

D. Litt. Thesis, 1929.

J O H N M I L T O N.

---

The Making of an Epic Poet.

by

JAMES GOODE, M.A.

The query: whence did the poet derive such and such a thing, applies only to the question what; of the how no-one can find out anything.

Goethe.

P A R T    I I .

---

AN EXCURSUS .

"He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy."

Apology for Smectymnuus.

"Nor to be obtained by the invocation of dame memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich <sup>with</sup> all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs."

Reason of Church Government.

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

**University of Birmingham Research Archive**

**e-theses repository**

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

## CHAPTER I.

---

### HIMSELF.

"Unless he have in himself the experience"

#### 1.

It had been Milton's intention to produce "a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine." In his desire to make this work as nearly perfect as possible, he had been prepared for many years of preparation. Whether in other circumstances Milton could have produced such a work before the date when he was able to settle down to Paradise Lost we cannot say. As things were he had no opportunity of doing so. The "beginning late" of Paradise Lost was not due merely to Milton's "long choosing" nor to his desire to be "more fit". He did not engage on the poem at a given moment because he was then certain that he was in a position to make it as perfect as possible. It was not that he had considered his subject on all sides and now felt that he had mastered it sufficiently to set it forth. Paradise Lost was written

not because Milton had now got everything just right, but because a great poet was now relieved from other duties and must speak out the sum of his stored up convictions.

Milton indeed had considered the various aspects of his subject, but this consideration had not been an artist's endeavour to follow up all the implications of his theme. His own personal experiences had taught him to see these implications. The different aspects of Paradise Lost had been realised amid varying circumstances and had related themselves to varying desires and emotions, to varying stages in the history of Milton's experiences. And though it is unlikely that any great portion of Paradise Lost was actually composed before 1658, there is little reason to doubt Dr. Mackail's suggestion that "the substance and even the very wording of the poem had been slowly distilling in his mind long before he set himself to serious composition."<sup>(1)</sup> It is inconceivable that a poet should carry so much accumulated material without more or less unconsciously transmuting some of it into portable shape, and we know that Milton's meditations voluntarily moved harmonious numbers. Thus we find some passages in Paradise Lost which recall the romantic and luxuriant manner of

---

(1) Springs of Helicon, London, 1909, p.169.

(2)  
Comus, while others have something of the austere simplicity  
(3)  
which we associate with Paradise Regained. The difference  
does not concern the style only, it affects even the general  
(4)  
handling of material. Paradise Lost then is not simply  
the expression of Milton's poetic activity at the time when  
it was written.

In the years which preceded the writing of the poem Milton had suffered grievous disappointments and had finally been forced into some very important resolutions. But he had not yet realised all that these implied. What, for example, was his present position with regard to classical literature? At the beginning of Paradise Lost it would appear that he esteemed the classical Muses only less highly than the Muse of sacred song, and would fain himself be reckoned with

Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides,  
And Tiresias and Phineus Prophets old.

This, we may be sure, was his real feeling on the matter.

---

(2) e.g. I, 519-21; IX, 568 ff., 626 ff.

(3) e.g. X, 214.

(4) Book IX (see above p.150.) is handled very much in the same manner as Comus and Satan in 99 ff. and 473 ff. is made to speak like a character in a masque. His remarks in 157 ff. and 482 are directed to an audience. X, 332 ff. on the other hand approaches the bald narrative manner of Paradise Regained.

But other causes made it necessary for him to disparage the classical epics and to set up his own heavenly Muse in contrast with the "empty dream" which inspired them. Milton's aspirations had been based upon his belief in the almost infinite capabilities of the human mind. Art was for him the index of human progress. So long as he could believe in the destiny of his age, so long as he could credit the lords and commons of England with the wisdom of Areopagus and could hope himself to train orators endued with the spirit and vigour of Demosthenes or Cicero, so long could he afford to be just to Virgil and Homer, knowing that by the special advantage of being a Christian it was possible for him to surpass them. But when he came to see his age in another light, he had to adopt another reading of human history. (5) He could not profess a conception of the arts which would suggest that men were better off immediately before the coming of Christ than they had ever been since. Thus he was led to deny any real importance to pagan culture. (6) It was this later point of view which caused him to turn to the story of Adam, and that story is admirably suited to teach this lesson. But it was not this point of

---

(5) P.L. XII, 537 ff.

(6) Paradise Regained IV, 240-364.

view which made Milton an epic poet, and had its consequences been fully realised at the outset, Paradise Lost could not have been written. What made Paradise Lost was the whole-hearted beliefs and aspirations of the earlier time. The didactic scheme is after made occasional, and its validity is impugned by the mere existence in the seventeenth century of a poet who could undertake such a poem as this.

But it is not only in its use of classical lore that Paradise Lost shows its dependence on the emotions of an earlier period. It was in the days of his highest hopes that Milton had first considered the story of Adam and Eve. It would have been impossible for the author of the Nativity Ode to embark so confidently on such a theme, had not the great work of the ages been in the very act of accomplishment under his own eyes. In seeking to set forth the supreme greatness of the restoration, he would be little tempted to minimise the consequences of the fall. This confidence is still felt in some parts of Paradise Lost, but in others we feel the despondency which has set in with the fall of Milton's hopes. Similarly we must feel that his changing attitude to Cromwell has affected his portrait of Satan. His final dissatisfaction with the great rebel might cause him to attribute some of Cromwell's

characteristics to Satan, but Cromwell "was one of those men, quos vituperare ne inimici quidem possunt, nisi ut simul laudent"<sup>(7)</sup> and Milton was perhaps still something less than an enemy. Enemy or not, however, what Milton has once felt he has felt so impressively that no one but Milton himself can affect to be unaffected by it.

The poet, we are told, shares his prerogative of creation with God alone, but we must remember that he has not the power to create one world for all time. In his various works he may create many worlds, and each may be satisfactory for its immediate purpose. Their deficiencies can be estimated only by comparing one with another. And not only does the poet create different worlds in different works, but he usually creates different worlds at different periods of his life. The world of Shakespeare's histories is not that of the tragedies nor is either of them the world of the romances. The poet who could make one finally satisfactory world would be more than human. Yet this was essential for the complete success of Milton's design.

Art must have perspective and every work of art  
<sup>(8)</sup>  
its own point of view. Milton's long choosing caused him

---

(7) Clarendon: History of the Rebellion (ed. Macray), vol. VI, p.91.

(8) This is the basis of Goethe's criticism of Paradise Lost: "Der Hauptfehler, den er begangen hat, nachdem er

to attempt to focus successive points of view into one universal scheme, and it is perhaps his failure to observe this necessary limitation of art rather than any deficiency in creative power which causes us to find Paradise Lost less completely successful than some of the works of Shakespeare. We cannot imagine Shakespeare carrying the theme of Hamlet in his mind unwritten, and then endeavouring to realise the intention of Hamlet in the composition of Macbeth. Obviously the two points of view cannot be combined in one play. It would be as impossible to make Claudius into a Macbeth as to make Malcolm into a Hamlet. If the story of Prospero and Miranda had somehow been connected with the story of one of the great tragedies, would our minds be attuned to read it properly? Should we not resent the prosiness of Prospero as impatiently as we resent that of Adam?

These considerations are not suggested as serious topics in the criticism of Shakespeare, but they do help us to understand something of what happened to Milton. The

---

(Note (8) continued from p.285.)

den Stoff einmal gewählt hatte, ist dasz er seine Personen, Götter, Engel, Teufel, Menschen, sämtlich gewissermassen unbedingt einführt und sie nachher, um sie handeln zu lassen, von Zeit zu Zeit, in einzelnen Fallen, bedingen musz ..." To Schiller, August 3, 1799.

advantage which Shakespeare had in observing, or in being able to observe, the necessary limitations of his art may be seen by comparing his treatment of Iago and Othello with Milton's treatment of Satan and Adam. Iago, like Satan, is not only the most complex but also the central character in the story. He it is who soliloquises and who motivates the action. In his hands Othello and Desdemona are quite as helpless as Adam and Eve. And yet he is in no sense the hero of the story. Would this have been possible if the history of Iago's earlier life had previously been set forth and his malignity clearly motivated, as with Satan? Would it have been thus if there had been no other world outside that presented by the drama from which Othello could draw his romantic history and the glamour of his great achievements? That is the position of Adam in Paradise Lost.

## 2.

Among the things necessary for one who aspired to write a great poem Milton included "insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs." The art of government must certainly be reckoned one of these. Milton himself was

concerned with politics more closely than most other poets, though his experiences never made him a great political thinker. Yet these experiences served another purpose in adding to his knowledge of human nature, and his ideas, though not perhaps of much value to those whose business it is to govern others, are not without importance for those who would rightly govern themselves.

The debate in Book II is one of the show-pieces of the epic, the sort of episode for which there was ample precedent in ancient poetry and which therefore might be expected to be modelled on the best masters. Milton's natural tendency in art was to observe such traditions. His own experience was idealised, or conventionalised, by his reading. It would have been as impossible for him to have reproduced real Parliamentary phraseology in blank verse in lines such as Mr. Hardy's

The Bill I would have leave to introduce  
Is framed, sir, to repeal last Session's Act,  
By party-scribes intituled a Provision  
For England's Proper Guard; but elsewhere known  
As Mr. Pitt's new Patent Parish Pill,

as it would to add the journalistic aside in brackets - (laughter). There was a certain decorum to be observed in these matters, and decorum to the seventeenth century usually meant imagining that one's contemporaries were

ancient Greeks or Romans. To Milton Parliament was not merely the shadow itself which sat at Westminster but the perfect idea of an Areopagus which lay behind it. Yet for all this his debate is not of the usual epic kind, full of old men eloquent and warlike youths. His oratory certainly is classical, but when we hear Mammon discoursing on the mineral resources of Hell, it begins to come home to men's business and bosoms.

"Milton," wrote the late Professor Dowden, "was never dramatic in the high sense of that word. Varying, vital movement of thought and passion he was unable to exhibit ... But Milton excelled in the representation of characters in position and more especially in the discussion of a 'topic', by two characters who occupy fixed and opposite points of view. This was not dialogue; there is no giving and taking of ideas, no shifting of positions, no fluctuant moods, no mobility of thought. It was rather debate, a forensic pleading, with counsel on this side and on that." In the main this criticism is justified, although it takes too much account of Comus and Paradise Regained, which had a doctrinal purpose, and of Samson Agonistes, which was limited by the conventions of the Greek drama. But this is not true always of Paradise Lost, as the

temptation scene in Book IX will prove. And even the debate in Book II is more dramatic than this criticism suggests.

As might be expected in a debate, Moloch, Belial and Mammon do express fixed points of view, and the contrast between Moloch and Belial is of a type well represented in earlier literature. But there is more in them than that. Moloch is not only the short-tempered man of arms. He is also the born blunderer, the man who will raise the very question his party have been trying to avoid. Satan had very carefully fixed the topic of the debate:

Whether of open Warr or covert guile  
We now debate,

but Moloch's vehemence and his reliance on ultimate victory or extinction causes others to consider what it will all lead to and suggests doubts as to the advisability of hostilities of any kind. This lets Belial in. He too is something more than the type of the cunning man: he is the intellectual, the awkward man on the committee. His mind works on a higher plane than those of the rank and file. They have an idea that he is usually right, but he is right in such an annoying way. His superior and insinuating manner is obviously not popular. But, though he gets no applause, he is obviously the brains of the

opposition. His honourable friend Mammon, who is quick-witted enough to see the strength of Belial's position, has only to restate it in a practical and business-like form. He puts the whole matter in a nutshell:

Either to disenthroned the King of Heav'n  
We warr, if warr be best, or to regain  
Our own right lost.

Having reduced the question to its simplest terms, he is able to show conclusively the futility of war. He can add nothing to Belial's arguments, but what of that? His gibe at the "warbled Hymns" and Hallelujahs of Heaven is more effective than any argument. And then he goes on to speak of the commercial possibilities of their new realm. This is talking to some purpose. The speech is received with acclamation.

So much for the puppets, for puppets they are. Not mere mouthpieces, however. They are moved by circumstances as they arise, and though typical are drawn with an insight which could come only of personal experience. Yet they are only the minor characters of the drama. The chief actors are Satan and Beelzebub. They manage the meeting. They have already arranged what is to happen, and they know their business. These are characters of another order. They do not display simply talent or

quickness of wit. They have got beyond that. The picture of these two real statesmen, both of whom possessed the gifts which he himself so conspicuously lacked, is a high tribute to Milton's dramatic insight. Beelzebub is the ideal party manager or second in command. He is not distinguished by initiative or boldness of enterprise. (9) When once assured of the possibility or necessity of a line of action, however, he is supremely capable of taking charge. He can quell a panic and he can make just the right opening for his chief. His rising in the debate is like the intervention of a giant among pygmies. His solidity and breadth raise him beyond all comparison with these back-benchers. He understands the situation perfectly and simply takes it in hand. He is not hurried; he seeks not to make an immediate impression. His opening is not abrupt, like Moloch's, nor languidly disinterested, like Belial's, nor does he affect the business-like methods of Mammon. Mammon had appealed to their pockets. Beelzebub, knowing men better, appeals to their self-respect, and gravely warns them against vain delusions. In discussing the question of war and peace, have they not lost sight of the true state of things? Is God likely to grant them peace?

---

(9) Cf. I, 128 ff.

Naturally after Moloch's ridiculous blunder, he does not revive the suggestion of open war. But while later speakers have been demolishing Moloch's proposals, they have failed to explore fully the suggestions contained in their leader's opening speech. Do they think the government so unfertile in expedients that these dangerous consequences must necessarily be hazarded? What if we find an easier method? And so the way is prepared for the great personal triumph of Satan.

Milton, then, does show some perception of the powers required for handling men. Such powers, however, could not win his unqualified admiration. He could not accept as an inevitable fact the idea that men must be handled in this way. He felt that men ought to be sufficiently far-sighted to see their own interests, and that their self-discipline ought to be strong enough to render such handling unnecessary. After the failure of his hopes, he saw that this could not be, but his attempt to provide for the present state of man in the Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth was not likely to win general acceptance. If mankind were now perceived not to be all Miltons, it was too much to expect them to commit their government to a perpetual council of Miltons

even supposing that such could be found. Milton, no more than the supporters of Divine Right, could not allow man to rule himself, or even to be ruled, by mere earthly ideas. The guiding principle must be not man's own wishes but the will of a high providence which he was apparently unable to understand. That the utilitarian ideal of secular government is achieved by his devils<sup>(1)</sup> argues not merely its impossibility but its unfitness for man. Adam and Eve were the only people who ever lived under a system of government which Milton could entirely approve. Their crime was not merely to have forfeited this privilege themselves but to have made it impossible for the political problems of later ages to be solved on Miltonic principles. In Paradise Lost we get not the ingenious theorising of the political pamphlets but a revelation of the essential elements of Milton's thought which made all such theorising of no avail.

Along with these matters of temporal government, Milton's experience also led him to form definite ideas on questions of public worship. He began by attacking the ceremonies of the Laudian clergy, then turned successively to the Presbyterians and Independents, and finally found no sect to which he could adhere. Thus in Paradise Lost

---

(1) II, 496.

Adam and Eve observe no rites at all, and Adam is carefully warned by the angel against attaching special sanctity to any one place. This, however, is not all. Here again Paradise Lost reveals something more of Milton than he found possible or desirable to develop in prose argument. The Milton who had walked the studious cloister's pale and listened with rapture to the pealing organ knew quite well that there were some surroundings and some forms of sensuous impression particularly suited to arouse a spirit of true devotion. It is true that in his ecclesiastical pamphlets he speaks in another manner of "deformed and fantastic dresses, palls and mitres, gold and gew-gaws fetched from Aaron's old wardrobe or the flamens' vestry." "The soul by this means of over-bodying herself," he asserts, "bated her wing apace downward." But Milton was unconsciously doing violence to his own feelings in the heat of debate. He was convinced of the unworthiness of the Laudian clergy and in their ceremonies he found nothing but idolatry. Yet it is this despiser of ceremony who, almost immediately afterwards, wishes to win men's minds to religion by certain "set and solemn paneguries". In what way these were to differ from the motions and postures, the liturgies and lurries of the other party, it might be unprofitable to

inquire. It is obvious, however, that they could be justified only on the assumption that those who took part therein were inspired by a greater spirit of sanctity than the "hireling wolves" of the established church. When he had learned that

New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ Large, he perhaps saw less reason to regret that these paneguries had not been established.

Here then we see Milton's difficulty. He could not be a Puritan of the negative and iconoclastic type. His devotion was united to an innate sensuousness which made him long for some grand and solemn means of expressing his delight in the service of his Maker. But he would employ no instruments unworthy of so sublime a function. Unfortunately, however, so long as priests are compelled to live in a world where money is essential to procure the necessities of life, the problem of hirelings is bound to persist. Milton's own solution of the difficulty has not been considered practicable by any of the more flourishing sects. The Quakers, to whom he was much attracted in later life, had indeed no paid ministers, but with them set and solemn paneguries were out of the question. Religion, being an affair of the inner life,

cannot express itself in externals. Yet though this were true of this imperfect world, the artist in Milton must still believe that beyond this there is a more perfect world where a more satisfying form of worship may be found. Thus it is that in Paradise Lost we have the set and solemn paneguries of the angels exhibited in such strong contrast to the simple worship of Adam and Eve.

### 3.

The effect of Milton's experiences was not to broaden and humanise his views but to intensify and to harden. The final collapse of his political hopes confirmed a tendency which had become apparent at the time of the divorce pamphlets. He saw little virtue in the usual forms of human association. The perfection of temporal government would seem to be possible only to devils, and angels alone are capable of performing satisfactorily acts of corporate worship. Salvation therefore must come from within not from without. Liberty cannot be bestowed upon us by government nor can man's soul be saved by the ministrations of an organised church. Such forms of government as do exist

only serve to deprive man of the power of acquiring even domestic liberty which is the essential foundation of all liberty. Our chief care, therefore, should be for the virtue of the individual man. This obviously will not be encouraged by any poem setting forth the achievements of a particular nation or national hero. For the poem which expounds the true relationship between God and man there could be a choice only of two heroes: Adam, and the "perfect hero" of The Passion. Yet neither of them really fulfilled Milton's requirements. Adam does not succeed. He can inspire us, only insofar as we are made to feel our own ability to succeed where he failed. We cannot therefore regard him as a hero. Christ, of course, is still the perfect hero, but His triumph is not yet accomplished. The story of His earthly life, as Milton reads it, presents Him not as having performed the great restoration but rather as having rendered it possible for man himself to take part in that restoration. The lesson of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained alike is that man must be his own hero.

Milton had carried out in his life the principles enunciated in his seventh Prolusio. He had been assiduous in the acquirement of universal learning and his soul had

reached out far and wide till it filled the world, and space beyond that, in the divine exaltation of its magnitude. But he had also become, as he had put it in the same Prolusio, infrequens and vere peregrinus in earthly affairs. <sup>(2)</sup> One who has so consistently explored the ultimate causes of things must see life as an ordered plan, and he cannot forgive other men who are content merely to live and who show no desire to follow out the great scheme which life was intended to be. Life, as lived by the majority of men, was but a deliberate perversion of what Milton knew it ought to be. In fact the only person who seemed able to follow this ideal scheme of life was Milton himself. During the Civil War and the Commonwealth he had placed his trust in others, only to be deceived. At the end of the struggle he had to believe that only in himself <sup>(3)</sup> could his trust be placed. Milton himself is the true hero of the Great Rebellion, and he too became inevitably the hero of Paradise Lost. The great epic is that of a poet deserted by his "heroes". Adam fails and God has not thought fit

---

(2) ed. Symmons, VI, 187-88.

(3) In God, Milton would have said. When a man is driven to God as a refuge from his fellow-men, his God is likely to be characterised by his own idiosyncrasies.

to bring about the great consummation which will effectively set off the initial triumph of Satan. But of the heroism of the poet himself there can be no doubt. How else can we describe the enterprise of him who undertakes the justification of what God Himself, in Milton's view, had not yet justified?<sup>(4)</sup>

4.

To know all is to understand all. To understand all is to pardon all. Sainte Beuve formulated the doctrine, but it is in Shakespeare that we find its supreme justification. Milton did not pardon all, and he certainly did not understand all. His knowledge of life has not the universal range of Shakespeare's, though what he had he held to most tenaciously and made good use of it. Perhaps indeed he held it too firmly, wrenching by main force the small portion of life he knew to do duty in unsuitable places. Why did he insist on vividly realising the various aspects of his remote and extensive subject so exclusively in terms of his own narrow experience? Not that we could wish him to be insincere or untrue to his

---

(4) Cf. Saurat: Milton: Man and Thinker, pp.219 ff.

knowledge of things, but surely every man must have a range of imaginative sympathy which will carry him beyond the bounds of his actual experience. Why did not Milton use more freely the creative power which enabled him to enter into the characters of Belial and Eve? Why did he not give us more of the things he could feel and understand, instead of dwelling almost exclusively on those which he actually had felt? Shall we seek an explanation in his blindness?

In early years he had been a student and a dreamer. And his dreams seem to have arisen out of his studies rather than from his experiences in the world of men. It is indeed hard to say where his studies finished and his dreaming began. When he sat up into the night and unsphered

The spirit of Plato to unfold  
What Worlds, or what vast Regions hold  
The immortal mind that hath forsook  
Her mansion in this fleshly nook,

was he employed strictly in arriving at the exact meaning of his author, or did he sometimes allow his mind to wander forth in speculative imaginings, calling up and tracing by a voluntary act upon the darkness images which Plato had suggested? Certainly the description of gorgeous Tragedy sweeping by in sceptred state suggests some kind of resem-

blance to those visions of De Quincey where "vast processions passed along in mournful pomp, friezes of never-ending stories." The sights which the youthful poet in L'Allegro is permitted to dream are of a distinctly literary quality.

Then came the time when Milton had to leave this world of dreams and dwell in the world of men. Here he learnt to doubt the wisdom of sequestering out of the world into Atlantic and Utopian politics, and even to speak with scant courtesy of Plato's Academic night-sittings. So long as he might, he did honestly try to live in the world of men not that of visions. And so long as his sight lasted he was able to do so. But just when his activities in the world of men had reached their height, he was shut in by darkness. Henceforward he was to see nothing but visions.

