

Milton and the Restoration: Some Reassessments

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Milton during the Restoration is usually seen as a distressed poet who, reeling from cultural shock, abandons public activity, especially political activity, to withdraw "into regions of the mind"?¹ My reassessment of this perspective is twofold. First, I will cite Milton's political prose to argue that he anticipated the monarchical restoration. On the contrary, this restoration, on the whole, confirmed his political expectations. Second, I will argue that there is much evidence to suggest the "Restoration Milton" was extraordinarily active—especially for a blind man—in a society that he very likely found more congenial than that of pre-war England. I will then examine how these reassessments impact the autobiographical passages of *Paradise Lost*, before concluding with a few tentative remarks on a "culture of loss" that seems to link the poet's political prose with his epic.

Christopher Hill has written that "the restoration then came about, in Milton's view, because of the avarice and ambition of the revolutionary leaders, because of lack of virtue and civic morale among the body of the people, and because of divisions among the godly themselves."² I suggest that these cultural failures would have been anticipated by, in Professor Hill's words, "no political innocent" who had recorded in his Commonplace Book (1640-41) that "anyone may learn with how much disturbance of conscience affairs of state are carried on."³ Milton's deeply skeptical and satiric temperament was strenuously exercised throughout the tumultuous 1640s and 1650s.⁴ The "Ha, ha, ha" of his early anti-prelatical tracts is quickly turned on his allies in this rancorous debate (*Animadversions*, CPW 1: 726). Presbyterians—among others—condemn his books and denounce him in

sermons, and his response is characteristically ferocious as he condemns those who have misled the nation into "all this waste of wealth and blood" (Sonnet XII 14; ca. 1646).⁵ In *Ad Ioannem Rousium* (January 1647), the central problem is attributed not to the Anglicans, or to the Presbyterians, or to the Sectaries. It is seen as the English themselves: "What god or what god-begotten man will take pity on the ancient character of our race—if we have sufficiently atoned for our earlier offenses and the degenerate idleness of our effeminate luxury—and will sweep away these accursed tumults among the citizens?" (25-29). "Milton's bitter perspective on the events of the late 1640s" clearly is evident in his *History of Britain*.⁶ It is even more clearly evident in the section censored from that work. In 1648 he excoriates the Parliament that chose to "hucster the common-wealth," involving the nation in "ridiculous frustration" (MS Digression, CPW 5.1: 445, 443). And it is then that he more obviously turns his attention to averting the reimposition of royal order. In *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton warns "doubling Divines" (CPW 3: 198)—and the rest of those "who of late so much blame Disposing [...] the Men that did it themselves" (title page)—"not to fall off from thir first principles" by sponsoring a restoration—in 1648: "Let them, feare therefore if they be wise, [...] and be warn'd in time they put no confidence in Princes whom they have provok'd, lest they be added to the examples of those that miserably have tasted the event" (CPW 3: 238-39). Even with the execution of the king, too many of "the men that did it themselves" remain "an inconstant, irrational, and Image-doting rabble," the latest generation of the "race of Idiots" that slumbered in "slavish dejection" during the pre-war period. His countrymen, he writes in 1649, are characterized by "a besotted and degenerate baseness of spirit, except some few" (*Eikonoklastes*, CPW 3: 601, 344, 355).

His *Defenses* do not merely warn against a restoration of the monarchy. As pointed out by his anonymous biographer (and many others since then), they predict it. Aloof from "the corrupt designs of his Masters," Milton "little less than Prophetically, denounc'd the Punishments due to the abusers of that Specious name" of "Liberty" in the

"Perorations at the close of those Books."⁷ In each case, resounding the mighty *if* of *Ad Ioannem Rousium* (and the first word of the *Tenure*), he targets the vices that he had cited in his Digression as the sources for political reversal—"self-seeking, greed, luxury, and the seductions of success" (*First Defense*, CPW 4.1: 535) and "avarice, ambition, and luxury" (*Second Defense*, CPW 4.1: 680):

Unless your liberty is [...] of that kind alone which, sprung from piety, justice, temperance, in short, true virtue, has put down the deepest and most far-reaching roots in your souls, there will not be lacking one who will shortly wrench from you, even without weapons, that liberty [...]. (CPW 4.1: 680)

Milton here in the *Second Defense* again implies that his readers lack these virtues, that these virtues must be developed rather than retained. The English must "drive" from their "minds the superstitions that are sprung from ignorance of real and genuine religion [...]." They must "expel avarice, ambition, and luxury" from their "minds" and "extravagance" from their "families": "You, therefore, who wish to remain free, either be wise at the outset or recover your senses as soon as possible" (*Second Defense*, CPW 4.1: 680, 684).

