflicted, whole. This model, which does not force correspondences between the Milton of 1645 and the Milton of 1667, persists in

⁶⁵ William Hazlitt, 'Comus' (1815), *The Romantics on Milton*, p. 368.

⁶⁶ Hazlitt, 'On Milton's Sonnets' (1821), *The Romantics on Milton*, p. 393.

⁶⁷ S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Ch. XXIV, *The Romantics on Milton*, p. 227.

⁶⁸ From *Imaginary Conversations: Southey and Landor* (1829), *The Romantics on Milton*, p. 351.

criticism of the *Poems* to this day, the best of which pays attention to what the volume says about itself, to the relationship between its constituent parts and the inconsistencies in their self-presentation, before attempting to connect them to *Paradise Lost*. Such an approach not only deepens our comprehension of the works included in the *Poems* (1645) and subsequent iterations; it also enables a richer, livelier interrogation of the whole shape of Milton's poetic career.

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