Thus the author of Paradise Lost was forced into a way of life which the author of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso had freely chosen. When we read of Milton's feeding on thoughts that voluntarily move harmonious numbers, those thoughts must have been suggested either by his own recollections or by passages read to him from chosen authors. He could not find material simply by gazing

on the world around him. Instead of the endless pageant of life passing before his eyes, he could see only those phantoms which he himself painted on the darkness. And being thus shut off from the outer world and confined to a world of visions seems to have produced in him an approximation of the waking and dreaming states of the brain similar to that experienced by De Quincey in other circumstances. What he called up and traced by a voluntary act upon the darkness transferred itself to his dreams, so that after his thoughts had been deliberately fed in the manner suggested the nightly visitations of his celestial Patroness came unimplored. Certainly Milton had in thought descended "into chasms and sunless abysses and had seen space swelled and amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity" even as had De Quincey himself. Perhaps that is why De Quincey is the one critic who can really speak convincingly of Milton's achievement, as one who has felt it all in his bones. Most of the others, as De Quincey remarked of Lamb, except by culture and by reflection, have no genial appreciation of Milton.

But after his experiences of the middle period, Milton was no longer content to be a mere dreamer of dreams. He might console himself with the thought that the light

which had now ceased to visit his eyes could shine inward, revealing things invisible to mortal sight. Yet in fact he was not satisfied to dwell in these supernatural regions and struggled not less heroically than his own Satan to lay hold on that punctual spot, the visible universe. No poet has felt more keenly than Milton the longing for the further shore, but with him the ripa ulterior was the visible not the invisible world. Many have spoken of his mastery of the material sublime, and some have compared this unfavourable with the luminous intangibility of Dante's Paradiso. Few, however, have understood that to a blind man the material world loses something of its oppressive materialism. Our eye presents tangible objects in overwhelming profusion. So long as it remains our chief organ of sense, we find it impossible to escape from the tyranny of the material. We move in a world too definitely realised, and long therefore for another which holds out the promise of fresh experiences and new discoveries. But the man who must depend on his sense of touch is not thus afflicted. He is (in no transcendental sense but in mere fact)

a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realised.

His sense of touch is an organ of discovery, the means by

which he receives his dim and fragmentary intimations of the world around him. Mere tangibility, so far from oppressing him, has the effect of a kind of spiritual assurance.

Not however in utter nakedness nor in entire forgetfulness had Milton left this other world which he so earnestly longed to regain. His recollections were shadowy and fragmentary but, be they what they might, they were yet the master-light of all his seeing. He had not numbered the streaks of the tulip nor studied the different shades in the verdure of the forest. But he retained some sense of general properties and large appearances, and could reproduce those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and to carelessness. Milton was not obsessed by that most imposing of abstractions - Nature; but his naïve and unaffected delight in all the beauty of earth is almost unparalleled:

Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,  
With charm of earliest Birds; pleasant the Sun  
When first on this delightful Land he spreads  
His orient Beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flour,  
Glistring with dew; fragrant the fertil earth  
After soft showers; and sweet the coming on  
Of grateful Eevning milde, then silent Night  
With this her solemn Bird and this fair Moon,  
And these the Gemms of Heav'n, her starrie train.

It was one of the merits of his chosen theme that

it enabled him to reconstruct that earth in imagination,  
step by step. Now

the Mountains huge appear  
Emergent, and thir broad bare backs upheave  
Into the Clouds,

and

So high as heav'd the tumid Hills, so low  
Down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep,  
Capacious bed of Waters.

Then he will crown with high woods the hills,

With tufts the vallies and each fountain side.

And in one fair spot of Paradise he can gather together in  
narrow room Nature's whole wealth. To please the sighted  
and the orthodox, he pretends that this Paradise is a  
heaven on earth. But this we know to be untrue. Earth  
certainly resembles Heaven, for Heaven too has its variety

Of pleasure situate in Hill and Dale

and its change delectable of evening and of morning. Yet  
we cannot believe, in spite of Milton, that the earth has  
borrowed these things from Heaven. At least the change  
delectable of morn and evening is so unnecessary and is  
worked by so artificial a device that it cannot be native  
to Heaven. In sober fact the Heaven of Milton is but the  
shadow of the earth which he remembered.

Yet though he did his best to retain a hold upon  
this visible world, Milton still suffered a great dis-

advantage. Other artists may half-create the world they see; but they still have the power of filling in the remaining half from direct observation. The most fertile imagination will often find elements in nature which he would never have thought of putting there. Otherwise what need were there to learn of her? Milton, however, could only work with images presented by his own mind. Hence the personal impress which he has left upon everything in Paradise Lost. All things in that poem speak of Milton, because they had to come out of Milton. What he could imagine he could also present, but he could not give us other things merely copied from the life and added to his picture to give it a specious completeness and objectivity. Painters, even when portraying ideal figures, usually have recourse to living models. Poets do not engage their models in this way, but they have always some new spectacle of life thrusting itself upon their notice. This is particularly to be seen in those Elizabethans with whom Milton has been compared. Take, for instance, Ford's lines:

Smooth formality  
Is usher to the rankness of the blood,  
But impudence bears up the train.

Think you that he would have written thus, if he had not

happened to catch a glimpse of some such situation some  
time during the previous week?<sup>(5)</sup>

Thus Milton cannot compare with those great masters of narrative who plunge boldly into the complexity and manifoldness of life, lighting on incidents and situations here and there - often in unlike places - yet confident that however far they may wander they can always find their way back without difficulty. He cannot, like Homer or Fielding, flit about through all the affairs of life, narrating briefly the general course of events but pausing now and then to light up his narrative with touches of imaginative observation. He cannot approach us as a man of the world who expects us to be tolerably familiar with the general features and tendencies of the way of life he is to present to us. And therefore it is not wholly unfortunate that he should have chosen to deal with a state of society which did not demand such treatment. Right from the beginning of the poem it was necessary for him to conjure up carefully each situation, scrupulously fitting every detail into its proper place. Having once completed his setting, he can extend its scope in any conceivable direction. But he must take his own pageant

---

(5) Cf. Raleigh: Milton, p.117.

with him. It moves slowly and magnificently, and it moves in vacuo: there is nothing to be allowed for surroundings or for contingencies other than those which are properly introduced and motivated in their due course.

Thus Milton's meditations were turned inwards instead of outwards, and the result was not romantic mal de siècle but epic. The introspection of the Puritan was not an expression of surrender and listless self-commiseration but a buckling on of the armour of a Christian in order to assault the strong places of the greatest enemy of all. Milton had always submitted himself to rigorous self-examination, and now in his loneliness and disappointment he wrestled with the devil as never before. He has now learned to look on Satan not as in the hour of thoughtless youth. No longer does he delude himself with the conception of a tempter fit only to be discomforted by the steadfast priggishness of maidenly virtue. Not that he has fallen from his high standard; far otherwise. His powers of self-criticism have developed and he knows that virtue is often betrayed by its own excessive confidence. The devil we have to fear is one of at least equal intellectual stature with ourselves. The Satan who could tempt Milton must be a devil of commanding personality,

not shallow, sensual and specious in the manner of Comus, but possessed of real and solid capabilities such as Milton had recognised and admired in Cromwell. A devil, too, he must be who could command all the poetry and eloquence, the learning and philosophy of Athens, the eye of Greece.

It is as a tempter, not as the essential embodiment of evil, that Satan is to be understood. Milton was not one of those who hunger and thirst after unrighteousness. For him simple wickedness had no attraction. What, therefore, he never desired, he could leave alone without ecstatic renunciation and fervid self-upbraiding. Consequently it has been held that he was no true religious poet. But if his lofty morality made him no true spokesman of the religious impulses of ordinary sinful man, it at least gave him a certain advantage in presenting the temptation of the yet perfect Eve and of Jesus Christ. For they too were proof against mere brute wickedness. The only tempter who could hope to overcome them was one who might assault Milton himself. Thus the lord of evil could not be hatefully and revoltingly wicked like the Eumenides of Aeschylus. Evil, Milton sees, is not thrust on us by a pursuing Providence, but chosen by ourselves: and surely no person who is worth tempting - nor no devil

neither - will be attracted by unmitigated evil. So we find Satan presented as a sort of Prometheus. It is to the spiritual aspirations of man that he makes his appeal, since he knows that it was thus that he, the greatest of the angels, was tempted. It is by the promise of knowledge and the godlike power it bestows that he prevails on Eve, and it is by the prospect of power and knowledge and by urging him to take upon him the powers of deity that he seeks to overcome the Son of God.

That it was on this side that Milton himself was most open to temptation should be sufficiently obvious. And in one place at least we can see the tempter of Milton just peeping out behind the dramatic tempter that the poem required. It is where Satan from inward grief his bursting passion into plaints thus poured:

O Earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferr'd  
More justly, Seat worthier of Gods, as built  
With second thoughts, reforming what was old!  
For what God after better worse would build?

This indeed was just what Milton came near to feeling, and to prevent himself from doing so he attributed this sentiment to Satan himself. It is by reason of such utterances as this and Adam's burst of self-revelation with its tongue-tied

wisest, vertuousest, discreetest, best,

that those that know art and use judgment may see in the harsh and indomitable Milton the most human and ingenuous of all great poets.

5.

Though his blindness and his experiences in the middle period of his life profoundly influenced Milton, they did not make him a poet. Paradise Lost owes its being not to these things but to Milton's life-long resolution to write a great poem. The form and scope of this poem had long occupied his thoughts, and although, after the Smectymnuus pamphlets, he ceased to take the public into his confidence in these matters, we may be sure that he still pondered over them and that the critical ideas which he evolved were a potent factor in determining what manner of poem this should be.

Like all heroic poets of his day, Milton knew his Aristotle. It was from Aristotle that his pupils were to learn what the laws were of a true epic poem. Unlike certain of his contemporaries, however, he did not erect into authorities of equal importance such people as Macrobius, Scaliger, Piccolomini, Vida, Vossius,

(6)

Robortelli, Riccobini, Paolo Beni and Mambrun. Yet on the other hand he was free from the mere Aristotelianism of the age of good sense. The commentators specified by him were all somewhat liberal in their interpretations: Castelvetro a man of undoubted independence of reasoning; Tasso who had his own axe to grind; and Mazzoni for whom there was also Dante to be considered. So that, while he insists on the value of Aristotle as a text-book for his pupils, it is not surprising to find that, for himself, Milton is inclined to doubt whether the laws of Aristotle are strictly to be kept or nature followed. For ancient rules he has a just esteem: to copy nature is not necessarily to copy them. He is almost contemplating some glorious offence which will raise him beyond the tinkering legislation even of the most ancient critics.

What Aristotle is particularly supposed to teach is what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric. (7) And what Milton, in The Reason of Church Government, is anxious to decide is precisely whether to choose the epic or the dramatic form, or - though this seems less likely - the lyric. Paradise

---

(6) Spingarn: Literary Criticism of the Renaissance, p.244.

(7) Of Education, P.W. III, 474.

Lost, at any rate, could only be in the form of an epic or of a drama. Milton's own early inclination and his final choice was the epic. Aristotle, however, had asserted that tragedy was preferable, and it was obviously necessary that his reasons should be considered.

"It is superior, because it has all the epic elements - it may even use the epic metre - with the music and spectacular effects as important accessories; and these produce the most vivid of pleasures. Further, it has vividness of impression in reading as well as in representation. Moreover, the art attains its end within narrower limits; for the concentrated effect is more pleasurable than one which is spread over a long time and so diluted. What, for example, would be the effect of the Oedipus of Sophocles, if it were cast into a form as long as the Iliad? Once more, the Epic imitation has less unity; as is shown by this, that any Epic poem will furnish subjects for several tragedies. Thus if the story adopted by the poet has a strict unity, it must either be concisely told and appear truncated; or, if it conform to the Epic canon of length, it must seem weak and watery." (8)

The question to be decided, therefore, was this: are the imperfections indicated by Aristotle a necessary or only an accidental feature of the epic? Milton found them to be accidental. Lack of concentration, he would probably admit, might well be reckoned against Homer, but a more closely-knit form of epic was quite possible; as, for example, in that "brief model", the Book of Job. By the time he came to write Paradise Lost, he had also

---

(8) Poetics, XXVI, 4-6, trans. Butcher.

found means to remedy most of the other imperfections. The result was that, in his endeavour to devise a perfect form of poetry, his Paradise Lost has taken on the qualities of the drama as well as of the epic. The plot is dramatically motivated, and certainly would not furnish the subjects for several tragedies. The dramatic vividness of presentation is not to be questioned. In spectacular effect Paradise Lost surpasses all tragedies whatsoever, and even the lack of music is amply compensated for by the angelic choruses.

But Milton's interest in poetry went beyond mere questions of form. He had ideas about the nature of poetry itself, ideas which have been somewhat strangely neglected. This may be due partly to the theological phraseology which he sometimes employs, for though modern criticism is fond of such words as "inspiration" and "genius", it prefers to play with them as words which have no meaning. When the Holy Ghost is brought into the question, there is danger of our notions becoming too definite. But the chief cause of this neglect is, perhaps, Milton's frequent use of the word "reason", a word doubly terrifying in a man who was not only brought up in the teachings of Calvinism, but who is also popularly supposed to have had just a

little too much in common with the neo-classical theorists of the age of good sense.

These apprehensions are, however, quite unfounded. Reason is a most excellent thing:

for smiles from Reason flow (IX, 239)

- and these smiles, mark you, are not smiles of scorn nor even of Meredithian comedy since they are of love the food. An earlier author known to Milton had suggested that the true food of love was music. If Milton persisted therefore in finding other sustenances for love we must suppose that in the smiles of reason there was something more apt to dissolve him into ecstasies than even sweet sound breathing upon a bank of violets. "Love hath his seat in reason," and reason makes use of love's ministrations not only to enlarge the heart but even to refine the thoughts. (9) Let us think for a minute on Eve -

Grace was in all her steps, Heav'n in her Eye,  
In every gesture dignitie and love -

and remember with what "obsequious majesty" she approved Adam's "pleaded reason," (1) and we shall at least understand that the reason of Milton is not a power at enmity with joy bent on the utter destruction of

---

(9) VIII, 589 ff.

(1) VIII, 510.

Such sights as youthfull Poets dream  
On Summer eeves by haunted stream.

Reason is not good sense, not demonstrative  
speciousness. These indeed are the things which reason  
has to guard herself against,

Since Reason not impossibly may meet  
Some specious object by the Foe subornd,  
And fall into deception unaware. (IX, 360 ff.)

There is good sense enough in the remarks of Belial, for  
example, but Milton dismisses his counsel as no true reason  
but mere "words clothed in reason's garb." (2) Thus too  
the disputations of the fallen angels on Providence, Fore-  
knowledge, Will and Fate, so far from representing the  
highest exercise of reason, are but "vain wisdom all and  
false philosophy." (3) Since their fall these angels  
are no longer capable of true reason. (4)

Reason is free but not irresponsible. "Reason,"  
says Eve, "is our law." (5) It is, however, superior and  
not inferior to the will, and therefore one cannot reason  
just as one wishes in the manner of Bacon's "discoursing  
wits". It is free in the sense that it is unhampered by

---

(2) II, 226.

(3) II, 565.

(4) XII, 83-84.

(5) III, 108; IX, 352; IX, 654.

any checks other than those which itself imposes. But on the other hand it can only exist by adapting itself to the fundamental principles of the universe and realising its proper function as the organ whereby those principles become known to man. The whole universe is inspired by reason. Hence, although in a particular sense man alone is "endued with sanctity of reason",<sup>(6)</sup> animals also are said to "reason not contemptibly."<sup>(7)</sup> For reason is progressive, and all the creatures of earth are animate

with gradual life

Of Growth, Sense, Reason, all summ'd up in Man. (IX, 112 f.)  
In man alone does it exist in all its sanctity, and in no other individual, though it is of course the key to the whole system of which all form part. Reason is the fundamental principle of the macrocosm and of the microcosm alike.

That the real should be identified with the reasonable is no new thing. The importance of Milton's views will appear, however, when we consider the manner in which the reason operates.

But know that in the Soule  
Are many lesser Faculties that serve  
Reason as chief; among these Fansie next  
Her office holds; of all external things,

---

(6) VII, 508.

(7) VIII, 374-75; IX, 558-59.

Which the five watchful Senses represent,  
 She forms Imaginations, Aerie shapes,  
 Which Reason joyning or disjoyning, frames  
 All what we affirm or what deny, and call  
 Our knowledge or opinion; then retires  
 Into her private Cell when Nature rests.  
 Oft in her absence mimic Fansie wakes  
 To imitate her; but misjoyning shapes,  
 Wilde work produces oft, and most in dreams,  
 Ill matching words and deeds long past or late. (V, 100 ff.)

At first sight this may suggest the critical discussions of such people as Hobbes or Rymer. "Judgment," says Hobbes, "begets the strength and structure, and Fancy begets the ornaments of a poem."<sup>(8)</sup> "Reason," says Rymer, almost in Milton's own words, "must consent and ratify whatever by fancy is attempted in its absence."<sup>(9)</sup> But the essential difference is this: they are discussing the structure of poetry whereas Milton's concern is with

All what we affirm or what deny, and call  
 Our knowledge or opinion.

Hobbes and Rymer insist that even in poetry fancy must be subjected to the domination of "judgment" or "reason" (which here mean much the same thing). Milton, on the other hand, attaches great importance to the part played by fancy even in prosaic matters of sheer and earnest opinion. True it is that even his fancy is subject to reason, but it is to

---

(8) Answer to Davenant. Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century (ed. Spingarn) II, 59.

(9) The Tragedies of the Last Age &c. Spingarn ut sup. II, 185.

Milton's own "reason", not to Rymer's. This Milton would have preferred to call the "understanding"; his own reason, on the other hand, is no more closely related to the understanding than to fancy itself.<sup>(1)</sup>

The understanding or judgment is an abstract, impersonal quality which Milton was not likely to overestimate. Real values, as he well knew, are fixed by a personal feeling of conviction, and this feeling will depend not merely on abstract rules culled from wise authors but on one's first-hand experiences of all external things

Which the five watchful Senses represent.

He did not conceive of Man as consisting of so many distinct and separate faculties. Man was for him one entity, one body-and-mind. There was no possible separation of soul and body, and therefore none between reason and fancy. Reason depends on fancy. It is not the understanding, but an emanation from both the understanding and the fancy. Reason is the soul itself:

Fansie and understanding, whence the soule  
Reason receives, and reason is her being. (V, 486 f.)

Reason indeed, so far from representing the suppression of personality, is itself the very essence of personality.

---

(1) V, 486.

The highest form of rational being is the  
intelligential substance of angels,

All Heart they live, all Head, all Eye, all Eare,  
All Intellect, all Sense. (VI, 350 f.)

The reason of Man differs from theirs, but it is "in degree"  
only, "of kind the same" (2)

and both contain  
Within them every lower facultie  
Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste,  
Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate. (V, 409 ff.)

After the fall, however, we may suppose that the discursive  
reason of man began to show a wider divergence from the  
intuitive reason of angels. In the disintegration of  
reason, understanding and fancy spring up as independent  
growths, leading on the one hand to merely academic dis-  
putation and on the other to that enraptured but unsatis-  
fying kind of poetry which, one critic has alleged, is  
out of Milton's reach. Apparently even the angelic  
reason could resolve into similar elements. The "vain  
wisdom" that presided over the angelic debates after their  
right reason had been obscured must have had some analogy  
with understanding; and, though partial, there must have  
been much true poetic fancy in the song which suspended  
hell. In mankind the dire effect of the separation is

---

(2) V, 490.

seen in Adam's setting up as a critic. Judgment and taste are the first fruits of his fall:

Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste,  
And elegant, of Sapience no small part,  
Since to each meaning savour we apply  
And Palate call judicious. (3) (IX, 1017 ff.)

Obviously he has progressed in knowledge and understanding since he first expressed his simple wonder at one who, in spite of the accepted theory, was apparently

intended first, not after made  
Occasionally,

but how much has he not lost in the process?

Adam has gained knowledge at the expense of his own soul. He has become a type of the man

Deep verst in books and shallow in himself,  
and Milton has little patience with such men and their pretensions to reason. True reason, the power by which we see into the life of things, is not mere accumulation of knowledge, nor an easy superficial air of wellinformedness. It requires a certain depth of personality in the reasoner:

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

---

(3) Raphael had foreseen this danger in VIII, 561 ff. Cf. 547-48.

Reason depends as much on the reasoner as on the facts. To reason one must half-create as well as perceive. Reason, if it is to be vital, requires the consecration of the reasoner's personality. Reason, in short, is not unlike the "Imagination" of Wordsworth,

which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood.

6.

It is obvious that any study of Milton's poetics must take account of the importance which he attached to industrious and select reading. Too often it has been supposed that his attitude in this matter must have been something like that set forth in Pope's Essay on Criticism, where Nature and Homer are the same and both alike the objects of the poet's imitation. This is a position which no one nowadays would care to defend, but the weakness lies not in its reverence for the classics but in its conception of poetic "imitation". If Homer merely imitates nature, then so long as we have nature we can do without Homer. And the man who imitates Homer is merely offering a substitute, a poor, faded copy twice removed.

But once admit that Homer contains something which is not in nature - the creative imagination of its author - then Homer becomes worthy of attention. Once admit that nature in Homer is not "imitated" but "interpreted", and then even those who know nature best will still need Homer, unless they have the supreme good fortune of being able to see nature for themselves not only

As she was by the sources of Time,  
but even as she appeared to the greatest of

Her vigorous primitive sons.

The poet's main business is not to imitate anything. He no more desires merely to echo the phraseology of Homer than to reproduce his exact observations of natural phenomena. He seeks rather to express

a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky.

We have the best authority for this; and yet there are those who will not have it so. What matters the blue sky, the setting sun or the living air? Are not these things common, to be seen and enjoyed by all men? So much you shall find at Westminster Bridge, where, of course, true nature is not to be found. These lexicographers of nature,

not her sons, are not to be put off so easily. Their love of rare phenomena is like the Bembist's love of fine phrases and, in the manner of all ferrets and mousehunts of an index, they specialise in parallel passages. How shall eglantine be twisted if it is not so written in the book of nature? And what an offence in verbal scholarship is it to describe the substance which bees carry on their thigh as "honey".