This skepticism is heightened since these admonitions follow Milton's salute to England's liberator. This no longer is the English people—or at least the people whom Milton previously credited with having performed "it themselves." In the *First Defense* he tells the English that God "has wondrously set you free before all men"; and in the *Second Defense* he cites God's instruments as the radical, especially army, leaders—and, of course, himself (CPW 4.1: 535, 674-78). The chief is Cromwell: "Cromwell, we are deserted! You alone remain. On you has fallen the whole burden of our affairs. On you alone they depend" (*Second Defense*, CPW 4.1: 671). This statement should be read in light of what Milton writes six years later, after "a short but scandalous night of interruption" caused by England's reliance on Cromwell: "Certainly then that people must needs be madd or strangely infatuated, that build the chief hope of thir common happiness on a single person" (*Likeliest Means*, CPW 7: 274; *Readie and Easie Way* 7:

361). A statement in the *First Defense* is even more illuminating. Should the English return to monarchy (as the tract strongly suggests, even "prophesies"), "the worst expressions and beliefs" of the skeptics (such as evidently himself) "are all true" (*First Defense*, CPW 4.1: 536).

Another one of these skeptics was John Phillips, very likely the anonymous biographer who points out this "prophecy." If it were Phillips, he probably had many good reasons, other than the perorations, for his observation of his uncle's skepticism. Certainly, Milton not only foretells the restoration of the monarchy, he foretells it for largely the right reasons. The restored monarchy and the government that would evolve from it are more acceptable to the commercial interests in an England at the threshold of empire and vast commercial expansion. Milton succinctly summarized the alternatives at this pivotal moment. He proposes the virtues of republicanism, "to administer incorrupt justice to the people, to help those cruelly harassed and oppressed, and to render every man promptly his own desserts." Or the English could reveal themselves to be "royalists" as they pursue "the ability to devise the cleverest means of putting vast sums of money into the treasury, the power readily to equip land and sea forces, to deal shrewdly with ambassadors from abroad, and to contract judicious alliances and treaties" (*Second Defense*, CPW 4.1: 671).⁸ As the MS Digression clearly indicates, this choice had been made long before 1654.

In early 1660, Milton's political skepticism culminates in proposing his own restoration:

Free Commonwealths have bin ever counted fittest and properest for civil, vertuous and industrious Nations, abounding with prudent men worthie to govern: monarchie fittest to curb degenerate, corrupt, idle, proud, luxurious people. If we desire to be of the former, nothing better for us, nothing nobler then a free Commonwealth: if we will needs condemn our selves to be of the latter, desparing of our own vertue, industrie and the number of our able men, we may then, conscious of our own unworthiness to be governd better, sadly betake us to our befitting thraldom: yet chusing out of our own number one who hath best aided the people, and best merited against tyrannie, the space of a raign or two we may chance to live happily enough, or tolera-

bly. But that a victorious people should give up themselves again to the vanquishd, was never yet heard of; seems rather void of all reason and good policie, and will in all probabilitie subject the subduers to the subdu'd, will expose to revenge, to beggarie, to ruin and perpetual bondage the victors under the vanquishd: then which what can be more unworthie? (*Brief Notes upon a Late Sermon*, CPW 7: 481-82)

A saving remnant perhaps, but it is doubtful Milton ever believed that any place had worthies abounding. Of course there was Heaven, but then many of the angels fell—or so the poet was arguing in *Paradise Lost*. Nor is it likely that he had much confidence in the virtue of pagan Greece and Rome or Machiavelli's Catholic Italy: the positive side of his own republicanism is too deeply sourced in "the long-deferr'd, but much more wonderfull and happy reformation of the Church in these latter dayes" (*Of Reformation in England*, CPW 1: 519). Yet, virtuous men were even rarer in a "reforming" England that by 1648 had inflicted the most "ignominious and mortal wound to faith, to pietie [...] since the first preaching of reformation" (MS Digression, CPW 5.1: 449). So Milton argues not that the English have virtue, but that they have the opportunity to develop virtue in Milton's republic.

Woolrych writes that Milton's proposal implies "better, in fact, King George than King Charles" (CPW 7: 203). Why Monck rather than Charles II? "General Monck cheerfully changed from the King's side to Parliament's as soon as the latter was clearly winning; with equal lack of principle he changed back again in 1660 when Parliament in its turn was going under."⁹ This man would seem the king-nominee of an epic satirist rather than of a political idealist—and he was. Nearly every word of the proposal for the English to "sadly betake" themselves (including, rhetorically, himself) to "thralldom" is contemptuous: "raign or two," "chance," "happily anough, or tolerably." The climactic question of disgust not only restates Milton's previous satirical assessments but is in keeping with the epic that he was then writing.

If his countrymen were to have a king because of their own lack of virtue, men like the plain flexible opportunist Monck were, as successful politicians should be, more plainly fitted to the character of the degenerate governed and to the character of the ignoble government

that such a populace deserves. Certainly such figures were less dangerous than someone who—with astonishing success—appears to be a saint-martyr-king, dying for the principle of his status as God's anointed. This political choice between a purported semi-divinity and a man who could "walk the streets as other men [...] without adoration" in many ways had been made in 1654 (*Readie and Easie Way*, CPW 7: 360). Milton then gradually withdraws from public office, as Cromwell becomes increasingly authoritarian, opening his government to those (many of whom are former royalists) who will find an easy transition to the government of one who—unlike Cromwell—accepts their offer of the crown. "King-ridden" Cromwell himself is condemned by many as a betrayer of the Cause as he effects a religious policy from which it is but "a small step forward to the Parliamentary persecution of sectaries after 1660."¹⁰ Yet Milton responds to Cromwell's despoliations not with amazed and angry protests but with the same satiric, polite if not politic, silence that will comment on Monck's and Montagu's, and Ingoldsby's and Downing's among a multitude of others—restoration of the monarchy.