This something far more deeply interfused is to be found also "in the mind of man". But, it sometimes seems to be implied, this is to be taken only in a special sense. The poet is not hereby permitted to become a professed student of the humanities. The greatest achievements of the human mind are outside his province. He is essentially an observer of nature and he were best to confine his investigations concerning the human mind to those manifestations thereof which he may chance upon in the pursuit of his professional duties. No one expects him to be so entirely independent as to owe nothing at all to the thoughts of other men. Only, to those who see things in proper perspective, there is a special virtue in the wisdom of hard-handed men that never laboured in their mind but have carefully toiled their unbreathed memories about with them as a special gift to bestow on some chance poet

encountered by the wayside.

Such was not Milton's opinion. If he was to understand

how the mind of man becomes  
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth  
On which he dwells, above the frame of things

. . . . .

In beauty exalted, as it is itself  
Of quality and fabric more divine,

he must consider the "mind of man" in what are usually considered its noblest examples. There might be round about him no lack of

men endowed with highest gifts,  
The vision and the faculty divine,

who owing to defective education lacked merely the accomplishment of verse. But Milton lived in troubled times when such men would hardly be found pursuing their usually untroubled careers. And besides, even Milton's patriotism would not allow him to suppose that at a given time he would find in one small tract of his own native country a company of men equal in poetic stature with Homer, Euripides, Virgil and Dante. Such was the society he was most accustomed to. When he had a mind to hear the music of humanity, he betook him to humanity's greatest singers.

Like Wordsworth, Milton realised that the essential part of man was his thoughts and feelings. Like him also he realised that the poet must respect the language of men. There is a peculiar sanctity in the words in which we have heard mankind make those confessions and declarations which have most strongly moved our passion and admiration. If therefore Wordsworth found that in rustic life "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their majority, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language," he was justified in using the language of rustic life. But Milton, who found more of the precious life-blood of the human spirit in books than in many a breathing burden of the earth, was no less justified in preserving to us something of their vital essence with the same care for linguistic association.

It is in this light that Milton's literary reminiscences are to be understood. To conceive of him as deliberately and systematically pilfering from the glorious dead is as impossible as to imagine Wordsworth botanising upon the earth which is their tomb. The author who comes to Homer - or to nature either - in that cool

mood which imitation demands may catch something of the form and colour of his original but the life within it will escape him. Homer, like nature, will yield his secret only to that imagination which half-creates even as it perceives. For true poetry, whether by Homer or another, has at least this analogy with nature: it is not made better, nor even fittingly transformed, by any mean but poetry makes that mean. We receive but what we give, as Milton himself recognised. But though he could inquire

what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek? it was impossible for one of his vigorous character to remain long on this Coleridgean plane. Like Wordsworth he was so much occupied with the straightforward work of production that he had little leisure or aptitude for harassing economic inquiries into the balance of his spiritual exports and imports. Therefore we must not suppose that we can dispose of Milton's literary associations by drawing up a simple list of his creditors with statements of what is taken from each. For Milton did not simply take this here and that there and form a mosaic of his borrowings. He robbed no author's house but he has many tokens and precious memories of happy days spent in the company of different authors. It was

in such society that Milton grew to authorship and it is only by tracing his reactions to this environment that we can learn anything at all of a most important aspect of his development.

Others might regard books and authors as Peter Bell regarded primroses, but Milton had an ever-present consciousness of the motion and spirit that impels. For him the supreme cause of all art is God, and the great artists are men divinely instructed. <sup>(4)</sup> The Deity has impressed upon the human mind so many unquestionable tokens of Himself <sup>(5)</sup> that it would be gross negligence not to take these into account even more than the many traces which are to be found in nature. In his third Prolusio, for example, Milton incites his hearers to survey the whole of the visible universe, but he also insists that they must go beyond this:

"But let not your mind suffer itself to be contained and circumscribed within the same limits as the world, but let it stray even beyond the boundaries of the universe; and let it finally learn (which is yet the highest matter) to know itself, and at the same time those holy minds and intelligences with whom hereafter it is to enter into everlasting companionship." (6)

---

(4) Artis Logicae ... Institutio, P.W. (Symmons) VI, 198. "Efficiens artis primarius nēminem reor dubitare quin sit Deus, author omnis sapientiae ... Causae ministrae fuerunt homines divinitus edocti, ingenioque praestantes."

(5) Treatise of Christian Doctrine, P.W. (Bohn) IV, 14.

(6) trans. Masson.

So completely possessed is he by the spirit of eternity that he can in sober fact write for antiquity.

When Milton's widow was asked "whether he did not often read Homer and Virgil, she understood it as an imputation upon him for stealing from those authors, and answered with eagerness, that he stole from nobody but the Muse who inspired him; and being asked by a lady present who the Muse was, replied, it was God's grace and the Holy Ghost that visited him nightly." Her readiness to suspect the imputation of plagiarism may suggest either that she realised how natural such an imputation would be or that she had been specially prepared to expect it. Her eagerness in replying would point to the second of these alternatives: her confidence would only be justified if she was absolutely sure of her information. She was obviously shrewd enough to see that to some people it is difficult to distinguish between conscious reminiscence and plagiarism. So she goes to the heart of the matter by ruling out all literary influences altogether.

Perhaps, however, it was not in this downright way that Milton had explained things to her. If she had asked him why he should read so much of other authors -

(What he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek?) -  
he might have replied that "these abilities wheresoever they  
be found, are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed,"<sup>(7)</sup>  
and that the only way of developing one's own divine gift  
was to seek out the divine wheresoever it was to be found.  
If they serve for nothing else, the great masters are a  
touchstone for testing the authenticity of one's own  
inspiration. A man is not likely to think himself  
divinely inspired to write revivalist hymns if he has  
learned to respond to the Matthew Passion. Milton could  
not believe that the Holy Ghost was capable of inspiring  
work of inferior quality. If he tried to live up to the  
standard of Virgil or Spenser, it was because anything  
unworthy of them would be unworthy of the Holy Ghost.

But the inspiration must come from on high. When  
God commands to take the trumpet, the result is not the  
same as when Virgil calls the tune. In Lycidas the in-  
spiration is mainly Virgilian. When therefore we are in  
the humour of considering the appreciation of Milton as  
the last reward of consummated scholarship, we shall regard  
Lycidas as the high water mark of his achievement. But  
when we are seriously endeavouring to understand his work

---

(7) Reason of Church Government, P.W. (Bohn) II, 479.

in the light of his own intentions, we shall see why he himself did not base his claims on that poem. When the Remonstrant forced him into literary competition with Bishop Hall, it was not on the pledges which he was about to publish that he relied for his justification, but on a prayer in the Animadversions <sup>(8)</sup> which the Remonstrant had taken upon himself to mislike. Few of us, perhaps, would exchange Lycidas for any number of such prayers, but we must admit that there is in it that which is not found in Lycidas - something more primal than the things with which scholarship is concerned, and something which is found equally in Paradise Lost. There is that in Paradise Lost which is not taken from anyone, things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. It is the most truly personal of all great poems. "In the Paradise Lost - indeed in every one of his poems - it is Milton himself whom you see," not the disiecta membra of other poets. "The egotism of such a man is a revelation of spirit." <sup>(9)</sup>

The aim of Milton's studies, as Mark Pattison observes, "was to improve faculty not to acquire knowledge." We cannot confine ourselves, therefore, to the mere

---

(8) P.W. III, 71.

(9) Coleridge: Table Talk. Aug. 18, 1823.

examination of those reminiscences of other authors which are found in Paradise Lost. We must consider also Milton's dealings with these authors during the period of his development. It is because of their influence on him that they have left their mark on his poem. The four chapters which follow are, of course, intended merely as illustration. They do not attempt to cover the whole ground, but deal only with four authors whom Milton is positively known to have read. A further chapter suggests some of the other branches of Milton's study which also affected his poetic character, though in this too an attempt has been made to observe the distinction between "faculty" and "knowledge." (1)

---

(1) The omission most regretted is that of the Greek poets. To have included Homer as well as Virgil, however, might have meant some repetition or much minute differentiation. If one was to be chosen and the other left, it seemed better to take the one whose position was more analogous to Milton's and who certainly helped him more, whether he exercised a greater influence on the actual form of Paradise Lost or not. Besides we may be sure that Milton's Homer was more Virgilian than the Homer we know. It would be troublesome and hazardous to reconstruct this Homer, and after all he would not serve our purpose so well as Virgil, who in the seventeenth century tended to dominate men's ideas not only of classical epic but of poetry in general. It is harder to justify the absence of the tragedians. One feels that they had a very definite and vital message for Milton. Yet it is an enterprise not lightly to be undertaken to attempt to see them with the eyes of a man who lived not only before Porson but even before Bentley. Milton read Virgil practically in the same text as ours, but not Aeschylus or Euripides.

Note (1) continued from p.333.

It is easy to learn what his contemporaries could find in Virgil's verse but not what they thought of the Greek metres. And the worst of all is this: it is so obvious that Milton's Euripides cannot be the Euripides of Dr. Verrall or Professor Murray. Yet this Euripides seems equally obviously to be the only one who will serve our turn.

## CHAPTER II.

---

### INDUSTRIOUS AND SELECT READING: OVID.

" ... which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me."

#### 1.

Milton's literary career, as he himself informs us, begins with his study of the "smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce, whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for their matter, which what it is, there be few who know not, I was so allured to read that no recreation came to me better welcome." By the "smooth elegiac poets whereof the schools are not scarce," it is natural to suppose that Milton meant to indicate the Roman elegiac poets. Such a choice is intelligible and, as Milton suggests, well suited to his years. The Roman elegy is essentially a poetry of youth and does not demand that large and mature experience of life which is needed

for the appreciation of Virgil or of Horace. If this were indeed Milton's meaning, we should understand at once the curtness of his reference to "their matter" and we should also appreciate the necessity for his apologetic addendum: "it was then those years with me which are excused, though they be least severe." That Milton knew all three of the great elegiac poets might well be assumed, although it so happens that there are some positive indications to this effect in his works. Ovid alone, however, seems to have exercised any considerable influence over him.

This may seem strange, since modern opinion is unanimous in seeing in both Tibullus and Propertius poetic virtues which Ovid did not share - virtues, too, which should, as we may think, have called forth some response from Milton. Thus Sellar writes: "They treat of love, not as mere desire, but as the admiration of something above them ... Ovid shows us only transient desire, and regards the whole subject in a spirit of persiflage."<sup>(1)</sup> How is it then, we may ask, that Milton's elegies approached more nearly to Ovid than to either of the others? For Milton is before all things an idealist. The answer seems

---

(1) Horace and the Elegiac Poets, p.326.

to be that flippancy in treating of love belongs especially to two very different classes of people: those who know nothing of love, and those who know it, or at least something which goes by the name, only too well. We need not therefore fear to recognise this tendency in Milton's elegies, since the recognition does not involve any serious moral consequences. The tone of these elegies, we may be sure, is caused not by satiety and indifference but simply by immaturity.

There is an age, varying of course with the individual, which is not ripe for a sincere revelation of real emotion and is prone to regard such things as merely stupid. You shall find boys at the present day, not lacking in parts, who think bravely of Byron but regard Keats with distrust. There is nothing strange in this since Keats, as some of his early critics have demonstrated, is an admirable object for the assaults of a somewhat boyish and boisterous sort of wit. Tibullus and Propertius, no doubt, would be equally vulnerable to weapons of this kind. But Byron is clever. You cannot laugh at him, for he never takes his grand pretensions really seriously. He was himself not unskilled in the disposition of schoolboy artillery. And Ovid was equally

brilliant. We shall do well to bear in mind youth's admiration for mere cleverness. It is nature's part in them, whereas the graver subjects of admiration are only the teacher's part - as the scholar's age then is, so will he understand them. The Milton with whom we have to deal had not yet written the Hobson poems, so that he had still enough of schoolboy witticism to be superior to Tibullus and Propertius and to pardon Ovid many an offence against the decencies by reason of this outstanding merit.

In accounting for the special influence of Ovid, we must remember also that Ovid was something more than an elegiac poet. The extraordinary popularity which he had always enjoyed was due not more to his elegies than to his encyclopaedic Metamorphoses and Fasti. Even today, when Ovid's poetic fame is greatly diminished, an ignorance of these works would be the mark of a very fragmentary Latinist. This is of some importance since it is precisely in his reminiscences of the Metamorphoses and Fasti that Milton's acquaintance with Ovid first appears.

## 2.

The date at which his imitation of the elegiac

poets begins might be surmised from Milton's own words in the Apology for Smectymnuus. The contrast between these poets, whom he read from choice, and the orators, whom he read because he had to, suggests that Milton had already begun to take his own way and to differentiate between the actual curriculum of the University and the course of reading which he would prefer to follow. This would point to a date somewhere about 1627. (2) That this date is of some importance in this connection will appear if we compare the poems written before 1627 with those which immediately follow. The earlier poems, On the Death of a Fair Infant, Elegy II and Elegy III, In Quintum Novembris, In Obitum Procancellarii Medici and In Obitum Praesulis Eliensis all contain reminiscences of Ovid. Many of these, however, are matters of fact not of style, and nearly all are taken from the Metamorphoses and the Fasti. (3) Even

---

(2) Cf. supra pp. 55 ff.

(3) Fair Infant, 8 ff., Metam. VI, 682 ff.; 23 ff., Metam. X, 162 ff; 50, Metam. I, 149; 47, Metam. I, 151. Elegy II, 6, Heroides VIII, 68; 7, Metam. VII, 264; 10, Metam. XV, 624 and Fasti VI, 745; 5, Tristia IV, viii; Elegy III, 21, Metam. VIII, 620; 32, Fasti II, 314 and Ex Ponto II, v, 50; 49, Metam. I, 778; 59, Remed. Amoris 39. In Quint. Novem. 23, Fasti VI, 731; 31, Metam. II, 795; 54, Metam. I, 219; 149, Metam. VII, 184; 166, Metam. VI, 64; 171, Metam. IX, 773; 172, Metam. XII, 39; 207, Fasti V, 441.

the two elegies are not in the Ovidian manner of those which come later. But though there is little of the Ovidian elegy in any of these six poems, it is worth noting that five of them are elegies in the sense that they are written to celebrate some person's death. In this the English poem resembles the Latin poems, but in another respect it would appear to differ from them. On the Death of a Fair Infant is obviously modelled on the work of an earlier master - Spenser. But who was the model for the Latin "elegies"? Surely there is no classical poet who uses indiscriminately for such works the elegiac couplet, the alcaic or the metre of Horace's epodes, nor would such a one introduce into the substance of his poems dreams and visions after the manner of Chaucer's Book of the Duchess. Yet the closeness of Milton's imitation in the Fair Infant forbids us to believe that the Latin poems are altogether original and without prototype. Such

---

Note (3) continued from p.339.

Procan. Medici 10, Metam. IX, 134; 17, Metam. XIV, 44; 18, Ex Ponto III, i, 123; 25, Metam. II, 676; 28, Metam. II, 629.

Praesul. Eliensis 20, Ibis 54.

(The above are taken mainly from Todd). The Metamorphoses, and possibly the Fasti, would be read at school; it is not likely that Amores were a school-book.

independence, one would suppose, would more probably be displayed in the English poem.

The explanation would appear to be that Milton in his earlier "elegies" was imitating, not the classical poets, but the modern "elegiac poets whereof the schools are not scarce." Volumes of verse at this time were frequently produced at the universities on the deaths of eminent persons. To one such - on the death of Camden - Diodati contributed a copy of Latin alcaics, and at a later date Milton's own Lycidas was intended for a similar volume. We may be astonished that Milton should have thought it worth while to imitate such occasional effusions. But even the great poets of Milton's youth, Jonson and Donne among them, had no more disdained to engage their muses on epitaphs and elegies than had Milton's own friends, Diodati and Gill. Nor must we condemn too lightly collections of occasional verse of a type which called forth both Lycidas and Spenser's Astrophel. It is easy for us, of course, to see that, whereas the English writings in this kind might become great poetry, the Latin verses were of necessity mere artificial exercises unworthy of imitation. To a contemporary this was not so easily perceived. The works of modern Latin poets were not yet

regarded as essentially different from those of the classical authors. They might be inferior, but there was no reason to suppose that they must be so. And so Mantuan was read in school along with Virgil, and men who knew Catullus and Horace could yet read Buchanan with pleasure.

The composition of funereal elegies was encouraged by contemporary custom, but these were not the sole themes of the modern Latin muse. There were also elegies of the Roman kind. In fact the word "elegy" had the ambiguous meaning which it still retains and which indeed it has had since classical times. Moreover the habit of regarding modern exercises as genuine outpourings of the Muse would facilitate the approximation of these modern efforts to the works of the classical poets. Possibly then, when Milton referred to the "elegiac poets whereof the schools are not scarce", he was thinking both of those which were written and also of those which were read in the schools. In the same category he might include all the modern elegies and also such works as Ovid's, which served as models and were consequently widely studied. Regarding them as one group, he makes no comment on his own passage from the obituary to the more Ovidian type of elegy. Yet there

was such a transition: the elegy which he spurned in Elegy VI and of which he had recently composed several examples is not that which he had favoured in Elegy II -

Fundat & ipsa modos querebunda Elegia tristes,  
Personet & totis naenia moesta scholis.

3.

(4)

We have already seen that it is the period of Ovidian influence which marks the real emergence of Milton as a poet. Other elegiac writers were possibly no less easy in imitation, but it was Ovid whom he found most pleasing to nature's part in him. The first signs of his serious devotion to Ovid are to be seen in Elegy I: Ovid claimed his allegiance not as the poet of love but as the poet of injured innocence unjustly condemned. As such he might well appeal to Milton, especially at the time when this elegy was written. The situation was decidedly flattering to the young poet, who would have needed more prosaic philosophy than even Touchstone's self not to seem sensible of it. Here he found himself in truly poetic circumstances, circumstances which not only raised his own emotions to the highest pitch of

---

(4) supra p.55<sup>9</sup>.

youthful sentiment but bore also a striking similarity to those which beset one of the greatest poets of antiquity. What wonder then in committing his feelings to paper if he did so very much in the manner of that most capricious poet, honest Ovid?

The poem is obviously overlaid with recollections of the Tristia and of the Epistolae ex Ponto. Its opening suggests at once the style of Ovid's

Littera sera quidem, studiis excolte Suilli,  
huc tua pervenit, sed mihi grata tamen, (5)

while the lines

Si sit hoc exilium patrios adiisse penates,  
Et vacuum curis otia grata sequi,  
Non ego vel profugi nomen, sortemve recuso,  
Laetus & exilii conditione fruor

are probably reminiscent of one of the Tristia wherein Ovid insists on a very precise and legal interpretation of the word exilium, showing himself as anxious to avoid the stigma of the name as the harshness of the fate. (6) One reason for Milton's doubting whether such a term could be fitly applied to his own condition was, perhaps, that his "exile" had brought him to town; it was precisely the loss of town life which made Ovid's punishment unbearable. (7) Hence

---

(5) Ex Ponto IV, viii, 1-2.

(6) Tristia V, xi.

(7) Ex Ponto I, viii, 31 ff.

Milton's pious regret:

O utinam vates nunquam graviora tulisset  
Ille Tomitano flebilis exul agro.

He has been taken to task for suggesting that Ovid's verses suffered as a result of his exile, but he had at least Ovid's own authority for it. (8) Ovid also is responsible for the comparison with Homer. (9)

Yet in spite of these borrowings the elegy is essentially what it professes to be - a personal epistle written by Milton to his most intimate friend about his own recent experiences and expressing his own thoughts and feelings on the matter. And this is what distinguishes it from any other verse that Milton had previously written. Nor was it only on such exceptionally Ovidian occasions as this that Milton derived help from Ovid, as the fourth elegy serves to prove. Two years before he had sent Young a Latin epistle in prose and had excused himself on the grounds that his feelings were too warm and expansive to endure the confinement of verse. When he wrote Elegy IV, however, his feelings must have been even more strongly affected: he has to record no mere sentimental regret at Young's departure, but grave appre-

---

(8) Tristia I, i, 35; I, vi, 29; I, xi, 35; III, xiv, 29; V, xii.

(9) Tristia I, i, 47.

hension at the dangers which now beset him. Evidently therefore Milton has now found a way of verse that shall not do violence to his deepest feelings. In a sense this elegy is a more striking monument to the potency of Ovid's influence than that addressed to Diodati.

The general structure of the poem is very much like that of Ovid's verses to Perilla,<sup>(1)</sup> and its opening lines -

Curre per immensum subito mea littera pontum,  
I, pete Teutonicos laeve per aequora agros -

are obviously reminiscent of Ovid's

Vade salutatum, subito perarata, Perillam,  
littera, sermonis fida ministra mei.

In Ovid however it is the tutor who addresses his former pupil, whereas in Milton the rôles are reversed. Thus Ovid's claim that he first inspired his pupil with a love of poetry becomes in Milton an expression of indebtedness:

Primus ego Aonios illo praeunte recessus  
Lustrabam, & bifidi sacra vireta jugi,  
Pieriosque hausit latices, Clioque favente,  
Castalio sparsi laeta ter ora mero.

But Milton remembered also one of the Pontic  
<sup>(2)</sup>  
Epistles which opens in the same way with an address of the poet to his work. The poet and his correspondent here

---

(1) Tristia III, vii.

(2) Ex Ponto IV, v.

do not stand in the relationship of tutor and pupil it is true, yet the circumstances resemble those of Milton's poem more nearly than the other inasmuch as the poet is addressing one whom he regards as his superior both in learning and by the dignity of his calling. In this poem Ovid gives certain geographical data referring to the journey his epistle must undertake. He then instructs his emissary, on arrival at a certain city, to seek out a particular person. He suggests what the employments of that person are likely to be at the moment of the epistle's arrival, indicates the proper way of approaching him and rehearses the message which is to be delivered. All of these things are to be found in Milton's poem.

4.

In the world of poetry to which Ovid had introduced him Milton found relief from the merely ingenious toils of his university studies. Here alone could he find means of self-expression and of true self-development. Yet it would have been boorish to enter this new world mindless of all except just what he required from it and giving nothing in return. A newcomer has much to learn and in

courtesy to his cicerone he must submit to the conditions which he finds. Until he can walk alone, he must accept the conventions of his new society. He would already know, for example, and Ovid could hardly fail to remind him that one of the accepted subjects of poetry, especially of elegiac poetry, was love. Milton was not in love himself; but he was not blind and therefore he might easily perceive that it was better to write about living ladies than dead dons. One does not need to be in love to see that girls can be at least as beautiful as flowers or birds or any of the other things people write verses about. Owing, however, to his lack of experience, Milton has to work hypothetically on principles suggested by Ovid's general attitude or implied by his tone of voice. But he is apt and tactful and immediately grasps the main criteria for the tasteful appraisal of female types, and even dares to set up his own opinion therein against that of his mentor, extolling the girls of London above those whom Ovid had celebrated. (3)

One cannot make much, however, of women regarded solely in groups and from the point of view of critical spectatorship. It is in another fashion that they most

---

(3) Elegy I, 51 ff.

influence the lives of men, and it is therefore from another point of view that the poet must learn to see them. Though he himself need not be in love, he should know enough of the symptoms of the passion to be able to reconstruct a typical case and to follow it through its characteristic phases. Despite Ovid's looseness and his lack of depth, Milton could have found few better guides in the normal and conventional way of handling a form of experience of which he himself lacked first-hand knowledge. Thus it is in true Ovidian fashion that Milton tells of the false security of the young poet who knows not love, then of his bout with Cupid - how he wondered at the boy's impudence and twitted him - finally of the pains which followed.<sup>(4)</sup>

5.

Ovid had professed, on occasion, a noble appreciation of the value of poetry, and some hints for Milton's Ad Patrem may have been taken from him. But the higher forms of poetry are very exacting in their demands,

---

(4) Elegy VII. The conventionality of this elegy is further emphasised by its use of another model of the schools, Buchanan. Cf. J. H. Hanford: The Youth of Milton, p.116.

and Ovid had been only too ready to make flippant excuses for not attempting any great work. Here he differed entirely from Milton. If Milton were convinced that the elegy was essentially a meretricious kind of poetry, far below the truth and dignity of tragedy or of epic, he would not be content to go on wasting his time on such trifles. He would fail to see how a vita verecunda could be reconciled with a musa iocosa.<sup>(5)</sup> Surely a man would not be at any great pains to make himself "a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things" if he desired only to write mirthfully of questionable matters. Epic themes are beyond Ovid's strength:

at si me iubeas domitos Iouis igne Gigantas  
dicere, conantem debilitabit onus, (6)

but it is precisely such subjects which are calling to Milton even at the time of his Ovidian elegies. If he does not actually tell of the overthrow of the Giants, he must at least wander among the Gods who overthrew them and tell of the happiness which followed:

Nam dolus & caedes, & vis cum nocte recessit,  
Neve Giganteum Dii timuere scelus. (7)

---

(5) Tristia II, 354.

(6) Tristia II, 333-34.

(7) Elegy V, 39-40.

Ovid himself had written elegies on the approach of Spring, but Milton's In Adventum Veris is not elegiac. It has the large Olympian scope of the Metamorphoses rather, and of the Fasti.

Evidently if Ovid was still to command Milton's admiration it must be as the author of the Metamorphoses, that model of constructive ingenuity, not as the autobiographic elegist. Other influences besides Ovid's were at work. The lines At a Vacation Exercise have much in common with In Adventum Veris and in them the influence of Du Bartas is obvious. Incidentally these lines show that Milton has already realised that he will not find resources adequate to the theme of his choice in the composition of Latin verse. Du Bartas, of course, had not taught him this, but Du Bartas (or Sylvester rather) had sought to

wean our wanton Ile  
From Ouids heirs, and their unhallowed spell  
Heer charming senses, chayning souls in Hell. (9)

So that we are not surprised to find that Milton soon discontinues to practise Latin elegiacs. Still, if Ovid was to be superseded, we might well wish that Milton had

(8) e.g. Tristia III, xii.

(9) The Second Week, Eden (p.216 ed. 1611).

found some abler master. His denunciation of "our late fantasticks" ought, of course, to convince us that he would be proof against the worst dangers of Sylvester. But our confidence is shaken when in In Adventum Veris he deliberately imitates one of the most notorious "new-fangled toys" of that ancient fantastic who had hitherto been his literary guide:

(1)

Semicaperque Deus, semideusque caper.

In the sixth elegy (1629) Milton finds the elegiac form no longer adequate for his purposes. The author of the Nativity Ode has entered a new realm of poetry, and he definitely classes the elegy as one of the lower kinds inspired by Bacchus. No longer is Ovid hailed as a possible rival of Homer and Virgil. He is one of the lesser bards who depend for their inspiration on feasts and wine. The true epic poet must order his life very differently:

At qui bella refert, & adulto sub Jove caelum,  
Heroasque pios, semideosque duces,  
Et nunc sancta canit superum consulta deorum,  
Nunc latrata fero regna profunda cane,  
Ille quidem parce Samii pro more magistri  
Vivat, & innocuos praebeat herba cibos;  
Stet prope fagineo pellucida lympa catillo,  
Sobriaque e puro pocula fonte bibat.  
Additur huic scelerisque vacans, & casta juvenus,  
Et rigidi mores, & sine labe manus.

---

(1) Elegy V, 122. Cf. Ars Amatoria, II, 24.

Qualis veste nitens sacra, & lustralibus undis  
Surgis ad infensos augur iture Deos.  
Hoc ritu vixisse ferunt post rapta sagacem  
Lumina Tiresian, Ogygiumque Linon,  
Et lare devoto profugum Calchanta, senemque  
Orpheon edomitis sola per antra feris. (2)

The importance of this passage is not merely that its sentiments are characteristically Miltonic, but that they are also definitely anti-Ovidian. In a well-known passage of the Tristia, Ovid had sought to justify his own works by casting foul aspersions on other poets. Milton certainly had these verses in mind since his own

Quid nisi vina, rosasque racemiferumque Lyæum  
Cantavit brevibus Teia Musa modis? (3)

is an obvious echo of Ovid's

quid, nisi cum multo Venerem confundere uino,  
praecepit lyrici Teia musa senis? (4)

He finds no fault with Ovid's estimate of such poets as this. But when Ovid proceeds:

Ilias ipsa quid est aliud, nisi adultera de qua  
inter amatorem pugna uirumque fuit?  
quid prius est illi flamma Briseidos, utque  
fecerit iratos rapta puella duces?  
aut quid Odyssea est, nisi femina propter amorem  
dum uir abest, multis una petita uiris?  
quis nisi Maeonides Venerem Martemque ligatos  
narrat in obsceno corpora pressa toro? (5)

---

(2) Elegy VI, 55 ff.

(3) Ibid. 21-22.

(4) Tristia II, 363-64.

(5) Ibid. 371 ff.

- then Milton definitely breaks with him. Milton's own description of Homer, when compared with a similar reference to Spenser in the Areopagitica, makes it clear that he, like Horace, <sup>(6)</sup> dared be known to think him a better teacher than Chrysippus or Crantor:

Sic dapis exiguus, sic rivi potor Homerus  
Dulichium vexit per freta longa virum,  
Et per monstrificam Perseia Phoebados aulam,  
Et vada foemineis insidiosa sonis,  
Perque tuas rex ime domos, ubi sanguine nigro  
Dicitur umbrarum detinuisse greges.  
Diis etenim sacer est vates, divumque sacerdos,  
Spirat & occultum pectus, & ora Jovem. (7)

6.

The reaction from merely amorous forms of poetry is carried further in Comus and in the early prose works. Meantime Milton had ceased to write elegies, and even in the Latin verses which he did write the Ovidian element is less marked than before. The Epitaphium Damonis and Lycidas too are important indications of the change in Milton's attitude, for though the pastoral may not be a higher "kind" than the elegy, it is essentially the form

---

(6) Epistles I, ii. Quoted by Milton in Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes (ed. Symmons, III, 324). But Milton's rivi potor is not the Homer of Horace (Epistles, I, xix)

(7) Elegy VI, 71 ff.

of the professed poet as opposed to the irresponsible amateur. The pastoralist is an epic bard in embryo; the elegist is usually too lazy to be anything but a jeune premier. In spite of this change, however, there yet remain sufficient references to Ovid in the works of the Horton period and even in the prose works and sonnets which followed to show that Milton must still have continued to read him with some care.

Particularly noteworthy are the passages quoted in the Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio, where Ovid is referred to only less frequently than Virgil himself.

These include passages from the Heroides,<sup>(8)</sup> De Arte Amatoria,<sup>(9)</sup> Remedia Amoris,<sup>(1)</sup> Fasti,<sup>(2)</sup> Tristia,<sup>(3)</sup> and Metamorphoses.<sup>(4)</sup>

The references to the Metamorphoses are all drawn from the first book and the opening lines of the second. One of these is the passage beginning:

neu regio foret ulla suis animalibus orba (5)

(8) P.W. (ed. Symmons) VI, 308, 311.

(9) Ibid., 228, 245.

(1) Ibid., 223, 254, 350.

(2) Ibid., 246, 264, 265.

(3) Ibid., 210, 274.

(4) Ibid., 273, 236, 212.

(5) Metam. I, 72. Milton's reading.

which leads, four lines later, to the most important account of the creation of man:

Sanctius his animal mentisque capacius altae  
deerat adhuc, et quod dominari in cetera posset.  
natus homo est.

Another, equally significantly, tells of the strife and bloodshed which followed the passing of the golden age:

non hospes ab hospite tutus,  
non socer a genero: fratrum quoque gratia rara est.  
Imminet exitio vir conjugis, illa mariti:  
lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercae:  
filius ante diem patrios inquirit in annos, (6)

and this also immediately precedes a noteworthy passage describing Jove's overthrow of the Giants. The third is but a passing reference, but since it is a reference to a splendid description of a "towered structure high" - a most favourable example of Mulciber's best period - this too is not without its importance. (7) It may be noted, however, that the passages from Ovid are not usually so completely analysed as those from Virgil. Certainly there is nothing on Ovid to correspond with the extended commentary on Virgil's Fama.

7.

In reading Paradise Lost we frequently meet

---

(6) Metam. I, 144 ff.

(7) Metam. II, 1-4.

passages in which the words of Ovid are remembered, such as

Thrice he assayd, and thrice in spite of scorn,  
Tears such as Angels weep, burst forth: at last  
Words interwove with sighs found out their way,

or

and at his Gilles  
Draws in, and at his Trunck spouts out a Sea. (8)

Even when there is not this close verbal similarity, there is often a certain likeness in general style. This is not always easy to define. Milton's use of proper names, for example, often reminds us more of Virgil than of Ovid in its power of awakening poetical associations. Yet sometimes, even in this, there is something of Ovid:

nor could his eye not ken  
Th' Empire of Negus to his utmost Port  
Ercoco and the less Maritime Kings  
Mombaza, and Quiloa, and Melind,  
And Sofala thought Ophir, to the Realme  
Of Congo, and Angola fardest South;  
Or thence from Niger Flood to Atlas Mount  
The Kingdoms of Almansor, Fez and Sus,  
Marocco and Algiers, and Tremisen;  
On Europe thence, and where Rome was to sway  
The World: in Spirit perhaps he also saw  
Rich Mexico the seat of Motezume,  
And Cusco in Peru, the richer seat  
Of Atabalipa, and yet unspoil'd  
Guiana, whose great Citie Geryons Sons  
Call El Dorado. (XI, 396 ff.)

Such broad sweeping surveys are more in the manner of Ovid than of Virgil, and the phrase "yet unspoiled" is

---

(8) P.L. I, 619; VII, 415. Cf. Metam. XI, 419 ff.; III, 686. See also P.L. I, 90, Metam. I, 353; P.L. III, 51 ff., Metam. XV, 63; P.L. IV, 242, Metam. III, 158; P.L. XI, 745, Metam. I, 292.

just what we should expect from the poet who must be for ever reminding us that what he is writing about is right "at the beginning of things, with the world so new and all."<sup>(9)</sup> There are places too where Milton's recollections of Ovid are shown in details of description in his allusions,<sup>(1)</sup> while elsewhere his own characters are endowed with Ovidian qualities or sentiments.<sup>(2)</sup>

But the Ovidianism of Paradise Lost goes deeper than this. Here, for example, is Ovid's description of Chaos:

Ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum  
 unus erat toto naturae vultus in orbe,  
 quem dixere Chaos: rudis indigestaque moles  
 nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem  
 non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum.  
 nullus adhuc mundo praebebat lumina Titan,  
 nec noua crescendo reparabat cornua Phoebæ,  
 nec circumfuso pendebat in aere tellus  
 ponderibus librata suis, nec brachia longo  
 margine terrarum porrexerat Amphitrite.  
 utque erat et tellus illic et pontus et aer,  
 sic erat instabilis tellus, innabilis unda,  
 lucis egens aer; nulli sua forma manebat,  
 obstabatque aliis aliud, quia corpore in uno  
 frigida pugnabant calidis, umentia siccis,  
 mollia cum duris, sine pondere habentia pondus.(I, 5 ff.)

---

(9) Cf. the nondum inuisa and the neque adhuc of the similar survey in Metam. VI, 414-20.

(1) e.g. death of Hercules P.L. II, 542; Metam. IX, 134. (See Osgood: Classical Mythology of Milton's English Poems, p. 41); death of Orpheus P.L. VII, 32; Metam. XI, 1. (See Hales: Milton and Ovid, Modern Philology, 1903).

(2) P.L. I, 217, Metam. II, 519; P.L. I, 623, Metam. IX, 5; P.L. II, 92, Metam. XIV, 488; P.L. II, 719, Metam. XIII, 759.

This obviously is the region through which - or through the last remaining portion of which - Satan made his way half on foot half flying, the crude consistence (indigestaque moles) in which the embryon atoms are led to battle by Hot, Cold, Moist and Dry, and from which the earth upon her centre poised <sup>(3)</sup> was formed.

Not only is Milton's Earth made from the same materials as Ovid's, but the description of its creation bears a close resemblance to Ovid's account of the re-  
generation after Deucalion's flood. <sup>(4)</sup> The generation of animals from earth is not peculiarly Ovidian, but Milton's "tawny lion" presented in a state of semi-formation is a picture of a kind not unknown to Ovid:

eodem in corpore saepe  
altera pars uiuit, rudis est pars altera tellus. (5)

Milton's chief addition to the accepted cosmogony is the Paradise of Fools. This is believed to have been suggested probably by Ariosto, but it is to be noted that Milton

---

(3) P.L. V, 579; VII, 242. The other references are to II, 890 ff.

(4) Metam. I, 416 ff.; P.L. VII, 280 ff.

(5) Metam. I, 428; P.L. VII, 463. But cf. Du Bartas: Second Day of the First Week:-

green half-Tadpoles, playing there aloft,  
Half-made, half-vnmade; round about the Floud,  
Half-dead, half liuing; half-a frog, half mud.

indignantly rejects Ariosto's location and prefers to place it in a position analogous to that of Ovid's Temple of Fame - not in the moon but on the confines of three different worlds. (6)

The organisation of Milton's devils is that of Ovid's gods. These had been divided into nobiles and plebs, (7) and so we find in Milton that only the great Seraphic lords and Cherubim attend the great consult in Pandaemonium while the rank and file wait outside. (8)

Pandaemonium itself seems to have been suggested by the marble council chamber in the Palatia caeli (9) in which the devils, after they had got them new names among the sons of men, were accustomed to hold their staff-meetings. But it is Ovid and not Virgil or Homer who presents their councils in this way. In the assembly described in the first book of the Metamorphoses, Jupiter is not the father presiding in Homeric fashion over a family gathering, nor sympathising in private talk with his daughter as often in

---

(6) triplicis confinia mundi. Metam., XII, 40. Cf. P.L. III, 440; II, 1024; III, 510 and 528; X, 320.

(7) Metam. I, 172-73.

(8) I, 790 ff.

(9) Metam. I, 176 ff.

Virgil, but essentially the great administrator, the ruler of councils, the shaper of policy, the Prime Minister or Commander-in-Chief in consultation with his colleagues. His affinity to the Lucifer of Tasso or of Milton is more obvious in Ovid than in some other ancient poets.

8.

Like the Metamorphoses, Paradise Lost begins ab origine mundi, and, more than most other epics, it deals with mutatas formas - not, that is to say, voluntary changes on the part of machining persons, but changes imposed by the higher powers. The transformation suffered by the fallen angels, it should be noted, is not permanent. Milton must therefore have been much impressed by this Ovidian device to suppose that such a transformation could be an effective setback to the great triumph of Satan, even though this setback was only intended to be partial. We may, if we will, regard Milton's whole theme as a gigantic metamorphosis involving the whole frame of nature and the whole state of man; and as a striking but minor metamorphosis of a more distinctly Ovidian kind we may instance the creation of the constellation Libra in Book IV.

The general arrangement of Paradise Lost, however, owes little to Ovid. The nearest approach to the method of the Metamorphoses is perhaps to be found in the long interlude which begins in Book V. Virgil and Homer had indeed introduced lengthy narratives of a similar kind, but with them one speaker - Aeneas or Odysseus - is heard throughout, and he is concerned only with relating one series of adventures. In Milton, however, we have two speakers, one of whom relates two different stories: one narrative by Raphael is made to lead to another and then Adam, in his turn, takes up the tale. Even here we have not the variety of story-telling that we find, for example, in Ovid's account of the sojourn of Theseus in the cave of Achelous.<sup>(1)</sup> If Milton's stories do not relate one series of adventures, they are at least concerned with one connected series of events, whereas Ovid presents us with a sort of miniature Decameron or Canterbury Tales. Yet the interlude in Paradise Lost is sufficiently complex to require something of this Chaucerian or Boccaccian method of handling. Milton's stories must be motivated. The normal epic narration in Virgil or Homer simply forces itself on us. When a

---

(1) Metam. VIII, 547 ff.

stranger of striking presence who has obviously seen many adventures arrives by chance on our coasts, the obvious thing to do, when one has properly entertained him, is to ask for his story. But Adam, like Achelous, is not entertaining such a one, and it takes some scheming to make the stories arise naturally from the after-dinner small talk. Adam starts the ball rolling by his apology for his lack of suitable provisions, Theseus by a casual reference to some islands dimly perceived some distance away. Then again two of Ovid's stories are told with the intention of illustrating the reverence due to the gods, <sup>(2)</sup> and are to that extent more Miltonic than the narratives of Homer and Virgil. And in Ovid, as in Milton, the colloquy is ended by the personal reminiscences of the host.

In the arrangement of particular passages the influence of Ovid is more easily perceived. The device in the second book by which the stupid and vociferous Moloch is followed by the intellectual and subtle Belial may possibly owe something to the similar contrast between Ajax and Ulysses. Ajax, like Moloch, opens with a brief and pointed assertion, but Ulysses prefers, with Belial, to feel his way in a modest tone of suggestive supposition. <sup>(3)</sup>

---

(2) Metam. VIII, 579, 618.

(3) Metam. XIII, 5, 128.



(5)

to find it true. Such was the experience of Ovid's Aeacus:

qualesque in imagine somni  
uisus eram uidisse uiros, ex ordine tales  
adspicio noscoque. (VII, 649 ff.)

Perhaps, however, the most important example of Milton's indebtedness to Ovid's narrative manner is to be found in the description of the creation leading up to its climax in the creation of man. Thus Ovid:

neu regio fuit ulla suis animantibus orba,  
astra tenent caeleste solum formaeque deorum,  
cesserunt nitidis habitandae piscibus undae,  
terra feras cepit, uolucres agitabilis aer.  
Sanctius his animal mentisque capaci  
deerat adhuc, et quod dominari in cetera posset.  
natus homo est .....  
pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram,  
os homini sublime dedit caelumque uidere  
iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere uultus. (6)

This is obviously remembered in Milton's

Aire, Water, Earth,  
By Fowl, Fish, Beast, was flown, was swum, was walkt  
Frequent; and of the Sixt day yet remain'd;  
There wanted yet the Master work, the end  
Of all yet don; a Creature who not prone  
And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd  
With Sanctitie of Reason, might erect  
His Stature, and upright with Front serene  
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence  
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n. (VII, 502 ff.)

That Ovid should agree with the Old Testament in giving this supreme position to man is not remarkable, though

---

(5) P.L. VIII, 478 ff.

(6) I, 72-78, 84-86.

such a line as

finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum

looks very much like a direct borrowing from the Mosaic account. What must have struck Milton as an extraordinary anticipation of his own requirements was not only the special prominence given to man but the fact that in the generation of animals following Deucalion's flood a similar prominence is given to the serpent. His own description of the creation of animals is, as we have seen, <sup>(7)</sup> marked by a striking similarity to this passage of Ovid, and like Ovid he reserves the serpent for special mention at the end. That he had Ovid's words in mind is testified by Raphael's insistence that the serpent was "not unknown" (incognita) nor "noxious" (terror) to the recently created inhabitants (populis novis) of Eden. <sup>(8)</sup> Remembering this, we shall perceive that Milton's phrase "of huge extent sometimes" is not merely otiose as it at first appears. Having categorically contradicted Ovid on two points, Milton will graciously allow him to be perhaps partially right on a third. Milton's own serpent would not take <sup>(9)</sup> up any great part of a mountain side, but that is merely

---

(7) supra, p.359.

(8) P.L. VII, 494-98; Metam. I, 438-40.

(9) Metam. I, 440.

a matter of taste. If Ovid wants one of that size, Milton will at least not deny that there may be some like that.

9.

The influence of Ovid upon Paradise Lost was, it would appear, more extensive than one would have expected after the reaction expressed in the sixth elegy. Yet Milton continued to recognise that there were sides to Ovid's work which were not worthy of his approval. Nor were these things to be completely avoided by turning one's attention from the Amores to the Metamorphoses. Milton's insistence on the nakedness of Adam and Eve may have been partly provoked by his aversion from that false linen decency which Ovid sometimes professes. Thus, for example, in the death of Polyxena:

tum quoque cura fuit partes uelare tegendas,  
cum caderet, castique decus seruare pudoris. (XIII, 479 f.)

The mind which can think of such things on such an occasion is not enviable. This pretended care for decency is worse than the open immorality which Ovid elsewhere displays. And Milton's annoyance causes him to lay more stress than need be on the teaching of the story of Adam: that, but for man's wickedness, there would be no partes tegendas

and that the cura velare is but the symbol of our moral degeneracy.