If Englishmen were to have kings—and the poem Milton was writing in 1660 suggests that autocrats fall into the same category as death, taxes, and sin—Charles II in many ways surpasses Monck as a Miltonic nominee. Milton, of course, could not endorse Charles II, but here at least was someone who confirmed that "the mystery of kingship was irreparably fractured" and "a sudden modernity had swept away the Renaissance state" and the semi-divine trappings that had lent an aura to "Heav'n upon Earth" of Caroline court culture (*Eikonoklastes*, CPW 3: 530).¹¹ The new king's "inclination towards the leisured lifestyle of a country squire came into conflict with his duties as a king. He found it difficult to look and act like a king, to maintain his dignity and keep his distance; too often he would let 'all distinction fall to the ground as useless and foppish.'"¹² As had his father James, Charles I acted the "politic parent," the *Parens patriae*. A triumphal restoration arch welcomed Charles II, too, as *Parens patriae*: "[...] later in his career when called the father of his country, Charles II

reportedly said, 'Well, I believe that I am, a good number of them.'¹³ Renaissance "humanists, poets, writers, and artists" had been so successful in creating an image of a divine king that James I had been able to declare that kings were as "the breathing Images of God upon earth": "Kings are not onely Gods Lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon gods throne, but even by God himselfe they are called Gods."¹⁴ And the "remarkable Renaissance" of Caroline court culture had promoted the idea that "Kingship, the rule of the soul over the body politic, might lead man back to his earthly paradise."¹⁵ In the shadow of these dangerous, dazzling arguments, Milton would have been heartened—by a not unimportant sense of triumph—to hear that the king and his courtiers were once again abandoning God's love for that of women, and not attempting to disguise their lasciviousness with talk of "love," except of the body. The poet was much less disturbed by courtiers flown with insolence and wine than by those who, intoxicated with philosophical idealism, quoted Plato and Ficino as they endorsed political absolutism, celebrating court men and women as "gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, sun and stars," representing "the Renaissance belief in man's ability to control his own destiny."¹⁶ The mighty and great were now supposed (as they had always been by Milton) to get drunk and make noise—and not to pretend it was philosophy. Lusty courtiers, rolling in their brutish vices, Plato unquoted: this was how it should be—and seemed to be after 1660.¹⁷

Why then does Milton, about 1660, withdraw, more or less permanently, into "regions of mind"? I suggest that this assessment is not completely convincing. In December 1657 Milton had written that he had "very few intimacies with the men in favor, since" he stayed "at home most of the time, and by choice."¹⁸ And in 1659 he writes that his contact with public officials had been restricted to his "prayers for them that govern" (*Letter to a Friend*, CPW 7: 324). In 1660, however, there are so many persons possibly responsible for Milton's preservation that it is impossible to determine what precisely did happen. Edward Phillips tells us of "all the Power and Interest he [Milton] had in the Great ones of those Times," including "Friends both in [Privy]

Council and Parliament."¹⁹ Parker speculates that these powerful "Friends" might have included Monck, Montagu, Annesley, Sir William Morrice, Sir Thomas Clarges, as well as Davenant and Marvell. And of course there were the Joneses and Boyles, as well as other Fellows of the Royal Society.²⁰ Who among the great before the war, would have known the scrivener's son, much less have preserved him from the punishments prescribed for traitors?

Parker, arguing that during the 1640s and 1650s Milton's influence was "in the moulding of events [...] negligible," conjectures that after 1660 "living in seclusion, he probably became an almost legendary figure to those Englishmen who remembered but did not know him."²¹ Whatever was private about this "seclusion" would seem neither unnatural nor unwelcome to a blind man in his sunset years. But Milton continued to enjoy an extraordinarily busy and public "seclusion." His celebrity (he had little or none before the civil war) flared brighter, achieving if not exactly a radical chic, at least a radical fascination.

Milton's books are, of course, denounced (as they had been in 1643/44) and burned, but this adds "evidence for Milton's political reputation after the Restoration."²² The forbidden, then as now, exerts an irresistible allure, especially if you survive it: "visits to see Milton were part of the ordinary tourist route through London, and travelers from abroad were being shown [before the fire] the birthplace in Bread Street by the proud local inhabitants."²³ Nor is the prophet, though understandably unpopular with many, neglected by his more knowing countrymen. He is visited by "the Nobility, and many persons of eminent quality"—more than the blasé poet did desire, "almost to his dying day."²⁴ Witty stories are told about visits from the Duke of York (or according to Chateaubriand, the king himself)²⁵—who, made the butt of the poet's subversive repartee, indignantly tattles to his brother the king (*LR* 4: 389-91). In another anecdote that reveals Time busily vindicating the poet, when the King's Book begins to appear as not the king's book, the Earl of Clarendon writes to John Gauden, Bishop of Exeter, "Nobody will be glad of it but Mr. Milton"

(LR 4: 369). In a vein of similar hilarity, Warton tells us how King Charles II is informed of the quasi-regicide's mock funeral, a ruse to fool the authorities, and the Merry Monarch laughs heartily at the bard's prank (LR 4: 317).