"A wise man," says Milton, "like a good refiner<sup>(1)</sup> can gather gold out of the drossiest volume," so that we need not wonder that he discovered so much wealth in Ovid, who is after all not the very drossiest of authors. The tremendous amount of information relating to classical mythology which the Metamorphoses contains must make it a valuable book to all those who love these myths, even if they do not always care for Ovid's treatment of them. Then there is the abundance of life and colour which endeared Ovid to the poets and painters of the Renaissance. Certainly Ovid has not the art of Virgil, but he has a greater store of the crude material of poetry - and this was just what Milton in his blindness lacked means to provide for himself. Ovid also has a power, shared by few others of the classical poets, of rising above the earth and of moving about easily in space. His description of Phaethon's journey must have impressed itself strongly on Milton's imagination.

Yet although Milton derived much benefit from Ovid, it must be confessed that Ovid's influence on Paradise

---

(1) Areopagitica, P.W. II, 70.

Lost was in some respects unfortunate. Ovid was not a religious poet. "He cannot conceive," says Sellar, "what calls for reverence or inspires the spirit of awe. He has no sense of mystery, no feeling of anything sacred either in life or above life."<sup>(2)</sup> "He had no belief in the supernatural, but it was as vividly present to his fancy as if his reason had accepted it for a reality. Curiosity, not faith, was the source of his inspiration. The interest appealed to is simply the love of the marvellous and the love of the picturesque in human action and in outward scenes. It was by a rapid and orderly succession of new and vivid surface impressions, not, like Lucretius and Virgil ... by making one deep concentrated impression, that he spoke to his own and to later times."<sup>(3)</sup>

To Milton vividness of impression had long ceased to be the criterion by which the affairs of this prosaic world were to be distinguished from those of the world beyond. And if he suspected Ovid of lack of faith, he would see no reason to regret it. Paganism was not a religion but a sinful superstition, and if Ovid's mythology

---

(2) Horace and the Elegiac Poets, p.351.

(3) Ibid., p.350.

seems thin and unconvincing, that was, no doubt, because all heathen mythology must be found unconvincing when it is fully and imaginatively realised. Milton would have little fear that a similar defect would be found in his own supernatural organisation when presented in the same vivid manner. Yet so it is. Seeley complains that "Milton does not seem to feel any awe of the spiritual world,"<sup>(4)</sup> and is perturbed by the thought of angels digesting their food. Sir Walter Raleigh writes in the same strain: "The ultimate mysteries of human existence and Divine government were no mysteries to him.

The living Throne, the sapphire blaze,  
Where angels tremble, while they gaze,  
He saw;

- and he did not tremble. His persons are visible, their characters are known, the nature of their relations is easily ascertained and expounded. Everything, in short, is as plain as a pikestaff. So he came to picture scenes which criticism is reluctant to traverse, and to make statements which it is equally irreverent either to affirm or to deny."<sup>(5)</sup> If Ovid cannot be held to blame for all this, we must admit at least that his influence was not likely to

---

(4) Lectures and Essays (Eversley Edition), p.150.

(5) Milton, pp.126-27.

act as a corrective.

10.

Apart from the description of Chaos and of the Creation, Ovid does not seem to have served Milton as a model of style. And even in these passages it is not so much the phrasing and rhythm as the general arrangement and articulation of the discourse which is Ovidian. There are places, as we have seen, where a striking phrase of Ovid is remembered, but usually it was his incidents and situations which Milton most readily called to mind. The likeness between the two poets is chiefly intellectual and affects Milton's thoughts more than his language. His choice of material and his attitude towards that material very often remind us of Ovid. There is a certain matter-of-factness in Paradise Lost which is more in the manner of Ovid than, for example, of Virgil. It may be said that Milton's subject is partly to blame: it is hard and theoretical and affords little scope for "the sense of tears in mortal things." But is the subject of the Aeneid in itself any more promising? In any case, if Milton had been moved by a keener sense of the lacrimae

rerum and of the mortalia which touch the hearts of men, and less by the Ovidian desire to account for things, he might have been led to another subject. Milton could conceive and picture a whole universe as no other poet has been able to do. But there are some things which can only be achieved by the recognition that there must be more things in heaven and earth than can be accounted for even by the poet's philosophy:

Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram  
perque domos Ditis vacuas et inania regna.

In Paradise Lost our familiarity with the movements of heavenly bodies <sup>(6)</sup> robs night of much of its mystery, and our knowledge of the infernal regions is too immediate and actual to permit such distant romantic effects as this. The outside tracts which Milton has won from obscurity and colonised are vividly presented, but they have only with difficulty been won to the service of poetry. Before our eyes

in sudden view appear  
The secrets of the hoarie deep, a dark  
Illimitable Ocean without bound,  
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and highth,  
And time and place are lost. (II, 890 ff.)

None but Milton can do this. Yet even Milton is at his best when confined within the narrower circuit of the pendent

---

(6) IV, 661 ff.

world. We feel the change even at our first entrance  
therein:

So high above the circling Canopie  
Of Nights extended shade; from Eastern Point  
Of Libra to the fleecie Starr that bears  
Andromeda farr off Atlantick Seas. (III, 556 ff.)

Milton's bold inventiveness, which was certainly  
stimulated by his reading of the Metamorphoses, is an  
essential part of Paradise Lost. Yet the most interesting  
results of Ovid's influence are to be seen not in passages  
written in the spirit of Ovid but rather in those based on  
Ovidian materials. In such passages a knowledge of Ovid  
is often a necessary factor in poetic appreciation. Thus  
Milton's comparison of Eve just before her temptation to

Ceres in her Prime,  
Yet Virgin of Proserpina from Jove (IX, 395)

loses some of its force if we do not remember that it was  
in the form of a serpent that Jove accomplished Ceres'  
seduction. (7) So also the preceding reference to Pomona  
is more apposite when we recall how she ultimately listened  
to the persuasions of Vertumnus who had entered her garden  
in disguise - persuasions which begin in his professed  
admiration for her fruit and are developed with special  
reference to the tree before which they stand. (8) That

---

(7) Metam. VI, 114.

(8) Metam. XIV, 641 ff.



(3)

but the flowery setting is most insisted on in the Fasti. It is important to note however that in neither version does Ovid make any real use of the flowers. Older authorities had probably settled Proserpina's occupation at the time of her abduction, and Ovid saw no reason to alter it. But so far as he is concerned she might have been doing anything else. In the Metamorphoses he supposes that the flowers were violets or lilies, but in the Fasti he more generously presents us with a lengthy catalogue though Proserpina herself gathers only crocuses or white lilies. He is not led to imagine, however, how charming she must have appeared while thus engaged. His object seems to be merely to get her into a favourable position for Pluto's assault, not to present the situation in such a manner as to heighten our sense of Pluto's desecration.

How different is this from Milton's presentation of Eve, whose virgin charm seems to be portrayed almost entirely by a skilful use of this flower motif. She was born on a bed of flowers <sup>(4)</sup> and spends the greater part of her time among them. For them she is not loth to leave an angel's discourse. <sup>(5)</sup> Where she is concerned even the

---

(3) IV, 435 ff.

(4) IV, 451.

(5) VIII, 44.

time must be told by flowers.<sup>(6)</sup> It is this that lends such pathos to the garland which the unsuspecting Adam had woven for her, and which makes us feel the full extent of her fall only when that garland falls from his fingers.<sup>(7)</sup> Thus Eve's lament,

O flours,  
That never will in other Climate grow, (XI, 273).

becomes something more than the complaint of a pettish woman on having to leave a pretty garden. It is obvious therefore that Milton's "a fairer flower" was not merely a piece of decoration, but the first enunciation of a theme which was to play a great part in the poetic texture of Paradise Lost.

We do not expect Ovid to rival Milton in that symphonic art of poetry in which Milton has no rivals, but we cannot help wondering at the slipshod vulgarity of his melodic phrases. In both his versions Proserpina is made to stand out by comparison not with the flowers but with her companions. In the Metamorphoses she gathers more flowers than they; in the Fasti she gathers a different kind. This may give some idea of her industry or of her discrimination, but hardly of her beauty. Yet see how near Ovid came to it. Thus, for example, in the Fasti:

---

(6) IX, 278.

(7) IX, 838, 892.

Plurima lecta rosa est; sunt et sine nomine flores.  
ipsa crocos tenues liliaque alba legit. (IV, 441).

To us it seems that that ipsa is intended simply to disappoint us in what follows. And again in the Metamorphoses:

ludit et aut uiolas aut candida lilia carpit,  
dumque puellari studio calathosque sinumque  
inplet et aequales certat superare legendo. (V, 392)

Why "aequales certat superare"? He seems to have gone out of his way to avoid the obvious comparison suggested in the preceding lines. Yet when it is a question not of flowers but of vines and fruit, Ovid can rise gallantly to the occasion:

pomaque mirata est. "tanto" que "potentior" inquit.

### CHAPTER III.

---

#### TASSO.

"d' Italia grande antica l'ultimo vate."  
Carducci.

#### 1.

Ariosto and Tasso were probably better known to Englishmen of Milton's time than any other Italian poets. There was, for example, no translation of Dante like those by Harrington and Fairfax. It is not surprising therefore that Milton does not mention Tasso in the account of his Italian studies. Even if he did read Tasso along with Dante and Petrarch, he probably gained no fresh experience thereby since he had most likely already read him in translation. This earlier reading of Fairfax would not be regarded as part of his Italian studies any more than the reading of Sylvester was regarded as a study in French literature. Fairfax and Sylvester were both part of the ordinary reading of English people, not works worthy of mention as having exercised a special



to have influenced Spenser. Moreover Milton soon perceived that contemporary literature in Italy was in a bad state, and in his letter to Buonmattai he seems anxious to learn something of the writers of earlier days. His knowledge of them is, as he admits, defective, but he wishes to supplement it. We can understand therefore that he would eagerly embrace the opportunity of learning something of the last great Italian poet from his friend and biographer Manso. Nor could Manso fail to rise gloriously to the occasion. He thought most nobly of poetry and had the loftiest possible conception of Tasso. Milton could pay him no greater compliment than to refer to him as Tasso's friend. It is obvious that Milton must have partly shared his enthusiasm, and also have revealed in himself some of the characteristics which Tasso had taught him to expect in a true poet to have earned from him the tribute:

Ut mens, forma, decor, facies, mos, si pietas sic,  
Non Anglus, verum hercule Angelus ipse fores.

The lines testify at once to Manso's lack of originality, his generous enthusiasm - extended here to a young and unknown poet - his belief that true poetry is bound up with the true faith and that the possessor of it is gifted with angelic power.

This made him a worthy exponent of Tasso's poetic

doctrines. For these were not sensible and craftsmanlike observations within the limits of what is profitably debatable, like Dryden's for example. Tasso was concerned with high matters which cannot adequately be discussed but only tentatively and imperfectly indicated. In cold print such ideas may often appear naive and jejune. Yet the living man in personal conversation could no doubt make them live and inspire his hearer with something of his own spirit. And if this power was to be transmitted to another generation, it must be by a living witness; mere book-print could not do it. Short of meeting Tasso himself, it is difficult to see how Milton could have gained so vivid a conception of the poet's personality and of his aims by any other means than that afforded by his acquaintance with Manso.

2.

Sooner or later the Gerusalemme Liberata was bound to demand Milton's attention. He had already professed a desire to sing of "kings and queens and heroes old", and quite recently he had told in pastoral verse how Phoebus had touched his trembling ear. Which, according

to classical precedent, should mean that he was now resolved to devote himself to a long period of preparation for the purpose of composing a grand epic poem of the accepted form - an "artificial" epic. Such poems had not often been successfully attempted in recent years, but the Gerusalemme was a brilliant exception. Its success was undoubted; yet there could be no question of its artificiality. The idea of a war in a foreign land centring round the siege of a great city is obviously drawn from the Iliad. Like the Iliad also, the Gerusalemme deals mainly with the events arising from the withdrawal of one of the chief warriors of the besieging army. In finding a motive for Rinaldo's absence, however, Tasso has turned to the Odyssey, since his Armida is certainly modelled on Calypso and Circe. But she has points of contact also with Virgil's Dido, who similarly tries to deflect a hero from the course of duty, and her words of reproach on the hero's departure are an echo of Dido's own. Even Argantes, the gallant defender of the city, has some resemblance to Homer's Hector.

But besides these things there are other elements in the Gerusalemme Liberata such as those "witches' expeditions through the air" and the "enchanted woods inhabited by

ghosts" which the author of Gondibert found it impossible to pardon. These were derived, not as Davenant supposed from Homer, <sup>(8)</sup> but from the romances. Thus the Gerusalemme helps to bridge the gap from romance - Milton's early favourite - to epic, and helps to explain why the author of Paradise Lost did not consider it offensive to epic dignity to recall the knights of Uther's son or the peerage of Charlemagne. Thus also the Gerusalemme served as the connecting link between the epic and our sage and serious Spenser. It was by a reference to the second book of the Faerie Queene with its Bower of Bliss that Milton justified his high opinion of Spenser as a moral teacher. And that Bower of Bliss is taken from Tasso.

### 3.

It was not however as a successful contaminator of different literary forms that Tasso was celebrated by Milton. When God commands to take the trumpet, it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what conceal, and it was in no mood of mere literary curiosity but in a sincere outpouring of the heart that he set Tasso not only

---

(8) Preface to Gondibert.

\* This is the reading of the editions from 1673 onwards. The first edn has "playwrights". Cf the edition of P. Chauvet, Paris 1909, p. 36.

(9)

with Homer and Virgil but even beside the Book of Job. This is not the same way of dealing with Tasso that we find, for example, in Dryden's critical works; but then, Dryden had not met Manso. In this same passage Milton shows his acquaintance with Tasso's biography, and by his insistence on the importance of "being a Christian" as a fundamental element in his epic purpose he shows some knowledge of Tasso's critical works. (1) With this for his starting-point there is little wonder that he came to attach special importance both to the example and to the precept of Tasso. He may refer in general terms to "the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old," but it is obviously in Tasso that he finds the most helpful guidance for his own conduct. (2) Tasso appears also in Of Education among the teachers of the sublime art of poetry who were to make Milton's scholars "perceive what despicable creatures our common rhymesters and playwrights be; and show them what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of poetry, both in divine and human things." (3)

---

(9) Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 478.

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) P.W. III, 474.

Tasso's power to teach these things does not depend merely on the alleged didactic purpose that he taught Spenser and others to find in his Gerusalemme. That he intended to make men better by means of his poetry is certain, (4) but he did not originally intend them to obtain this benefit by the prosaic reasoning out of his moral allegory. (5) This can be seen even in his opening stanzas. When children are tempted by sweets to swallow medicine, the medicine is swallowed unconsciously and at the same time as the sweets. (6) Moreover, no-one with the parables of Jesus Christ before him would find it necessary to apologise for the use of fiction in an allegory. Tasso deals with "le forme della fortezza, della temperanza, della prudenza, della giudizia, della fede e della pietà e della religione, e d'ogni altra virtù, la quale, o sia acquistata per lunga esercitazione, o

---

(4) Discorsi del Poema Eroico I, (Opere, ed. Rosini, XII, 13): "La poesia è dunque imitazione delle azioni umane, fatta per ammaestramento della vita."

(5) "In verità neppur negli anni, in cui componeva poemi sacri ed eruditi, il Tasso perdette mai il senso della natura della poesia. Un fine direttamente didascalico ed etico egli non lo riconobbe mai." Donadoni: Torquato Tasso (Firenze, 1921) vol. I, p.148.

(6) G.L. I, 3. So Milton understood it when he applied a similar illustration to poets of an opposite tendency. (Cf. Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 480). These at least professed no didactic purpose, but affected the reader directly by exciting the emotions.

infusa per grazia divina;<sup>(7)</sup> but not to sermonise his readers withal, only to excite their emotions. He must have an action which is "illustre, grande e perfetta tutta"<sup>(8)</sup> in order to move the soul with wonder and also "di giovare in questa guisa." It is difficult to explain fully the force of this giovamento,<sup>(9)</sup> though Tasso attaches particular importance to it. In effect it seems to be the necessary complement of the Aristotelian katharsis. Just as tragedy by arousing the depressing feelings of pity and fear could cause a kind of purging-off of the passions itself had raised, so the pleasing exaltation of epic would reinforce those emotions of admiration and emulation which the epic chiefly exercises.

Milton's own remarks in the Reason of Church Government indicate a very similar point of view. For him also the subjects of poetry include "whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable or grave." And he demands also that the subject shall have passion or admiration,<sup>(1)</sup> since although poetry is "of power beside

---

(7) Poema Eroico I, Opere XII, 7.

(8) Ibid., XII, 20.

(9) " ... dovendo il poeta aver molto riguardo al giovamento." Poema Eroico II, Opere XII, 45.

(1) P.W.II, 479. "Passion" may be required for the tragedies which Milton goes on to suggest, but "admiration" suggests rather the epic of Tasso.

the office of a pulpit to imbued and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility," yet its persuasive method is more simple, sensuous and passionate. Poetry teaches the whole book of sanctity not by precept but by "all the instances of example" and it can thus move even those who are temperamentally disinclined to doctrine. (2) Throughout Milton insists not on the moral interpretation of poetry, but on its power to regulate the emotions - "to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune." (3)

4.

For Tasso the essential part of ancient criticism of the epic was that dealing with the marvellous. The marvellous was the means by which wonder and its accompanying giovamento were to be aroused. This he considered to be the essential point of difference between epic and tragedy. (4) But this would not distinguish epic from the romances, and in fact Tasso did not seek to establish such a distinction.

---

(2) Ibid., 480.

(3) Ibid., 479.

(4) See e.g. Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica, Opere XII, 206, 234.

If the romances produced the requisite sense of wonder, then they fulfilled the fundamental requirement of epic and were as worthy of consideration as the classical poems. (5)  
In one respect only were they defective: though they moved the reader "colla maraviglia" it was not by means of an "azione illustre, grande e perfetta tutta."

This imperfection might be remedied partly by remodelling the matter of the romances in the manner of the accepted epics. Yet since the romances, despite their imperfections, have partially succeeded where the epics fail, it is obvious that they must contain in them something which the epics lack and for the proper treatment of which the epics can afford no guidance. It is not merely the narrative arrangement of the romances which requires adjustment. (That certainly might be helped somewhat by following classical models). But the fitfulness shown in their inconsequential story-telling is seen also in their fanciful handling of the marvellous. The marvellous, as the romantic poets ought to have realised, must be seen steadily and whole. Yet in spite of their Christian colouring, the romances have often treated it merely as a theme for poetic fancy just as it had been in pagan times.

---

(5) Opere XII, 201, 230, 45, etc.

Here Tasso goes beyond Minturno, who had justified the introduction of saints and angels as the modern poetic equivalents of the pagan machinery. Tasso's contention is not that Christian machinery may be justified by pagan example, but that pagan machinery is inadequate and must be superseded. (6) The councils of the gods may still take place, but they must be sought in their proper region, in hell not in heaven. In making these changes, however, Tasso had other aims besides the perfection of his literary structure. His heroes had to be admirable, and virtue now had come to consist in faith as well as works. Obviously therefore such heroes cannot be credited with belief in a fictitious hierarchy. (7)

There was much here to strengthen, though hardly to modify, the views of one who had passed from the heathen mythology of the Vacation Exercise to the Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity. Already Milton, inspired by "Cremona's trump", had set before himself the ideal of a Christian epic - nay more, had found in Christ himself the "perfect hero".

5.

That subject, however, he found to be above the

---

(6) Arte Poetica I, Opere XII, 201-03.

(7) Ibid., 203; Poema Eroico II, Opere XII, 45.

years that he had when he wrote it, and so, paradoxical though it may appear, the chief result of Tasso's influence was to deflect his attention from purely religious to patriotic themes. Just "as Tasso gave to a prince of Italy his choice whether he would command him to write of Godfrey's expedition against the Infidels, or Belisarius against the Goths, or Charlemain against the Lombards," so if there were "nothing adverse in our climate or the fate of this age" Milton hoped to discover some king or knight before the Conquest in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian hero. (8) The story of Arthur, which he first contemplated, was Tasso's own suggestion; (9) at the time of writing his lines to Manso Milton had not yet considered the whole body of our own ancient stories as he did later. He is assured, however, that there have been noble achievements which need only to be set forth by some competent interpreter in the mother dialect to make England equal in glory with Athens herself. (8) While waiting until the appropriate theme should be discovered, Milton gives further proof of his admiration for Tasso by attuning the Petrarchian stanza to the heroic measures that Tasso had taught it. (1)

---

(8) Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 478.

(9) Arte Poetica I, Poema Eroico II (Opere XII, 203, 45).

(1) See The Sonnets of Milton, ed. J.S. Smart, pp. 40-41.

Events were to prove that, from Milton's point of view, there was much that was adverse in the fate of his age; and these events not only confirmed Milton's suspicions but also profoundly influenced his own outlook on life. In the invocation to the ninth book of Paradise Lost, Milton seems to have remembered his earlier aspirations <sup>(2)</sup> and to have taken counsel with himself. Perhaps an age too late or cold climate had damped his intended wing. Certainly he had lost some of the brave enthusiasms of his early years. Whether this were due to diminished poetic power or to greater maturity it was now idle to inquire. Milton can only write what he now feels, not seek to resurrect his former self. And so this half-suggestion of regret and self-distrust is anxiously set aside. Milton reassures us and reassures himself by proclaiming that the subject he has finally chosen is not less but more heroic than the long and tedious havoc of fabled knights in battles feigned. But he protests too much. He is too eager to be free of all suspicion of interest in such matters. We suspect that it is not really that he is not skilled or studious therein, nor that he is not sedulous by nature to indite such themes, but rather that sad experience has taught him

---

(2) The recollection of the Reason of Church Government in lines 44-45 cannot be accidental.

the folly of seeking the pattern of a Christian hero in any man of mortal mould. Never had any seemed more likely to rise to that eminence than those warriors and politicians to whom his own sonnets had been addressed. Their failure had convinced Milton that it was not by the imitation of merely human actions that poetry could accomplish Tasso's ammaestramento della vita.

This belief is indicated in Paradise Lost itself. Tasso had already removed the councils of the discarded gods to hell, but Milton goes a step further. The leaders of his council have little resemblance to Pluto and his followers. They are heroes rather, not unlike those to whom he and Tasso had written sonnets. Chivalry also fares equally badly. Godfrey's review of his forces is likewise transferred to hell. (3)

6.

Milton found it impossible to inspire his readers with true virtue by the force of man's example. The essential power of Christianity is not to be found in any

---

(3) The likeness of the devils to Tasso's crusaders seems to be emphasised in X, 427, where "the Grand" seems like a deliberate reminiscence of G.L. I, 20. For Godfrey's likeness to Satan see also below, section 8 of this chapter

pattern of kings and knights. From the first, man has been unworthy of the high place bestowed on him. But though man is not fit to symbolise essential goodness, Milton is not foolish enough to see in him nothing but evil. Had man's wickedness been original and indicative of his independence, it would be in its way admirable. But it is merely derivative and indicates only shallowness and inability to stand alone. Obviously man is quite unfit to be a protagonist in the strife between the essential forces of good and evil. So in Paradise Lost the interest is sustained largely on the supernatural plane. In Tasso, as in other epic poets, the machining persons had been pale characterless beings, but in Paradise Lost it is the human beings who are deficient in human interest. There is no need to insist on the part played by Milton's devils. His angels are perhaps not so impressive, but they do at least acquit themselves doughtily on the stage, and are solid beings who can eat and blush, not phantoms which vanish into thin air. (4)

Here Milton goes beyond Tasso, as it was inevitable that he should. Tasso had confined himself to human virtues whether acquired by self-discipline or infused by divine

---

(4) Cf. G.L. I, 17.

grace; beyond this he would not go. "Non s'invaghisca il poeta delle materie troppo sottili e convenienti piuttosto alle scuole dei teologi o dei filosofanti, che ai palagi dei principi e a'teatri: non si mostri ambizioso nelle questioni naturali e teologiche."<sup>(5)</sup> But Milton even at the time when he most nearly approached Tasso would not observe these limitations. For him the subjects of poetry included "whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable or grave." So now, although mankind might be found lacking in virtue, the sublimities of religion yet remained. And even if mankind had not failed him, it is doubtful whether Milton could have been satisfied to treat the conflict of good and evil on anything less than a universal scale. He would have found it impossible to accept the limitations which the timidity of Tasso had suggested. He had not turned to poetry because he doubted his own fitness for the office of preaching. Why should he leave the most important questions to be decided by men with whom he disdained to be associated? Had not Tasso himself claimed something of divinity for the poet's art?<sup>(6)</sup> Who better than the poet could help men to understand the

---

(5) Poema Eroico II, Opere XII, 58.

(6) e.g. Poema Eroico III, Opere XII, 90, 66.

intention of the supreme Creation?

The difference between the two poets may be perceived even in their opening invocations.

O Musa, tu che di caduchi allori  
non circondi la fronte in Elicona,  
ma su nel cielo in fra i beati cori  
hai di stelle immortali aurea corona,  
tu spira al petto mio celesti ardori,  
tu rischiara il mio canto, e tu perdona  
s'intesso fregi al ver, s'adorno in parte  
d'altri dilette, che de' tuoi le carte. (I, 2)

Milton's words have many points of resemblance to Tasso's, but there is nothing in him to correspond with Tasso's last two lines. He cannot have been insensible of the part played in Paradise Lost by his own invention, nor ignorant that his additions are of more serious import than the fictions of Tasso. But there is no word of excuse: instead he boldly claims that his inspiration is comparable with that of Holy Writ and, later, that his Muse is related to the Wisdom of the Old Testament.

7.

Paradise Lost contains many echoes of the  
(7)  
Gerusalemme Liberata besides many other phrases which

---

(7) e.g. P.L. I, 56, G.L. IV, 1; P.L. I, 314, G.L. IV, 3; P.L. I, 547, G.L. VIII, 17; P.L. I, 664, G.L. V, 28; P.L. I, 748, G.L. I, 24; P.L. III, 266, G.L. IV, 65; P.L. VI, 69, G.L. I, 75; P.L. VI, 104, G.L. XX, 31; P.L. VI, 135, G.L. IV, 2; P.L. VI, 309, G.L. VII, 83.

(8)

seem to be derived from Fairfax's translation. This might suggest that these were but scattered reminiscences of earlier reading. Some passages, however, seem to indicate a fairly recent contact with Tasso's text. In such lines as

At last his Sail-broad Vannes  
He spreads for flight,

or

Fierce as a Comet; which with torrid heat,  
And vapour as the Libyan Air adust, (9)

the influence on Milton's phraseology is too emphatic to be attributed to mere recollection. Some parts of the Gerusalemme seem indeed to have been studied closely both in the original and in translation. In

Thus when with meats & drinks they had suffic'd  
Not burd'nd nature, (V, 451)

it seems that Milton has remembered Tasso's naturale amore (1) and also Fairfax's word "sufficed". Similarly

Now Night her course began, and over Heav'n  
Inducing darkness, grateful truce impos'd, (VI, 406)

---

(8) e.g. P.L. I, 105, Godfrey IV, 15; P.L. II, 402, Godfrey IV, 75; P.L. II, 670, Godfrey XVI, 68; P.L. III, 394, Godfrey II, 91; P.L. IV, 20, Godfrey XII, 77; P.L. VIII, 474, Godfrey XIX, 94.

(9) II, 927; XII, 634. Cf. G.L. IX, 60; VII, 52. See also P.L. II, 407, G.L. I, 14; P.L. X, 427, G.L. I, 20.

(1) XI, 17.

and

to Arms  
The matin Trumpet Sung, (VI, 525)

seem to contain obvious recollections of Tasso's tregua  
(2)  
and mattutina tromba, but

That whom they hit, none on thir feet might stand (VI, 592)  
(3)  
seems to be reminiscent of Fairfax.

Tasso had been regarded by Milton as his great predecessor in the Christian epic, so we should expect Tasso's influence to be particularly marked in the management of the machinery of *Paradise Lost*. Certainly the manner in which the Deity is introduced by Milton is reminiscent of Tasso. In Paradise Lost, as in the Gerusalemme,  
(4)  
we have the device of making the Almighty survey the whole of the universe - that the reader may be impressed with His all-seeing vision - before settling his gaze on one particular spot:

---

(2) XI, 18, 19.

(3) XI, 60. The ninth canto also, especially stanzas 57 to 66, seems to have been equally well known in both versions. In P.L. II, 927, as we have seen, is a reminiscence of Tasso's stanza 60, but "the winged Warrior" (P.L. IV, 576) is probably from Fairfax's version of the same stanza. In three lines (P.L. VI, 876-78) Fairfax's stanza 59 and Tasso's stanza 66 are both echoed. Canto IV too was known in both versions. Cf. footnotes 7 and 8 above.

(4) I, 7-8.

Now had the Almighty Father from above,  
 From the pure Empyrean where he sits  
 High Thron'd above all highth, bent down his eye,  
 His own works and their works at once to view:  
 About him all the Sanctities of Heaven  
 Stood thick as Starrs, and from his sight receiv'd  
 Beatitude past utterance; on his right  
 The radiant image of his Glory sat,  
 His onely Son; On Earth he first beheld  
 Our two first Parents, yet the onely two  
 Of mankind, in the happie Garden plac't,  
 Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,  
 Uninterrupted joy, unrivald love  
 In blissful solitude; he then survey'd  
 Hell and the Gulf between, and Satan there  
 Coasting the wall of Heav'n on this side Night  
 In the dun Air sublime, and ready now  
 To stoop with wearied wings, and willing feet  
 On the bare outside of this World, that seem'd  
 Firm land imbosom'd without Firmament,  
 Uncertain which, in Ocean or in Air. (III, 56 ff.)

Milton's introduction of the Son is, of course, original, and the Sanctities of Heaven do not appear in Tasso's description. But he has them in another place, in a passage which Milton obviously knew very well:

d'intorno ha innumerabili immortali. (IX, 57)

Tasso, like Milton, represents the angels as organised into military units:

milizia innumerabile ed alata,  
 tre folte squadre, ed ogni squadra instrutta  
 in tre ordini, (XVIII, 96)

and it is from him that Milton borrows the phrase "winged warrior" and the conception of a celestial armoury.

---

(5) P.L. IV, 576; G.L. IX, 60.

(6) P.L. VI, 320 ff.; G.L. VII, 80.

Twice in each poem God has occasion to send an angelic minister to earth. The first mission is to convey a message of warning or of advice. For this Tasso chooses Gabriel, and Milton Raphael. Both are of dazzling beauty, Gabriel carrying sunbeams in his golden hair, while Raphael appears to Adam like another morn risen on mid-noon.<sup>(7)</sup> Yet in spite of Tasso's assurance of his celestial majesty, Gabriel seemed too much of a "stripling" - and Fairfax's independent testimony bears witness to the justice of Milton's misgivings - to hold such high office as that of the Seven. Such a description would better fit a junior and less responsible angel, and Milton accordingly transfers it to the disguised Satan. On the second occasion, when the need is not for words but for action, the divine emissary both in Milton and in Tasso is Michael.

Milton knew both passages of Tasso well and drew from them many details, yet he does not give us a mere copy of either of them. God's preliminary colloquy with Michael is, for example, in Milton transferred to the sending out of Raphael:

Raphael, said hee, thou hear'st what stir on Earth  
Satan from Hell scap't through the darksom Gulf  
Hath raisd in Paradise. (8)

---

(7) G.L. I, 13; P.L. V, 310.

(8) V. 224. Cf. "Non vedi or come s'armi  
contra la mia fedel diletta greggia  
l'empia schiera d' Averno?" (IX, 58).

On the other hand, while there was no need for Raphael to put on human shape like Gabriel, it was necessary for Michael to do so after carnal fear had dimmed Adam's eye, <sup>(9)</sup> and accordingly Milton introduces the circumstance in that place. So also it is not at the time of his descent to earth that Michael encounters the devils, as in Tasso, but in the course of the wars in Heaven. <sup>(1)</sup> Again, Michael's "swift descent" could hardly be delayed while Milton led us through the intricacies of the Ptolemaic system, and so Milton introduces these during Satan's more leisurely journey of discovery in Book III. <sup>(2)</sup>

The angelic songs to which Tasso refers <sup>(3)</sup> could, of course, be introduced at any time when the scene is laid in Heaven. The chief of Milton's heavenly hymns, however, seems to be indebted not to these but to the hymn of the Crusaders beginning

Te Genitor, te Figlio, eguale al Padre. (XI, 7)

Milton has modified the relationship of the two Persons and has much expanded the address to both. He also definitely

---

(9) P.L. XI, 212, 239.

(1) G.L. IX, 64; P.L. VI, 275.

(2) G.L. IX, 60-62; P.L. III, 480.

(3) G.L. IX, 58.

avoids mentioning the Holy Ghost, the Blessed Virgin, the saints or St. Peter,

te che sei pietra e sostegno  
de la magion di Dio fondato e forte. (XI, 8)

Consequently there is at first sight little resemblance between the two hymns. But what makes it almost certain that Tasso's hymn had engaged Milton's attention is the manner of its delivery:

Cosí cantando, il popolo devoto  
con larghi giri si dispiega e stende,  
e drizza a l' Oliveta il lento moto;  
monte che da l'olive il nome prende,  
monte per sacra fama al mondo noto. (XI, 10)

There is here the suggestion of an ecclesiastical procession, which Milton would have regarded with horror, but - to compare great things with small - the larghi giri suggest that the hymn of the Crusaders may have been accompanied by motions not altogether unlike those which we find in Milton:

That day, as other solem dayes, they spent  
In song and dance about the sacred Hill,  
Mystical dance, which yonder starrie Spheare  
Of Planets and of fixt in all her Wheelles  
Resembles nearest. (V, 618)

In their devotion to their Lord, the Crusaders were fit models for angels. In their capacity as fighting men, they were, as we have seen, treated less sympathetically.

8.

There can be no doubt that Tasso's council in

Hell influenced Milton more than any of the events in Heaven. This council, like Milton's, is summoned by the sound of trumpets to consider what steps shall be taken to counteract the latest development of God's purpose on earth. In both poems the vast number of those who found their way into the "Plutonian hall" is insisted on, (4) and when they have taken their places the arch-fiend from his seat of state addresses them. But how much of this came from Tasso directly and how much by other channels is hard to say, since this portion of Tasso's work had been widely imitated in an age which found subjects for poetry in such things as the Gunpowder Plot and other hellish machinations of the Church of Rome. (5) As evidence of Milton's interest in this canto of Tasso we may refer to the echoes of the first and third stanzas already cited, (6) and it seems also almost certain that his comparison of Satan to Teneriff or Atlas was partly inspired by a recollection of

né tanto scoglio in mar, né rupe alpestra,  
né pur Calpe s'inalza, o 'l magno Atlante,  
ch' anzi lui non paresse un picciol colle. (IV, 6) (7)

---

(4) P.L. I, 752 ff.; G.L. IV, 4. Though the hall is not actually mentioned by Tasso, it is implied, and Milton's use of the adjective "Plutonian" (X, 444) is very significant

(5) Phineas Fletcher is particularly important in this connection.

(6) in P.L. I, 56, 314.

(7) Cf. P.L. IV, 985.

Apart from this, however, Pluto bears little likeness to Satan; one is a hateful monster emitting sulphurous vapours, the other not less than archangel ruined. Yet in spite of their physical dissimilarity, an attempt has been made to demonstrate a certain likeness in their sentiments. (8) Each reminds his hearers of their fall from Heaven and makes use of these memories of former wars to encourage them in the coming encounter. This would be more convincing if this same method had not been adopted by others, Phineas Fletcher for example. Indeed it is hard to see how else Satan could have proceeded. Certainly there is one phrase of Pluto's which Milton did remember:

Sia destin ciò ch' io voglio -

but this is not given to Satan.

Milton's Satan in the great consult is in fact more like one of Tasso's oriental monarchs. When Milton placed him

High on a Throne of Royal State, which far  
Outshon the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,  
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand  
Showrs on her Kings Barbaric Pearl & Gold, II, 1 ff.)

he almost certainly had in mind Tasso's King of Egypt:

---

(8) See E. Pommrich: Miltons Verhältnis zu Torquato Tasso, Halle a. S., 1902, p.38.

Egli in sublime soglio, a cui per cento  
 gradi eburnei s' ascende, altero siede;  
 e sotto l' ombra d' un gran ciel d' argento  
 porpora intesta d' or preme co 'l piede,  
 e, ricco di barbarico ornamento,  
 in abito regal splendor si vede. (XVII, 10)

The association of Lucifer with the Orient was traditional and Milton's use of oriental colouring was evidently

deliberate. (9) Thus Satan is elsewhere referred to as

the "great Sultan" (1) and the banners of his followers are

called "orient colours." (2) The second council is a "dark

Divan" (3) and Pandaemonium itself is compared to

a cover'd field, where Champions bold  
 Wont ride in arm'd, and at the Soldans chair  
 Defi'd the best of Panim chivalry  
 To mortal combat or carreer with Lance. (I, 763 ff.)

Such an incident happened in Tasso, but with the rôles of the Christians and Pagans reversed. Milton

probably thought, as others have done, (4) that it would

have been better if Tasso's Christians had had a little

(9) e.g. The History of the Damnable Life &c. of Doctor Faustus, chap. III: "Lucifer is thrust and fallen out of heaven, through his pride and high mind, yet he hath notwithstanding a legion of devils at his command, that we call the Oriental Princes;" and Chap. XII: "The which kingdoms are governed by five kings; that is, Lucifer in the Orient, Beelzebub in Septentrio, Belial in Meredie, Ascheroth in the Occident, and Phlegeton in the midst of them all."

(1) I, 348.

(2) I, 546.

(3) X, 457.

more of the spirit of his Saracens. Or it may be that in matters of mere fighting, Christian and Pagan was all one to Milton. The possibility that he had this event in mind when writing of what happened in Pandaemonium is interesting however as indicating another prototype of Satan - no paynim this time, but Godfrey himself. After Argantes' challenge has been received

Gli altri di mano e d' animo men forte  
taciti se ne stanno e vergognosi;  
né v' è chi cerchi in sí gran rischio onore;  
ché vinta la vergogna è dal timore. (VII, 59)

Seeing his followers' dismay, Godfrey speaks:

"Ben sarei di vita indegno,  
se la vita negassi or porre in forse,  
lasciando ch' un Pagan cosí vilmente  
calpestasse l' onor di nostra gente!

Sieda in pace il mio campo, e da sicura  
parte miri ozioso il mio periglio." (VII, 60-61)

The resemblance to the conclusion of the "great consult" is very close indeed.  
(5)

Satan's state may owe something to that of the King of Egypt; but that monarch was no model for Satan himself, although he might have served him as a capable second in command:

---

Note (4) continued from p.404.

Cf. R. Garnett: History of Italian Literature, p.247.

(5) P.L. II, 420 ff.

Poi che la grave età piú non sofferse  
de l' armi il peso, al fin la spada scinse;  
ma non depose il suo guerriero ingegno,  
e d' onor il desío vasto e di regno.

Anco guerreggia per ministri; ed have  
tanto vigor di mente e di parole,  
che de la monarchia la soma grave  
non sembra a gli anni suoi soverchia mole. (XVII, 7-8)

Such was Beelzebub "majestic though in ruin" whose Atlantean  
shoulders still could bear

The weight of mightiest Monarchies.

Others too of Satan's oriental princes have some  
likeness to the Saracens of Tasso. Moloch's sentiment,  
for example, is precisely that of Clorinda:

Faccia Ismeno incantando ogni sua prova,  
egli a cui le malie con d' arme invece;  
trattiamo il ferro pur noi cavalieri. (II, 51)

The contrast between Belial and Moloch is anticipated in the  
figures of Alethes and Argantes. Like Moloch, Argantes  
is quick to anger, and in battle he roars like him with  
"uncouth pain" (insolito orror). In the debate in the  
tenth canto, after the opening words of the King of  
Jerusalem, Argantes - in the manner of Moloch - is the

---

(6) P.L. II, 51 ff.

(7) G.L. II, 58, 61; P.L. II, 109 ff.; G.L. II, 59; P.L.  
II, 44 ff.

(9) G.L. VI, 44; P.L. VI, 362.

first to speak. Like him too, he wastes little time in considering the position and in weighing pro's and con's, but plumps for reliance on sheer fighting. It is his habit, as it is Moloch's, to speak "quasi uom che parli di non dubbia cosa."<sup>(1)</sup> Then after him comes one "in act more graceful and humane." Orcano, like Belial, would counsel ignoble ease, and he pursues Belial's own tactics.<sup>(2)</sup> He opens not abruptly but with diffidence. He can understand the spirit of the last speaker and wishes he could share his confidence. But he is very much afraid that such optimism is hardly justified in the present circumstances. He invites his hearers to put aside the prejudices arising from their own personal desires and to consider the facts dispassionately.

9.

But though Milton's machining powers derive some traits from Tasso, the story which he has to tell is of a very different kind. We have seen how he disparages the heroics of Tasso's Crusaders by ascribing such things to

---

(1) G.L. X, 39.

(2) X, 40.

his own devils, and there can be no doubt that his condemnation of the "long and tedious havoc" of chivalric epics with their

tilting Furniture, emblazon'd Shields,  
Impreses quaint, Caparisons and Steeds;  
Bases and tinsel Trappings, gorgeous Knights  
At Joust and Torneament. (IX, 34 ff.)

is directed in part against Tasso. We must not omit to remark, however, that he does at least refrain from any specific reference to Tasso such as he makes to Achilles and Turnus. Nor must we overlook the fact that, in spite of Milton's emphatic declaration of the superiority of his own subject, he was long choosing and began late. Had this superiority been as undoubted as he would have us believe, we should expect him to have perceived this without any such protracted deliberation. The only explanation we can find is that the glamour of Tasso's heroics had laid such hold on him that at first he could not reconcile himself to the simplicity of the Paradise Lost theme. True by his magnanimous treatment of the devils he found it possible to give an epic tone to the earlier books of his poem, but when he reached Book IX he seems to have been reminded of his earlier misgivings.

And these misgivings had been well founded. It is quite true that the theme of Paradise Lost had apparently certain advantages over such subjects as that of Comus.

"In the story of the Garden of Eden," wrote Sir Walter Raleigh, "the beauty was, for once, on the side of the morality; innocence and purity might be depicted, not, as in a fallen world, clad in complete steel, but at ease in their native haunts, surrounded by all the inexhaustible bounty of an unsubdued and uncorrupted Nature."<sup>(3)</sup> Yet, if these advantages were to be real, it would be necessary for the poet to be able to forget all his own experiences in this fallen world. The true wayfaring Christian has accustomed himself to the dust and heat. He must be sure that this is no Bower of Bliss which is set before him.

Tasso's Bower of Bliss is one of those things in poetry which one does not easily forget, and Milton remembers it in his manner of introducing us to his own Paradise. There is the same gradual opening-up of the scene as we approach, though apparently the only points of similarity in the two journeys are the steep savage hill at the commencement<sup>(4)</sup> and the "Carneval des Animaux."<sup>(5)</sup> But the gardens themselves, when we reach them, are found to be very different from each other. Milton's Paradise

---

(3) Milton, pp.93-94.

(4) P.L. IV, 172; G.L. XV, 46, 52.

(5) P.L. IV, 340; G.L. XV, 48, 50, 51.

no longer commands the admiration which such men as Tennyson and Schiller professed for it. Yet when one has remarked upon the advantages of a setting so remote from Milton's experience of this fallen world, it seems hardly pertinent to complain: "There are no villages and farms in Eden, no smell of hay, no sheaves of corn, no cottages, no roads, and no trace of that most human of all symbols, the thin blue scarf of smoke rising from a wayside encampment."<sup>(6)</sup> This is but a statement of part of the difficulty of Milton's task. Certainly these limitations did serve to restrict unduly the powers of one who, if not a poet of Nature, was an admirable interpreter of that more natural theme, the country. But still Paradise is very different from most ideal gardens. It is obviously the work of one who has issued forth to breathe among the pleasant villages and farms and who knows

The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine. (IX, 450)  
The air of Paradise is good to breathe, as Satan found; and he, we may be sure, would have been nauseated by the stifling atmosphere of Tasso's boudoir romanticism.