Perhaps some of these anecdotes were invented after the poet's death. But several biographers (the anonymous biographer, Newton, and Richardson), relying primarily upon Milton's widow, even record that the *blind* man was invited by the King to write for the court, probably as Latin Secretary. He declines, unlike the vast majority of Englishmen (and many of his close acquaintances and former associates). But since Milton won't go to court, the court goes to him. Helmsmen of state seek to consult the sage on matters of which few people at that time are familiar, such as divorce, even royal divorce.²⁶ It is not known whether or how often Milton deigned to respond. After the poet is safely in the grave, his work is indeed appropriated by royalists. *Mr John Miltons Character of the Long Parliament and Assembly of Divines in MDCXLI* is published in 1681. The work—edited by Roger L'Estrange—is used by the Tories to attack the Parliament during the Exclusion Crisis.²⁷

And of course *Paradise Lost* is published in 1667 (and *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regained*—and histories translations, polemical prose, a logic book, and other material).²⁸ Yet, even before that poem, Milton already had attained a literary reputation. His *Defensio* (when an unburned copy could be obtained) was still admired by many (including, of course, himself) as a literary masterpiece. Even his poetry, quite possibly, had been recognized by many contemporaries as masterful.²⁹ Burnet comments that Milton "lived many years much visited by all strangers, and much admired by all at home for the poems he writ" (LR 5: 116-117). In 1663, the immensely popular *Mask* is re-published—this time with the author's name prominently attached.³⁰ Though without Milton's name, Shakespeare's third folio is published with Milton's dedicatory poem. It was not only Thomas Ellwood who recognized the scrivener's son as "a gentleman of great note for learning throughout the learned world."³¹ In the same year,

the Comte de Cominges, French ambassador, wrote of the English "arts and sciences" to Louis XIV, "if any vestiges remain here (in England) it is only in the memory of Bacon, of More, of Buchanan, and, in recent times, of one named Milton" (LR 4: 393).

Paradise Lost, more than likely, becomes an instant classic, or at the very least, "at once made a very strong impression."³² Indeed, "almost every bookish or literary person in England had read or looked into *Paradise Lost* before 1669."³³ But it is not only the learned—Puritan or Royalist—whom the poem astonishes. Stories appear disputing which fashionable courtier was to receive credit for "discovering" the poem (LR 4: 439, 446-47). The plausibility of these stories is strongly indicated by a more documented example of the poem's success with the world of fashion. In search of an entertainment for the Duke of York's proposed marriage festivities, the poet laureate hastens (according to some reports, attended by Sir Edmund Waller) to a house near Bunhill Fields to request permission to turn *Paradise Lost* into that popular new court genre, an opera. With elegant and genial scorn, the author grants his leave for the Laureate "to tagge his Verses" as an entertainment at the Duke of York's marriage to Louis XIV's niece, to whom his work is, with much adulation, dedicated (LR 5: 46-47).³⁴

Milton had good reason to remain "chearfull even in his Gowte-fitts" and generally "very merry" (LR 5: 83). As for his powerful enemies, apparently they were numerous enough to allow him to see himself as "the one just man" and ineffective enough to leave the one just man undisturbed to enjoy the happy fame, or infamy, or godly disrepute that he had gained, and continued to gain, through his role as civic sage.

Ironically, perhaps the most powerful source for creating the image of the reclusive, defiant Milton is *Paradise Lost*. Immediately following the account of the defeated angels, the epic poet tells us that he is

unchang'd

To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,
On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
And solitude; [...] (PL 7.24-28)

But this "solitude" (*PL* 7.28) is highly rhetorical. "Solitude" literally characterizes Milton in 1660 no more accurately than Marvell's "silence" characterizes a "retired" Milton in 1660-1674 (*LR* 5: 57). By his own admission the poet was "with dangers compast round" (*PL* 7.27). One can be alone, or one can be the center of oppositional controversy, but one cannot be both; functioning as an overt opposition, as we now realize, is a profound form of cultural participation. The poet seems to confirm this by imploring his muse to "drive farr off the barbarous dissonance" of a Restoration culture (*PL* 7.31). This threat is averted—not apparently by the muse—but by the author's numerous powerful friends.

Similarly significant is the assertion that the poet was "unchang'd." This usually is read as evidence of Milton distancing himself from the new cultural contexts. I suggest it indicates the opposite. Milton does not change because he, in many ways, if not the last poet of the English Renaissance (whatever that term might denote), was the first poet of the Restoration. *Paradise Lost*, in at least one spectacular way, vividly supports this perspective. The declaration that the poet is "unchang'd" at first appears obtuse, especially as he was writing such an innately political work as epic. The poem was certainly begun—and its blueprint most probably completed—before the Restoration, which did not occur, according to best guesses, until about mid-poem.³⁵ And then came no minor tap to the political world, requiring subtle shifts or limited modification of perspective. The divine course of history, much celebrated by godly polemicists (including, sometimes, Milton), had seemingly reversed itself. The political world was turned upside-down, winners and losers reversed places, and the events of 1640-1660 assumed a radically fresh significance. Some great thing would seem to have failed or succeeded. Some change—rethinking, modification, or capitulation—would seem to have been in order. Only Milton, and his poem, it seems, remained unchanged in 1660.