This sentimentality was not to Milton's taste. Despite all his professions, it is obvious that Tasso has

---

(6) Raleigh: Milton, pp.121-22.

a liking for the morally enervating luxuriance of the Bower of Bliss and that he, like his heroes - and his readers too - is more readily responsive to the power of Armida than to that of Godfrey. Milton will have none of this pleasant dallying with forbidden things, and he soon reduces this insidious feminine element to its proper proportions. Tasso's meretricious

L'uno di servitú, l'altra d' impero  
si gloria, ella in se stessa, ed egli in lei. (XVI, 21)

is reformed altogether and resolutely squared with the true scheme of things:

For contemplation hee and valour formd,  
For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,  
Hee for God only, shee for God in him:  
His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd  
Absolute rule; .....  
Shee as a vail down to the slender waste  
Her unadorned golden tresses wore  
Disshelv'd, .....  
..... which impli'd  
Subjection. (IV, 297 ff.)

The same impatience with Tasso's dangerous trifling is seen in Milton's treatment of the phrase  
(7)

Sia destin ciò ch' io voglio.

Not even his devils are allowed to indulge in parody of Him whose will is truly Fate. For the purposes of Paradise Lost, whether He be considered as the wielder of destiny or as the

---

(7) G.L. IV, 17; P.L. VII, 173.

sole Being to whom man's homage is due, God's position must always be made perfectly clear.

10.

At the time of his return from Italy it had been Milton's wish to become the English Tasso. Obviously, however, the general structure of Paradise Lost was not greatly influenced by the Gerusalemme.<sup>(8)</sup> The days of Il Penseroso were long past and Milton was perhaps less impressed by enchanted rings and shields, flying horses and what not,<sup>(9)</sup> and we are not surprised to find none of these things in Paradise Lost. Since it was impossible to lay the pattern of a Christian hero in any king or knight, the ideal epic could not be constructed in the manner of the Gerusalemme. The only help which Tasso could afford in this way was in his management of such episodes as the battle scenes, the council in hell and

---

(8) Solerti: Vita di Torquato Tasso, 1895, p.720, suggests that Milton was indebted to Tasso's Sette Giornate, but Pommrich op. cit., pp.26, 27 considers that any points of resemblance may be accounted for by reference to the Bible and to Du Bartas.

(9) "Parlo di quelli anelli, di quelli scudi incantati, di que' corsieri volanti &c." Arte Poetica I (Opere XII, 200. Cf. also XII, 41). See Il Penseroso, 113-14.

(1)  
the sending out of the angelic messengers. But though Tasso did not give Milton a model for his epic, he perhaps did a greater service in providing some of the material which helped Milton to form an idea of his own. The aspiration of Tasso's critical works goes far beyond his actual achievement in the Gerusalemme Liberata. It required a genius bolder than his own to follow up his suggestions and bring them to their ultimate realisation.

Milton could appreciate Tasso's claim that the epic poet should be allowed to think and speak of high matters in his own way. (2) But for him this was not merely a literary convention, "siccome colui che finge d'esser rapito dal furor divino sopra se medesimo." (3) He was not merely playing at seership. Therefore he could hardly agree that the subjects of poetry should be drawn from true religion but must not be "di tanta autorità che siano inalterabili," (4) nor that the poet should leave alone

---

(1) Cantos IV, IX and XI were known both in Italian and in Fairfax's translation. This might suggest an interest in those cantos which could not always wait until a reader who understood Italian was at hand. Hanford, however, (Chronology &c., p.282) finds evidence for "four or five persons who could read to him in Italian."

(2) Arte Poetica III, Opere XII, 236.

(3) Poema Eroico IV, Opere XII, 140-41.

(4) Arte Poetica I, Opere XII, 204.

questions of natural philosophy and theology and confine himself to matters more suited to the theatre or the courts of princes. It was not to be expected that Milton should follow Tasso in his ingenious endeavour to satisfy at once the critics, the princes, the general public, the inquisition and his own poetic conscience and desire for fame. Milton was all conscience. When he claimed divine inspiration, who should set bounds to his "licenza del fingere", who tell him what was "inalterabile" and what things were "troppo sottili" for him? But though Milton could not agree with Tasso, it is important that he should have read a critic whose scheme of poetics caused such questions to be raised.

In other ways too Tasso's criticism was helpful. His remarks on the magnitude and unity of an epic poem, for example, are more sensible than those of some other Renaissance critics. <sup>(5)</sup> And Milton, who admired Spenser and Ariosto, would pay more heed to one who had so much in common with the romantic poets and whose method of approach was different from that of the common rout of unity-mongers. Again, probably no other critic of the time laid such stress as Tasso on the choice of subject.

To Tasso the epic is an essentially high and

---

(5) Arte Poetica II, Poema Eroico III.

serious form of poetry. Though he regards the marvellous as essential, he makes it clear that it must not be the light-hearted supernatural of such as Ariosto. Humour must not be found in the epic nor such immorality as is found in Ariosto. All must be great and noble. He insists on "la grandezza e nobilit  degli avvenimenti." And the style and treatment must be answerable thereto. The poet will introduce low or common things only with the greatest caution: "alle mediocri aggiunga altezza, alle oscure notizia e splendore, alle semplici artificio, alle vere ornamento, alle false autorit ." If he brings in such people as shepherds he must not be tempted by their simplicity to neglect the grandeur which belongs to his poem: "dee aver riguardo non solo al decoro delle persone, ma al decoro del poema, e mostrarli come si mostrano nei palazzi reali e nelle solennit  e nelle pompe." Thus Tasso has a great fondness for figures of speech which magnify, hyperbole and the like. Metaphors must be chosen so as to add to the grandeur of the thing presented. Tasso realises fully the dangers of the familiar style: "Sar  sublime l'elocuzione, se le parole saranno non comuni, ma peregrine, e dall' uso popolare"

---

(6) Arte Poetica III, Opere XII, 237.

(7) Poema Eroico IV, Opere XII, 125.

lontano ... Nasce il sublime, e il peregrino nell'  
elocuzione dalle parole straniere, dalle traslate, e da  
tutte quelle che proprie non saranno." (8) He affects the  
(9) period and likes to commence in an oblique case. He  
believes that drawing out the sense from verse to verse is  
(1) productive of magnificence and sublimity, and in this  
(2) connection cites a sonnet of Casa. How far Milton  
consciously followed these principles of Tasso we do not  
know, but consciously or not few poets have applied them  
more consistently.

---

(8) Arte Poetica III, Opere XII, 237-38.

(9) Poema Eroico V, Opere XII, 150.

(1) Ibid., 145.

(2) Which perhaps owes its celebrity to this citation. See Donadoni, op. cit. I, 180. On Casa's influence on Milton's sonnets see Smart's edition, pp.30 ff. See also Smart's remarks (pp.27-28) on the relation of Milton's sonnets and his blank verse.

## CHAPTER IV.

---

### VIRGIL.

"O degli altri poeti onore e lume."  
Dante.

#### 1.

It is not surprising that in his earliest works Milton shows comparatively few signs of the study of Virgil. Virgil is above all things a sage and serious poet, a singer of the still sad music of humanity, one who may be found not peculiarly attractive to ardent youth. There are few recollections of Virgil in any of the English poems before the Horton period, and in the earlier Latin poems the references to Virgil are few indeed as compared with the numerous imitations and reminiscences of Ovid. Though few in number, however, they may not be entirely unworthy of remark.

The first of these passages occurs in the first Latin elegy, which was written at a time when the youthful spirit of revolt had received a sudden impetus. Here Milton admits the greatness of Virgil's work, but he is

obviously not much attracted by it. He suggests indeed that Virgil is fortunate in being allowed to enjoy his present position next to Homer. Adverse circumstances alone prevented Ovid from securing at least this second station on Parnassus, if not the first. Milton shows some knowledge of Virgil in casual reminiscences in the other poems of this time. There is, for example, a passing reference in the Alcaics on the death of Dr. Gostlin,<sup>(1)</sup> where Virgil's Iapis figures in the muster-roll of the physicians of antiquity. The conventional epithet "Cydonian" applied to the archer in Elegy VII is also perhaps Virgilian in origin.<sup>(2)</sup> Probably the only one of these poems which attempts to reproduce anything of Virgil's poetic manner is In Quintum Novembris. This differs from the others in that it alone is an experiment in epic narration. Some Virgilian imitation therefore is here to be expected, and traces thereof have been found in the address of the Pope to Phonos and Prodotes and in the description of Fama;<sup>(3)</sup> but even in this poem there is more of Ovid.

---

(1) In Obitum Procancellarii Medici, 29; Aeneid XII, 391.

(2) Elegy VII, 37; Aeneid XII, 856 ff.

(3) In Quint. Nov. 157 ff., 172 ff. The ambiguas voces in 212, and the reference to Britain which  
prudens natura negavit  
Indignam penitus nostro conjungere mundo  
 may also be Virgilian.

More significant than this, perhaps, is the single line in the fourth Elegy:

Cornea pulvereum dum verberat ungula campum - (4)

an imitation of one of Virgil's most famous lines which shows that Milton could appreciate one at least of Virgil's literary devices. It is not surprising to find, therefore, in the year after this elegy was written, that Milton recognises the virtues of Virgil as a model of Latin style. (5) Another year later and we can almost presume to foresee an admiration based on more vital grounds. For now Milton definitely expresses his dissatisfaction with mere elegiac poetry, and assigns to Ovid a very lowly position compared with that of the poet

qui bella refert, & adulto sub Jove caelum,  
Heroasque pios, semideosque duces,  
Et nunc sancta canit superum consulta deorum,  
Nunc latrata fero regna profunda cane. (6)

2.

A remarkable feature of these earliest works of Milton is the absence of pastoralism. This is the more

---

(4) Elegy IV, 119; Aeneid VIII, 596.

(5) Letter to Gill, May, 1628.

(6) Elegy VI, 55-58.

remarkable because of his early acquaintance with Spenser and the Spenserians. The sudden efflorescence of pastoralism in the Horton period is therefore noteworthy, and not the less so because it would seem to be derived from a source other than Spenser. That Milton professed a great admiration for Virgil's Eclogues at this period is well known. It was from the Eclogues that he chose the mottoes for his first two published volumes of poetry. This alone would indicate that they had now become a favourite work. Nor are traces of their influence hard to find. They are least obvious, perhaps, in L'Allegro, Il Penseroso and Arcades, but even here they are not entirely lacking. The names, Corydon, Thyrsis, Phyllis and Thestylis, for example, are not exclusively Virgilian, but it is worth noting that they are all to be found in Virgil. The smoking cottage chimney and the mess of herbs prepared by Phyllis for the reapers also are Virgilian rather than Spenserian. (7) It would appear moreover that Milton's authority for the association of the nymphs and shepherds in dance was Virgil's fifth eclogue. (8)

Comus has much more to show than any of these

---

(7) L'Allegro, 81-86. Cf. Ecl. I, 82 and II, 10-11.

(8) Arcades, 1, 96. Cf. Ecl. V, 58 ff. and Osgood: Classical Mythology of Milton's Poems, p.65.

works and indeed may be regarded as a landmark in the history of Milton's study of Virgil. Here again we find a pastoral setting together with a sufficient number of Virgilian reminiscences to indicate one at least of its sources. The most striking of these are to be found in the line,

To meditate my rural minstrelsie,<sup>(9)</sup>  
and in the use of the name Meliboeus.<sup>(1)</sup> This, however, is not all. The effects of Milton's extensive reading during this period are now becoming apparent, and here, for the first time, we have evidence of Milton's acquaintance with all three of Virgil's works. The reminiscences of the phraseology of the Georgics<sup>(2)</sup> are the more striking in that they were less expected. The chief debt, however, is to the Aeneid, and this debt is a very real one. There can be little doubt that Milton had studied the sixth, seventh and eighth books rather carefully not long before Comus was written. When, for example, we find him celebrating

---

(9) 547. Cf. Ecl. I, 2.

(1) 822. Cf. Osgood, p.54. Cf. also 291-292 with Ecl. II, 66.

(2) 872 (Cf. Georg. IV, 387) and 235 (Cf. Georg. IV, 513 ff.)

pauci, quos aequus amavit  
Iuppiter aut ardens evexit ad aethera virtus (3)

almost in the language of Virgil himself, and echoing such significant phrases as "the broad fields of the sky,"<sup>(4)</sup> we may suspect that the sixth Aeneid had done something towards revealing to him

How charming is divine Philosophy.

Milton was well acquainted with the Odyssey, yet there are unmistakable Virgilian echoes in his references to Circe.<sup>(5)</sup> Likewise his allusion to Scylla's "barking waves"<sup>(6)</sup> suggests that it was Virgil who had most recently reminded him of that lady. In the light of these passages it would seem probable that the reference to Cacus is due to Virgil<sup>(7)</sup> rather than to Ovid, and that the most probable source of the description of Sabrina's setting her

printless feet  
O're the Cowslips Velvet head,  
That bends not as I tread

is Virgil's similar description of Camilla.<sup>(8)</sup> It would be

---

(3) Aeneid VI, 129 f. Cf. Comus 12, 41, 78.

(4) Comus 979. Cf. aeris in campis latis, Aen. VI, 887.

(5) Comus 51 (Cf. Aen. VII, 11-17) and 534 (Cf. Aen. VII, 15-20).

(6) 258. Cf. latrantibus undis, Aen. VII, 588.

(7) 655. Cf. Aen. VIII, 252 ff., Fasti I, 569 ff.

(8) 897 ff. Cf. Aen. VII, 808 ff.

too much perhaps to describe these books of the Aeneid as one of the "sources" of Comus. Nevertheless the passages we have referred to are not merely reminiscences. They are not scattered allusions drawn from all parts of the Aeneid; and they are borrowings of some importance, considerable additions to the poem, not casual references which could be omitted without serious loss.

3.

The deliberate use of Virgilian material in Comus should prepare us for the more extensive borrowings to be found in Lycidas. The name, Lycidas, may be taken from Theocritus, although Virgil also uses it. There are several other details in the poem which might with equal probability be ascribed to a Greek as well as to a Virgilian source. There is little, however, to indicate that Milton had devoted much attention to the Greek pastoral poets at this period, whereas his study of the Eclogues is beyond question. And in one point at least the debt to Virgil is demonstrable. Milton's Damoetas is not the young shepherd of Theocritus<sup>(9)</sup> but the deceased master of the

---

(9) Lycidas, 36. Theocritus: Idyl.VI. Cf. Virgil: Ecl.III

shepherd poet as in Virgil. (1) The whole poem is obviously modelled on the tenth eclogue, and it is to that source possibly, rather than to Theocritus, that the invocation of the Nymphs must be traced. (2)

Aesthetically this relationship between Lycidas and "the latest, the loveliest and perhaps the most Virgilian of all" the eclogues (3) is a matter of some importance. Our present interest, however, is not aesthetic. Lycidas, for us, matters less for its actual than for its potential significance. In this connection, it is more important to remark on its reminiscences of the sixth eclogue. The fauns in that eclogue are probably the source of Milton's rough satyrs. (4) From the same poem also Milton derived the phrase: "and build the lofty rhyme." The idiom is, of course, common enough in Latin poetry. Yet, when Milton speaks of Lycidas's building the lofty rhyme, there can be little doubt that he is thinking of Virgil who likewise refers to other poets building the lofty themes of epic, while he himself must

---

(1) Ecl. II, 37.

(2) Lycidas 50-55. Cf. Ecl. X, 9; Idyl I, 66. Cf. also Lycidas 10 with Ecl. X, 3.

(3) J. W. Mackail: Virgil (Our Debt to Greece and Rome), p.53.

(4) Lycidas 34; Ecl. VI, 27. Cf. Osgood, p.87.

be content to meditate the thankless muse on the pastoral  
reed - having been admonished thereto by Phoebus himself. (5)

Milton had evidently studied this confession of Virgil's early poetic aspirations with considerable attention. His own epic intentions had already begun to take shape. Can it be that he was deliberately following the methods of his great predecessor? Is it by reason of Virgil's precept and example that we find the author of the Vacation Exercise and the Nativity Ode exercising his powers as he had never exercised them before on a mere pastoral theme? If the sixth eclogue had this power, it was largely because it contained ample evidence that its author was in complete sympathy with Milton's own aspirations. Not only is there the confession of Virgil's own desire to sing of kings and battles, the usual theme of epic poetry, but there is also the attempt to set forth a cosmogony and a history of the earliest ages.

That Milton's interest in Virgil did not diminish during the next few years is testified by his choice of mottoes for Comus and the Poems of 1645. It is not recorded that he ever admitted to anyone that Virgil was his original. Nevertheless it is noteworthy that in the most carefully

---

(5) Ecl. VI, 3-4, 7; Lycidas ll, 77.

elaborated poem he had yet written - the high water mark of English poetry, as some will have it - he should be so vitally influenced by Virgil. It is perhaps even more significant that in the early part of the period of poetic silence which immediately followed, the one poet who could say for him what he could not, or would not, say for himself was Virgil.

The last relic of this period of Virgilian pastoralism is to be seen in the Epitaphium Damonis. The fact that this poem is written in Latin must not be taken as indicating that, through his admiration of Virgil, Milton had gone back upon the intentions expressed in the Vacation Exercise. More probably, Latin was used in order that the poem might be intelligible to the relatives of Diodati.<sup>(6)</sup> Nevertheless there is a sort of fitness in the fact that this period should culminate in a pastoral written in Virgil's own language. And this in spite of the fact that the Epitaphium is less Virgilian than Lycidas. It may be that, as Professor Rands suggests,<sup>(7)</sup> Milton shrank from attempting the Virgilian strain in Latin. But there was probably another reason. The Alexandrians, after all,

---

(6) e.g. Giovanni Diodati, the theologian, whom Milton had met at Geneva.

(7) Milton in Rustication, (Studies in Philology XIX, April, 1922), pp.124 n.26, 126.

were Alexandrian; and Virgil was not. Virgil supplied Milton not with a convenient form for occasional poetry but, like Ovid before him, with a means of uttering his own aspirations. It is because people have expected Lycidas to be a mere pastoral elegy that they have felt that there was something wrong with it. The Epitaphium, written more in the manner of Bion and Moschus, is in this respect more satisfactory. Yet now that Milton has discovered the true model of the pastoral, he straightway bids that form farewell. It was the Virgilianism of the Eclogues, not their pastoralism, which mattered to him. As he bids farewell to the fistula, he makes it clear that he does not abandon Virgil but that he intends to follow him into the other realm of epic and sing of the Trojan settlement in Britain.

4.

The literary importance of the years that followed is to be found, not in actual poetic achievement, but in the preparation for Paradise Lost. Circumstances seem to have combined to keep Milton from poetic exercises during this period. Yet his long abstention was not

altogether involuntary. From Virgil himself he could have learned that long years of unremitting effort were required for the elaboration of a great poem. At any rate, we find him already covenanting with his readers for some years' grace at the very beginning of the period, when he could have had no idea how long it was to last. No doubt his official connection with the government served to prolong the period beyond his intentions, but it is well to note that, from the outset, he was prepared for a long period of silence before achieving anything noteworthy. Yet his great purpose was still borne in mind. It is from the prose works of this period that we first learn that this projected work is likely to take the form of an epic, and that Virgil and Virgil's model, Homer, are to be two of its patterns. Later on, in the Second Defence, we find some remarks on the conduct of epic poetry, drawn from Homeric and Virgilian example rather than from the "brief model" of Job. In the tractate Of Education epic poetry is one of the highest branches of study, but the

---

(8) Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 481.

(9) Ibid., 478.

(1) P.W. I, 299.

(2) P.W. III, 473-74, 471.

"rural part of Virgil" is to be undertaken at an earlier stage.

The rural part of Virgil would include both the Eclogues and the Georgics. The severely practical intention of Milton's educational schemes and the fact that he is known to have taught his pupils "the four grand authors De Re Rustica, Cato, Varro, Columella and Palladius"<sup>(3)</sup> makes it extremely likely that he had the Georgics especially in mind. If this is so, we may perhaps see therein further evidence of Virgilian influence in the scheme of life which Milton at this time chose for himself. For Virgil also, after singing of an unreal, conventionally poetic present, and before passing on to sing of the heroic past, devoted himself to the practical and political concerns of his own time. The Georgics are the work of a good citizen. Virgil's object was not only to produce fine poetry, but to use his literary talents to help on the practical policy of Augustus. The resemblance between his position and Milton's, however, is not very striking, and the point is perhaps not worthy of mention. Yet one cannot help feeling a little malicious satisfaction in supposing that it is just possible that the most scholarly

---

(3) Edward Philips: Life of Milton reprinted in Lockwood's edition Of Education, etc., p.lxv.

and cultured of classical poets should have been Milton's example in his decision to quit a life of learned seclusion and, as scholarly critics will have it, to prostitute his genius to the service of certain political tyrants whom he regarded as the saviours of society. Apart from these fancies, however, there is surely some importance in Milton's study of the most finished specimen of Virgil's artistry. The Georgics had not yet acquired the popularity which they enjoyed in the eighteenth century, but the greatest lord of language since Virgil had naturally some appreciation of their art.<sup>(4)</sup>

The most important indication of Milton's study of Virgil during this period is to be found in Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio where some thirty passages are quoted. The other references to Virgil in the prose works are not important. Such things as the allusion to the story of Deiphobus or the "Trojan horse" only serve to show familiarity with the story of the Aeneid.<sup>(5)</sup> The passages quoted in the Defence of the People of England<sup>(6)</sup>

---

(4) Cf. also his remarks on the structure of the Georgics in Artis Logicae &c., P.W. (ed. Symmons) VI, 348.

(5) Apology for Smectymnuus, P.W. (Bohn) III, 123, 125. Cf. also Defence, P.W. I, 185, 189.

(6) Defence, P.W. I, 36-37. Georgics IV, 211, 154.

are more interesting, because they show that Milton would have made use of Virgil, even in his prose works, if Virgil had been able to help him. (7) But Virgil was a very unsatisfactory authority to rely upon in these matters, as Milton himself points out; (8) and, in the disputatious circumstances in which Milton found himself, Virgil had less to offer than the Attic tragedians. (9)

It was Sellar's complaint that "the faith of Virgil is less noble than that of Aeschylus and Sophocles. It is more of a passive yielding to the longing of the human heart and to the impulses of an aesthetic emotion, than that union of natural piety with insight into the mystery of life which no great poets, Pagan and Christian (unless it may be Dante), exhibit in equal measure with the two great Athenian dramatists." (1) "The oratory of the Aeneid," he says again, "shows nothing of the speculative

---

(7) The Artis Logicae shows how ready he was to use Virgil where it was possible to do so.