Yet, most astonishingly of all, Milton was right: no change was needed. The epic emerges from another revolution unaltered—and just as it should be. Far from becoming either a majestic relic or the

vanishing paradise created by a defeated Saint, *Paradise Lost* becomes the most influential English poem of the next 200 years. The immense event of monarchical restoration registers so faintly on an intensely political poem because it generally confirmed the author's political notions. And these notions were those of the present and future rather than of the past. *Paradise Lost* reflects, enacts, and extends the powerful cultural currents that shaped the Restoration era and would continue to shape English life for at least the next 200 years. It perhaps would not be excessive to suggest that the monarchical restoration and *Paradise Lost* shared similar determining contexts—crises—changes or “causes.” These possible intersections are suggested by another autobiographical passage (the poem's last) that is often cited as evidence of the poet's cultural unease. Beating steadily and consciously towards *his* triumphant conclusion, the poet raises the question if he lives in “an age too late” for epic (*PL* 9.44). It was Milton's genius to perceive that his times were antipathetic to successful traditional epic, and he writes instead anti-epic that was perfectly timed to—among many other things—inaugurate the great age of British satire. Satan, warrior-hero-voyager-discoverer-conqueror-sage-leader-politician-saviour, is a tremendous satire on the futility of the heroism celebrated in Renaissance epic. Readers of Butler, Dryden, and that mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease would have shared Milton's skepticism. Significantly, Milton's conjecture concludes a catalogue of rejected epic themes identified with romance and consequently with the Caroline court culture. It was for this that Milton perceived himself late, and he perceived himself late, very early.³⁶

Where Caroline court art, focusing on the living representative of divine authority, had celebrated why things were right, *Paradise Lost* returns to the beginning to explain what went wrong, why it went wrong, why it is right it went wrong, and what to do about it.³⁷ An examination of the politics of *Paradise Lost* is beyond the scope of this essay. However, I would, in conclusion, like to offer a suggestion about one way in which *Paradise Lost* intersects Milton's pre-1660 political notions and his perceptions of the monarchical restoration.

One of the poem's primary arguments, an argument that predetermines many of the poem's constructions, from the state to the self, is that humans, if they are given a paradise (whatever perfections that term is intended to encompass), will lose it. This theme, I will suggest, is the culmination of the tough satire of the political pamphlets who foresaw long before 1660 a looming monarchical restoration as a confirmation of his arguments for a culture of limitations.

This culture of human loss and failure, of human limitations, often surfaces in the powerful disruptiveness of Milton's republican, protestant arguments. Dr. Johnson, as so often in his criticism of Milton, is almost right:

He hated monarchs in the state and prelates in the church; for he hated all whom he was required to obey. It is to be suspected that his predominant desire was to destroy rather than to establish, and that he felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority.³⁸

There certainly was little positive, practical, or precedented in a "Commonwealth; wherein they who are greatest, are perpetual servants and drudges to the publick at thir own cost and charges, neglect thir own affairs; yet are not elevated above thir brethren" (*Readie and Easie Way*, CPW 7: 360). Yet this republican disruptiveness was not created by a sullen resentment of the great nor from a naïve confidence in the capacity of the average subject. Rather it was created by a profound awareness of the dangers of those who pretend to be great as they mislead the average subject. Even the early anti-prelatical tracts "are far more concerned with destroying episcopacy than with the details of the order that will replace it."³⁹ The details themselves, soon abandoned, seem to be generated by the deeper, more enduring purpose that resounds throughout the anti-monarchical tracts: a "rehearsal not of Republican argument, but of Republican values." Central to these values is the "demystification of kingship."⁴⁰ Milton repeatedly strikes at those who deftly exploit powerful arguments to deceive—and, worse, benefit, especially with riches—the degenerate governed as they endeavor to "be ador'd like a Demigod," setting "a pompous face upon the superficial actings of State" (*The Readie and*

Easie Way, CPW 7: 425-26). Government instead should be structured on the assumption of human limitations—of governing and governed.⁴¹ Milton consequently rejects the highly centralized Caroline state and church as he argues de-organization. Englishmen—men—do not need to be organized: they need the opportunity of a republic to make themselves fit to be organized, a chance to emulate others who “have strove for libertie as a thing invaluable, & by the purchase thereof have soe enobl’d thir spirits [...]” (MS Digression, CPW 5.1: 441).

Milton of course is not consistent in the expression of his views, but then few people are consistent, especially while experiencing the cultural kaleidoscope of civil war. The civil war shapes Milton much more emphatically than he shapes it. He seems most plainly to summarize his political position—or at least his position in 1660—in the unsent letter to Monck, proposing a means to elect a Grand Council:

Though this grand Council be perpetual (as in that Book [*Readie and Easie Way*] I prov’d would be best and most conformable to best examples) yet they will then, thus limited, have so little matter in thir Hands, or Power to endanger our Liberty; and the People so much in thirs, to prevent them, having all Judicial Laws in thir own choice, and free Votes in all those which concern generally the whole Commonwealth, that we shall have little cause to fear the perpetuity of our general Senat; [...]. (“The Present Means, and Brief Delineation of a Free Commonwealth, Easy to Be Put in Practice and Without Delay. In a Letter to General Monk,” CPW 7: 394)

Milton, arguing his republican ideal on non-government, privatizes politics and religion into subtle processes of private self-discovery in which the processes are as significant as the discoveries. These processes often are based not on the assumption that people will find the right answers but they should have the opportunity to find the wrong answer for themselves, learn from their inevitable mistakes, and develop their capacity to become virtuous citizens who might eventually be fit to participate in effective government—probably that of King Christ (*Readie and Easie Way*, CPW 7: 374-75). Without this virtuous populace—which, again, can be developed only in a citizen-centered (rather than government-centered) republic—organization

such as that "yoke" imposed by the Normans means activity, activity means, for an unregenerate humanity, damage. This damage—to others, themselves, or the environment, such as in the forms of empire, class-system, or industrialization—must be limited by the disruption, if not dispersal, of power.

This culture of loss would suggest that Milton would have been far from dashed by the return of a monarch to preside over the teeming and complex cultural negotiations of the Restoration—that "brief, uneasy settlement."⁴² For Milton, the overwhelming political fact of 1640-1660 was not the failure to establish a republic but the destruction of Caroline absolutism. This, unthinkable in 1632, in itself established a providential politics. On the other hand, the failure to capitalize on this opportunity in 1658-60 was no surprise: the English had been failing—as Milton tells us in his *History*—since there had been an England; and the human race, as he tells us in *Paradise Lost*—since there had been humans. Far worse than the loss of paradise would be the retaining of paradise by those unfit to live in paradise. Similarly, no one was fit to be a member of Milton's "free commonwealth" who could not be persuaded to create such a commonwealth. In politics (as in religion), if you have to be told, you are not fit to hear yourself convinced. That his advice would go unheeded was the surest evidence that it should be unheeded.

No wonder, then, that the epic, though only half-written, remained triumphantly unchanged. It is surprising that the poet did not attach a headnote to his epic—or at least to the first six books: "In this epic the author narrates Satan's conquest of paradise. And by occasion foretells the restoration of the king and his court, then in their exile." Englishmen's exit from the dynamic possibilities of Stuart monarchy into the uncertainty and vacillations of Republican experiment and finally into the experiment of Restoration political cultures is eyed by Milton with the same sublime and happy equanimity with which he escorts Adam and Eve from their would-be universal capital. Deorganization is good. And as raucous Restoration politics indicated, and the ensuing 300 years confirmed, the disruptive possibilities of

the democratic process were just beginning to be realized. Indeed, Englishmen—many of them citing Milton—were to move further from monarchy than Milton perhaps would have believed. And, among the wreckages of the Caroline monarchy, was much that could be repaired, or rearranged (an ambivalence evident in the fascinating Satan or in his similarly fascinating Eve). As his perverted angel(s) also suggests, Milton's concept of evil is not so much informed by fears of hostile opposites as it is by the threat of perverted parallels. Things misused by princes in their attempt to counterfeit the divine might prove useful by the wise and knowing in their attempt to become fully and virtuously human. Milton then appropriates many ideals, especially those attached to court culture, in a way that might be expected from a poet haunted by a sense of lateness: he gets there earlier, in his art. He does not reject court culture but rather pre-empts it, embodying it in an archetypal paradise whose destruction predetermined the perversions of its more recent imitators.

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NOTES

¹This is Mary Ann Radzinowicz's summary of "received opinion" with which she disagrees ("The Politics of *Paradise Lost*," *The Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker [Berkeley: U of California P, 1987] 204). "In the aftermath of the Restoration, Milton lived in obscurity and desolation" (*The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, gen. ed. David Damrosch, 2 vols. [New York: Longman, 1999]) 1: 1730). The Norton anthologies similarly assess Milton. Laura Knoppers discusses how the "Puritan Milton" (Masson, Barker, Wolfe) and the "Renaissance Humanist Milton" (Hanford, Daiches) work to make the "view of the blind and miserable Milton who writes despite his defeat, harkening back to the 1640s or finding solace in inner spirituality [...] a canonical article of faith" (*Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and Poetry in Restoration England* [Athens: U of Georgia P, 1994] 1-6, 164).

²*Experience of Defeat* (London: Faber, 1984) 282. Professor Hill nevertheless sees a "terrible [...] slow sapping of Milton's faith in the Revolution" (*Milton and the English Revolution* [New York: Viking, 1978] 198).

³Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 196; *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Don Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953-82) 1: 65. I will cite this work as CPW within the text. Milton's example is one of the eminent Elizabethans, Walsingham.

⁴Certainly Dryden's—and Aubrey's and Toland's—observation that Milton was extremely "Satyricall" was based on more than his pronunciation of the "letter R very hard" (John Aubrey, "Minutes of the Life of Mr John Milton" and John Toland, "The Life of Milton," *Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1932] 6, 195).

⁵Citations to Milton's poetry, included within the text, refer to *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

⁶Nicholas von Maltzahn, *Milton's History of Britain: Republican Historiography in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1991) 23. He argues in the late 1640s, "unlike the Levellers, Milton emphasizes the sad continuities in English history which reach back long before the Conquest. The chief purpose of history was to show the alarming recidivism of the English" (218). Parker similarly comments, "Milton took a cynical and disillusioned view of the national character, a view unquestionably influenced by the confusion of his own times and the general atmosphere of pessimism in 1648" (William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, ed. Gordon Campbell, 2nd ed., vol. 1 [Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996] 327). Blair Worden writes, "Throughout his work there runs a doubt, not about the healthiness of republican rule, but about the fitness of the English people to sustain it ("Milton's Republicanism and the Tyranny of Heaven," *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli [Cambridge: CUP, 1990] 233). Gary Hamilton comments that "we might do well to consider the pessimism of the *History* alongside Milton's *Of Reformation*, a work which, though printed nearly three decades earlier, recounts a pattern of failures in England's past in such a way as to communicate little cause for optimism" ("*The History of Britain* and its Restoration Audience," *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose*, ed. David Loewenstein and James G. Turner [Cambridge: CUP, 1990] 246). Also see "Milton's *History of Britain* and the One Just Man," *Arenas of Conflict: Milton and the Unfettered Mind*, ed. Kristin McColgan and Charles Durham (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1997) 65-76.

⁷"The Life of Mr. John Milton by John Phillips," Darbishire 30.

⁸David Armitage cites this passage in arguing "John Milton: Poet Against Empire," *Milton and Republicanism*, ed. David Armitage, Armand Himy, Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: CUP, 1995) 214, 206-25. Hill comments that the attempts at republic failed partly because "the men of property refused to advance money to

any government they did not control" (Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* [New York: Harper and Row, 1970] 253). J. G. A. Pocock also argues the decisive influence of commercial self-interest in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975). Milton's anti-commercialism may have been a primary element for his republicanism and the solid base behind the apparently flimsy defense of republics as "the most frugal government" (from John Toland's *The Life of Milton* 186). Conversely, the Royalists, even after the Restoration, often cited the country's material prosperity in explaining, not the failure, but the origin of the revolt (Andrew Lacey, "Elegies and Commemorative Verse in Honour of Charles the Martyr, 1649-1660," *The Regicides and the Execution of Charles I* [London: Palgrave, 2001] 225-46).

⁹Hill, *God's Englishman* 58.

¹⁰Hill, *God's Englishman* 187. "When did Milton's hopes of Cromwell end? Not many of them are likely to have survived September 1654, when the protector forcibly expelled the commonwealthmen from parliament, declared his resolve to suppress blasphemies and heresies, and publicly scorned critics of the established ministry" (Blair Worden, "John Milton and Oliver Cromwell," *Soldiers, Writers and Statesmen of the English Revolution*, ed. Ian Gentles, John Morrill, and Blair Worden [Cambridge: CUP, 1998] 261). Hill comments that "[s]ome time between 1649 and 1660 Milton must have realized that things had gone badly wrong. In retrospect he probably thought the decisive year was 1653" (*Milton and the English Revolution* 189).

¹¹Sharpe and Zwicker, Introduction, *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998) 4, 5. Kevin Sharpe, arguing a persistent, pervasive royal aesthetic, concedes that "if the English revolution never fully forged a republican culture and government, the republic nevertheless effected a radical transformation of royal culture and power" ("'An Image Doting Rabble': The Failure of Republican Culture in Seventeenth-Century England," *Refiguring Revolutions* 56)

¹²John Miller, *Charles II* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991) 31.

¹³Larry Carver, "The Restoration Poets and Their Father King," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 40 (1977): 333-34. Carver points out that the public focus on the king's sex-life created the attitude that "behind the trappings of the all powerful *pater patriae* lies a mere faulted, human being" (346).

¹⁴Roy Strong, *Splendor at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and Illusion* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973) 19; James I, "A Speech to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at White-Hall On Wednesday the XXI. Of March. Anno 1609" and "A Remonstrance for the Right of Kings, and the Independence of their Crowns," *The Political Works of James I Reprinted from the Edition of 1616* (1918; New York: Russell and Russell, 1965) 248, 307. Strong comments that the deification of the monarch had been especially acute in an England—which witnessed the cult of

the Virgin Queen and the Stuart masks ("the Golden Age" an essential myth for each)—as the monarchy usurped the rituals and ceremonies of Catholicism (22). For this, also see Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977). For the divine right of kings as an argument developed to counter papal authority, see especially J. N. Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1914) 81-106. Gordon Schochet discusses "the sudden appearance of patriarchal political theories in seventeenth-century England" (54) and their immense impact on pre-1688 political life in *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974).

¹⁵Strong, *Splendor at Court* 213; Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment: The Politics of Literature in the England of Charles I* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 197-211. Strong adds, "The Renaissance of the arts, the best-known aspect of the civilization of the court of Charles I, is a direct manifestation of this triumph of autocratic power" (227).

¹⁶Strong, *Splendor at Court* 219, 76.

¹⁷"Where once the Stuart court had been articulated through the codes and conduct of a rarefied Neoplatonism, pornography now inhabited its center" (Steven Zwicker, "Irony, Modernity, and Miscellany: Politics and Aesthetics in the Stuart Restoration," *Politics and the Political Imagination in Later Stuart Britain: Essays Presented to Lois Green Schwoerer*, ed. Howard Nenner (Rochester, NY: U of Rochester P, 1997) 181.

¹⁸"Letter to Peter Heimbach," *The Life Records of John Milton*, ed. John Milton French, 5 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1949-58) 4: 89-90. I will cite this volume within the text as *LR*.

¹⁹"The Life of Mr. John Phillips by Edward Phillips," *Darbishire* 78, 74.

²⁰Parker 1: 571-72; also see Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 215.

²¹Parker 1: 664, 576. Parker prefaces the latter comment by claiming that "after the crowded year of the Restoration, Milton deliberately sought obscurity." Parker seems to have based this evaluation on the paucity of biographical material for this period (1: 588, 2: 1100).

²²Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 229.

²³A. N. Wilson, *Life of John Milton* (Oxford: OUP, 1983) 222-23.

²⁴"The Life of Mr. John Phillips by Edward Phillips," *Darbishire* 76. Also see *LR* 5: 116-117.

²⁵Parker 2: 1092. The King, purportedly, accosts Milton in St. James's Park. Parker's source is *Fraser's Magazine* 23 (1841): 301.

²⁶Parker 1: 612-13; *LR* 5: 11-15.

²⁷According to Edward Phillips, the Earl of Anglesey preserved the "digression" on the Long Parliament (*Darbishire* 75).

²⁸David Norbrook points out that Milton's "first post-Restoration appearance in print came in 1662, when the sonnet to Vane was printed in George Sikes's adula-

tory biography" (*Writing the English Republic Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* [Cambridge: CUP, 1999] 435). He adds that "the normal assumption that the disillusioned Milton cannot possibly have been involved perhaps needs rethinking."

²⁹Hill, refuting Parker, argues that "Milton's poetic reputation was not negligible even before the publication of *Paradise Lost*" (*Milton and the English Revolution* 228). Also see George Sherburn, "The Early Popularity of Milton's Minor Poems," *Modern Philology* 17 (1919-20): 259-78, 515-40.

³⁰Parker 1: 587.

³¹Parker 1: 580. Parker quotes from Thomas Ellwood, *The History of the Life of Thomas Ellwood*, ed. Joseph Wyeth (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1714) 132-37.

³²David Masson, *The Life of John Milton, Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time*, 6 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1881) 6: 628.

³³Wilson 242.

³⁴Parker notes that these words are Aubrey's, not Milton's, in the earliest account. It was not until 1713 that the phrase was attributed to Milton (2: 1148). Parker and most readers accept the phrase as Milton's.

³⁵Christopher Hill, of the scholars that I have read, most thoroughly accounts for the Restoration's impact on the poem. Hill reads in the poem "a shift of emphasis in the last six books of the epic," as Satan as perplexed grand rebel (pre-Restoration and often radical) degenerates into Satan as king (*Milton and the English Revolution* 366). He concludes that "in *Paradise Lost* Milton appears to envisage the possibility that mankind is entering into a new dark age" (412). When this pessimism is qualified by an observation that I will foreground I argue the poem's unaltered confidence. Since the English were unworthy of the blessings of Milton's republic, "it would have been *unjust* if the English Revolution had succeeded, just as Adam and Eve 'deserved to fall' (*PL* 10.16)" (Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 474).

³⁶Worden argues that Milton's "radicalism developed remarkably early" ("Milton's Republicanism" 233). David Norbrook argues that "Milton's early poetry is radical not only in its explicit political comments but in its underlying visionary utopianism" (*Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* [London: Routledge, 1984] 283). Michael Wilding (*Dragon's Teeth* [Oxford: OUP, 1987] 7-88) and Christopher Hill (*Milton and the English Civil War* 41-52) also argue the radicalism of Milton's early poetry. For Milton's critique of court culture in his masks, see Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics* 245-66; Cedric Brown, *John Milton's Aristocratic Entertainments* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985); and Stephen Kogan, *The Hieroglyphic King: Wisdom and Idolatry in the Seventeenth-Century Masque* (Toronto: Farleigh Dickinson, 1986). Edward LeComte discusses Milton's belatedness in the first essay of *Milton's Unchanging Mind: Three Essays* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat P, 1973).

³⁷Paul Monod observes that much of the cultural tension of the period can be traced to the conflict between Calvinism's insistence on innate depravity and Charles' "envisaging a monarchy that was free of human weakness or confessional bonds": "Arminian political writings [...] raised the mystical claims of sacral kingship to dizzying heights" (*The Power of Kings: Monarchy and Religion in Europe 1589-1715* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1999] 108).

³⁸Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G. B. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1905) 1: 157.

³⁹Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 110. Also see Janel Mueller, "Embodying Glory: The Apocalyptic Strain in Milton's *Of Reformation*," *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose*, 9-40.

⁴⁰Thomas Corns, "Milton and the Characteristics of a Free Commonwealth," *Milton and Republicanism*, 27, 25-42.

⁴¹In *Readie and Easie Way*, Milton explains commonwealths are preferable because of the ease with which "any governour or chief counselour offending, may be remov'd and punishd, without the least commotion" (CPW 7: 361).

⁴²Gerald MacLean, "Literature, Culture, and Society in the Restoration," *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History*, ed. Gerald MacLean (Cambridge: CUP, 1995) 3.