(8) Defence, P.W. I, 185.

(9) See e.g. Reason of Ch. Gov., P.W. II, 474; Smectymnuus, III, 133; Areopagitica, II, 57; Eikonoklastes, I, 488; Tenure of Kings, II, 14; Defence, I, 77, 126-27, 140; Second Defence, I, 240. Note that the mottoes to Areopagitica (II, 48) and Tetrachordon (III, 315) are from Euripides. Cf. Comus and the Poems of 1645.

(1) Virgil (3rd Edn.) Oxford, 1897, p.273.

power - of the application of great ideas to life - which gives the profoundest value not only to many speeches of Sophocles, but also to some of those in the Iliad." On the other hand, he admits that "it is not disfigured by the forensic special pleading and word-fencing, which is an occasional flaw in the dramatic art of Sophocles and a pervading mannerism in that of the younger poet (i.e. Euripides)."<sup>(2)</sup> No reader of Paradise Lost can fail to perceive that it, too, is somewhat disfigured by special pleading and word-fencing, and even its sincerest admirers cannot but feel that we could have done without some of its "application of great ideas to life." We cannot doubt that, in some respects, the Attic dramatists were dangerous models for a man of Milton's temperament, and that he who aspired to write the great epic of Christendom had still something to learn from Virgil. What he had learned from Virgil is to be seen in Paradise Lost.

5.

It is impossible to read far in Paradise Lost

---

(2) Ibid., pp.409-10. Notice Milton's own grouping of "Attic tragedies of stateliest and most regal argument" with "famous political orations" and the collocation of Demosthenes or Cicero, Euripides or Sophocles. Of Education, P.W. III, 473.

without being reminded of Virgil. Frequently we meet  
echoes of Virgilian phrases such as "liquid fire,"<sup>(3)</sup>  
"battle proud,"<sup>(4)</sup> "ignoble ease,"<sup>(5)</sup> "horrent arms."<sup>(6)</sup>

At one time Adam, like young Henry Esmond, remembers his  
O dea certa when he addresses his honoured visitor:

Native of Heav'n, for other place <sup>(7)</sup>  
None can then Heav'n such glorious shape contain. (V,361)

Sometimes it may be a recollection of the Eclogues -

With other echo late I taught your Shades  
To answer, and resound farr other Song, (X, 861) (8)

of the apparition of Hector,<sup>(9)</sup> of the unhappy end of Dido,<sup>(1)</sup>  
or of the imperial destiny of Rome. <sup>(2)</sup> Such reminiscences

---

(3) P.L. I, 229, Ecl. VI, 33.

(4) P.L. I, 43, Aen. VIII, 118.

(5) P.L. II, 227, Georg. IV, 564.

(6) P.L. II, 513, Aen. I, 1 d-e. Cf. also P.L. III, 359, Georg. III, 522; P.L. III, 493, Aen. VI, 75; P.L. IV, 31, Aen. I, 305, 370; P.L. IV, 723, Aen. VI, 725; P.L. VI, 371, Aen. XI, 376.

(7) Cf. Aen. I, 327. Quoted by Milton in Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio, P.W. (ed. Symmons) VI, 231.

(8) Ecl. I, 4.

(9) P.L. I, 84, Aen. II, 274.

(1) P.L. X, 1007, Aen. IV, 499, 643.

(2) P.L. XII, 370, Aen. I, 287, VI, 781. The second passage is quoted in Artis Logicae &c. (ed. Symmons) VI, 244.

(3)

far outnumber those drawn from Ovid or Tasso.

The influence which this study of Virgil exercised on the form of Paradise Lost has sometimes been exaggerated. It is ridiculous, for example, to describe Milton's poem as a "tertiary formation" bearing the same relation to the Latin epics as these bear to Homer. There is more critical perception in Macaulay's dictum that "the plan of Paradise Lost is in all essentials that of the Odyssey." But the question is not, as some critics have imagined, solely that of deciding how much is due to Virgil and how much to Homer. Hallam rightly insists that the Greek tragedians have an  
(4)  
equal right to be considered. Nevertheless the debt to

---

(3) See also P.L. I, 43, Aen. VI, 612; P.L. I, 194, Aen. II, 207, VI, 596; P.L. I, 328, Aen. I, 44; P.L. I, 670, Aen. III, 575; P.L. II, 4, Aen. II, 504; P.L. II, 430, Ecl. IV, 7; P.L. II, 634, Aen. V, 216; P.L. II, 786, Aen. XII, 919; P.L. II, 788, Aen. II, 53; P.L. II, 882, Georg. IV, 471; P.L. II, 921, VI, 310, X, 306, Georg. IV, 176; P.L. III, 29, Georg. II, 475; P.L. III, 569, Aen. VI, 638; P.L. IV, 140, Aen. I, 164; P.L. V, 56, Aen. I, 403; P.L. V, 861, Aen. X, 773; P.L. VI, 111, Aen. II, 407; P.L. VI, 635, Aen. I, 150; P.L. VI, 788, Aen. I, 11; P.L. VII, 433, Aen. VII, 33; P.L. VII, 631, Georg. II, 458; P.L. VIII, 637, Aen. XII, 59; P.L. IX, 888, Aen. II, 120, XII, 951; P.L. X, 68, Aen. I, 76; P.L. X, 417, Georg. II, 161; P.L. X, 1089, Aen. XI, 191; P.L. XI, 241, Aen. V, 250, Georg. II, 506; P.L. XI, 374, Aen. V, 710; P.L. XI, 447, Aen. X, 908; P.L. XII, 140, Aen. VI, 776; P.L. XII, 615, Ecl. III, 52.

(4) Introduction to the Literature of Europe, London, 1872, vol. IV, p.237. Paradise Lost, says another writer, "is conceived not so much in the spirit of the other great world epics - those of Homer, Dante, and Tasso - as in

the classical epics is very great, and it would appear that  
Milton owed far more to Virgil than to Homer. (5)

The frame of mind in which the poem is written, the pervading consciousness of a great purpose, is Virgilian rather than Homeric. So too is the introduction of the feminine interest. In the Dido episode Virgil also approaches nearer to the tragedians than to Homer; and in introducing this un-Homeric element into his epic, he raised up for himself a difficulty which afterwards beset Milton. Virgil tries hard to gain our sympathy for his hero, and to make us realise that Aeneas did well in renouncing the claims of love for those of duty. But all will not do; pius Aeneas has become a by-word. In Adam also we find the opposition between the claims of

---

Note (4) continued from p.434.

that of the ancient classical drama, with whose spirit he was impregnated, and whose dignity and stern, swift action appealed with peculiar force to the mingled traits of a character at once that of the scholar and of the Puritan." Sampson: Studies in Milton, London, 1914, p.77.

(5) Cf. F. Buff: Miltons Paradise Lost in seinem Verhältnisse zur Aeneide, Ilias und Odyssee, Hof a. S., 1904, p.12. In his bold creativeness, however, Milton resembles Homer rather than the more thoughtful Virgil.

(6)

love and those of a more sacred purpose. Milton perhaps realised that Virgil's treatment had not been entirely successful. He himself lays greater stress on the heinous nature of any lapse from duty, and sees to it that Adam is fully and ostentatiously warned betimes. His Eve, moreover, is not, like Dido, merely a passive sufferer but an active agent. Also the ruin attendant on the hero's preference of love to the dictates of his conscience is not fondly deemed but actually accomplished. We can realise to the full the baneful effects of Eve's influence; whereas those of Dido's have to be taken on trust, and, truth to tell, do not impress us very forcibly. Yet in the end Milton fails, just as Virgil had failed before him, to secure any great measure of sympathy for his hero.

(7)

It has been remarked that Milton apparently preferred

---

(6) Those who have insisted that the conflict between reason and passion in Paradise Lost must have an autobiographical basis have not sufficiently studied Convivio IV, ch. xxvi, where the same interpretation is applied by Dante to the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Books of the Aeneid. Autobiographical it may be: it was, however, also at the very centre of the epic tradition which culminated in Milton.

(7) Milton's especial interest in Book IV is testified by Artis Logicae &c., where the description of Dido going a-hunting, her reproach to Aeneas and the description of Fama are analysed more fully than those from any other book. The last passage is treated very elaborately in a page and half of text. (ed. Symmons, VI, pp.225, 351, 282-83). Cf. also the reminiscence in P.L. X, 1007.

the First and Sixth Books of the Aeneid to any of the others,  
"though not infrequent use is made of the Third, Fourth and  
Fifth."<sup>(8)</sup> This is what might have been expected of one

Not sedulous by Nature to indite  
Warrs, hitherto the onely Argument  
Heroic deem'd,

since it is precisely in the Second and in the last six books  
of the Aeneid that war plays so great a part.<sup>(9)</sup>

And it is not only in this negative sense that  
his preference for the first, and least warlike, part of the  
Aeneid is significant.<sup>(1)</sup> It is indeed possible to trace  
some analogy in structure between these first six books and  
Paradise Lost. In both we have a great war, followed by an  
incident between a man and a woman in which the gods are  
vitally interested, and one which has grave consequences  
for the hero's posterity. In both, the war is thrown into

---

(8) Osgood, p. xlii.

(9) Note also that the slighting reference to the Aeneid  
(P.L. IX, 16) is to the latter part of the poem. In the  
Second Defence (Bohn, I, 299) it is this part that Milton  
regards as a typical epic - a point of some importance in  
considering the form of Paradise Lost.

(1) Of the twenty-three quotations from the Aeneid in  
Artis Logicae, all but three are from the first six books.  
Of these three, two (Symmons VI, 206, 351) are references  
to IX, 427 Me, me, adsum, etc. - the better fortitude of  
heroic martyrdom; the other, equally significantly, to  
XI, 362, nulla salus bello (Symmons VI, 237).

the background and only related incidentally in the course of the other action. There is also a certain similarity in the way in which this main action is introduced. After the exordium with its summary of the argument and its appeal to the muses, the person first introduced is the supernatural being who is destined to play the part of the villain. There is admittedly a great difference between the merely incidental tantaene animis caelestibus irae? of Virgil and the fundamental "Evil be thou my good" of Milton's Satan; (2) yet Virgil's handling of Juno's opposition to the will of Jove is vastly different from Homer's, and, by comparison, becomes almost a motive of Miltonic importance. (3) Juno has the devil's own determination: her hinc incepto desistere victam is in the very key of Satan's "What though the field be lost?" (4) To attain her ends she cares not what means she employs: she prefers a Hell she can bend to her will to a Heaven (5) where her power is limited.

---

(2) Cf. Lascelles Abercrombie: The Epic, p.82.

(3) Though Milton rightly insists that the bringing of Sin and Death into this world is a greater argument than Juno's ire. P.L. IX, 11 ff.

(4) Aeneid I, 37; P.L. I, 105.

(5) flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo (VII, 312). Cf. P.L. I, 263, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n."

It is Juno's mission throughout to oppose the will of the Supreme Ruler, and she does this by attempting to victimise the hero of the story. To accomplish this she makes the heroine her unwitting ally. Her enmity to Aeneas is not caused by Aeneas himself, but arises from a desire for revenge occasioned by a previous series of events for which Aeneas was in no way responsible. But he, apparently, is to gain freely by the grace of heaven all the benefits for which she had struggled in the past, so that in attacking him she is inspired by the same motive as in the former war. (6) Originally she had been moved to action by what she conceived to be an affront to her dignity, for Juno is very anxious to maintain her position as second in power to the Almighty. (7) At the outset we find her sorely vexed at the thought of any other deity possessing powers greater than her own. (8) Later she fears humiliation even at the hands of mere humanity. (9) And the result of all her efforts is that she enraged can see how all her malice serves but to bring forth infinite goodness on the part of the Almighty towards the objects of

---

(6) Aeneid I, 23.

(7) Aeneid I, 25 f.; I, 46-47.

(8) Aen. I, 39 ff. Cf. VII, 304.

(9) Aen. VII, 308-10.

her hatred.

In all these things she resembles Satan; and this likeness is increased when we find her seeking the alliance of the ruler of the forces of chaos and disorder. For the subjects of King Aeolus who, but for the restraint placed on them from on high,

maria ac terras caelumque profundum  
quippe ferant rapidi secum verrantque per auras (1)

have something in common with those governed by Chaos and his consort. Nay, we even find her seeking the aid of the infernal powers. Her minister Allecto bears some resemblance to Milton's Sin, or at least the effects of her arrival on earth are very similar. (2) If we feel such an association to be most pitiful in a ruined Archangel, it is surely past speaking of in the Queen of Heaven.

The use of epic machinery, both in Virgil and in Milton, is largely based on the Homeric model. Yet, as we have already suggested, Virgil's treatment differed somewhat from Homer's. This difference is particularly noticeable in the presentation of the supreme deity. In the Aeneid we are throughout more fully conscious of continuous divine control than we are in the Iliad. This greater and more serious

---

(1) Aen. I, 58-59.

(2) Aen. VII, 312, 324 ff.

insistence on the control of the superior powers is due to the graver and more philosophic attitude of mind in which the Aeneid was written, and it certainly influenced Milton's management of his divine agents. His Christian predecessor, Tasso, could not have afforded him this assistance, since the interventions of Tasso's machining persons are almost as occasional and inessential as Homer's. But the other consequences of this more abstract and philosophical motive are less commendable. Such motives may lead to a more worthy and dignified representation of the immortals than is to be found in the Olympian comedy of Homer. Epic poets, however, have to deal not with gods only but with men, and here the case is far otherwise. Here again, Milton's place is with Virgil, not with Homer. (3)

6.

Milton's methods of narration are, as we have seen, usually different from those of most other epic poets. Yet

---

(3) Fateor equidem, qui in studiis fere seclusus atque abditus est, multo promptius esse Deos alloqui quam homines, sive quod perpetuo fere domi est apud superos infrequens rerum humanarum et vere peregrinus, sive quod assidua rerum divinarum cogitatione mens quasi grandior facta in tantis corporis angustiis difficulter agitans se minus habilis sit ad expusitiones salutationum gesticulationes. Prolusio VII (ed. Symmons VI, pp.187-88).

there are passages in Paradise Lost which show a remarkable similarity to the narrative manner of Virgil. Compare, for example, the description of Satan's approach to Eden with the account of Aeneas's adventures after his encounter with Venus up to the time of his meeting with Dido. In both passages the same method is employed. As the traveller journeys on, he is keenly interested in all around him and marvels greatly at all he sees. Then, when his interest is raised to the highest pitch, he comes upon the object of his search, most wonderful of all,

forma pulcherrima Dido

or those

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall.

The details leading up to this crisis are also very similar. (4)

Aeneas sets out under divine guidance, and first climbs a hill whence he can survey the whole region. (5)

He is filled with envy by the things he sees. (6) After this general survey

the interest is narrowed down to the smaller plot of land where Dido herself is to be found. (7)

Lest anything should

---

(4) Aen.I,393 ff.; P.L.III,722 ff. In each case one of the interlocuters is disguised, but Milton reverses the rôles.

(5) Aen.I,418 ff.; P.L.III,742, IV,27 ff. Cf. IV,172.

(6) Aen.I,437; P.L.IV,358.

(7) Aen.I,441; P.L.IV,210.

be missing to complete the parallel, the pictures in Juno's temple awaken memories in the mind of Aeneas not unlike those expressed in Satan's great soliloquy. (8) And after the climax has been reached Aeneas, like Satan, at first plays the part of an unseen spectator. (9)

Another example may be drawn from this Fourth Book of Paradise Lost - the "scales" episode and the circumstances immediately preceding it. Milton here remembered the final encounter between Turnus and Aeneas, and followed Virgil's order of setting out rather closely. The preliminary description of the angelic squadron hemming Satan round, for example, was suggested by the tidings which Turnus received of the plight of Messapus and Atinas. (1) On the other side, the dilated Satan

Like Teneriff or Atlas unremov'd  
was drawn with an eye on Aeneas

quantus Athos aut quantus Eryx aut ipse coruscis  
cum fremit ilicibus quantus gaudetque nivali  
vertice se attollens pater Appenninus ad auras.

Then, as in Virgil, the Almighty hangs out his scales. After this Virgil's Juno had been constrained to acquiesce in Turnus's

---

(8) Aen. I, 459; P.L. IV, 32.

(9) Aen. I, 516; P.L. IV, 393.

(1) Aen. XII, 661 ff.; P.L. IV, 977 ff. See A.S. Ferguson in Modern Language Review, XV, 1920, p.168.

fate, but Satan, as an immortal and himself the Juno of the story, can read his own "lot". The episode concludes with an adaptation of Virgil's last lines:

The Fiend lookt up and knew  
His mounted scale aloft: nor more; but fled  
Murmuring, and with him fled the shades of night.

This episode is interesting in that it illustrates the extreme lengths to which Milton could go in his reaction from the epic of mere warfare. For the unsoldierly conduct of his angels there was, of course, some Biblical authority. Milton may have admired their docility, though we can hardly believe it. But certainly there seems to have been an inexplicable wrong-headedness in his setting forth their ineffectuality in a wonderful tableau which is deliberately intended to outdo the magnificent culmination of the martial second half of the Aeneid. (2)

7.

Milton's use of the phrase "Cerberean mouths" points to Ovid's rather than to Virgil's Scylla as the classical prototype of Sin. But in view of the objections (3)

---

(2) Jude, 9.

(3) Cerbereos rictus, Metam. XIV, 65; Aen. III, 424 ff.

raised by Addison and others we may be glad of such a precedent in the orthodox epic. Scylla, of course, has not Sin's allegorical significance; yet here too Virgil partly indicated the way with his Fama. This is generally admitted, though the commentators do not seem to have brought out fully the resemblance between the two figures. It is not merely that Fama is an allegorical personage who goes about in the world sowing trouble among men; the circumstances of her birth are also as precisely known as those of Sin's. Her birth, says Virgil, was a direct consequence of the rebellion of the giants against the Olympian deities and she sprang from one sole parent moved by anger and hatred of the gods above. This passage of Virgil was minutely analysed by Milton in his logical treatise.<sup>(4)</sup>

Virgil also may be the authority for introducing dogs in the train of an infernal goddess.<sup>(5)</sup> His goddess is not, like Sin, the portress of the infernal gate; yet her favour must be gained before Aeneas can obtain admission to the lower world. And round about the portal of this lower world dwell a host of abstract figures, including Death

---

(4) P.W. (Symmons) VI, 282.

(5) Aeneid VI, 257.

and mala mentis Gaudia - the lack of a comprehensive term in Latin is unfortunate, though Gaudia does look something like a feminine singular - and Discord. Discord, we remember, is the only one of Sin's offspring mentioned by name in Paradise Lost. But the others: Grief and avenging Cares; Sickness, Age and Fear; Hunger, Penury, War and Famine certainly came in the trail of Sin and Death. Conscience, Sickness, Fear, Famine, War and Labour are all specified in the earliest drafts of the poem. Their non-appearance in Paradise Lost, moreover, is readily explained by the Treatise of Christian Doctrine: "Under the head of death, in Scripture, all evils whatever, together with every thing which in its consequences tends to death, must be understood as comprehended; for mere bodily death, as it is called, did not follow the sin of Adam on the self-same day, as God had threatened."<sup>(6)</sup> Consequently Milton did not need to introduce all these attendant evils as separate personages, but was content to show their workings in Adam's vision. Artistically the concentration of all evils in two persons was a great advantage, particularly as Milton intended to use them not as lay figures but as actors playing a definite part in the story. It is perhaps as a result of this same process of

---

(6) P.W. (Bohn) IV, 263.

concentration that we find the loathsome pair invested with  
Gorgonian power, <sup>(7)</sup> that hell trembles at the approach of  
Death, <sup>(8)</sup> and Sin takes the form of the Scyllae bifformes <sup>(9)</sup>  
who are also lodged in the gates of Virgil's underworld.

Some other incidents which appear to owe something  
to Virgil may be more briefly indicated. Satan above the  
rest "in shape and gesture proudly eminent" bears some like-  
ness to Turnus:

Ipse inter primos praestanti corpore Turnus  
vertitur arma tenens et toto vertice supra est; (VII, 783)

and his protestation,

For me be witness all the Host of Heav'n,  
If counsels different, or danger shun'd  
By me, have lost our hopes, (I, 635)

is in the very manner of Aeneas:

Iliaci cineres et flamma extrema meorum,  
testor, in occasu vestro nec tela nec ullas  
vitavisse vices. (II, 431)

The Earth's signs of gratulation on the nuptials of Adam and  
Eve <sup>(1)</sup> owe something to the similar manifestations at the union  
of Dido and Aeneas. <sup>(2)</sup> Structurally, however, the closest

---

(7) P.L. X, 297; Aen. VI, 289.

(8) P.L. II, 676; Aen. VI, 256.

(9) Aen. VI, 286.

(1) P.L. VIII, 513.

(2) Aen. IV, 166.

parallel to this incident in Virgil is to be found in the convulsions which take place when Adam and Eve taste the forbidden fruit, <sup>(3)</sup> since this incident, like the union of Dido and Aeneas, marks the crisis of the story. The celestial messengers of Milton and Virgil alike are affected with misogyny. Raphael's lack of delicacy has been fitly reproved. But this is as nothing compared with the callow cynicism of Mercury whose

femina

varium et mutabile semper  
(IV, 569)

is uttered just at the very worst conceivable moment. Satan's passing through his followers unseen and then emerging as from a cloud may have been suggested by Aeneas's similar experience, <sup>(4)</sup> and the gate

With dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes (XII, 644) which Adam and Eve behold, when their ruin is accomplished and they are forced to leave their former home, recalls another of Aeneas's experiences in like circumstances:

apparent dirae facies inimicaque Troiae  
numina magna deum. (II, 622)

8.

But this similarity in general structure and even

---

(3) P.L. IX, 1000, 782.

(4) Aen. I, 411, 516, 579, 586; P.L. X, 441 ff.

the imitation of particular incidents are not matters of supreme importance. Shakespeare, for example, might have been content to owe as great a debt to authors of very small account. From Virgil there were other things to be learned.

O degli altri poeti onore e lume,  
Vagliami il lungo studio e il grande amore,  
Che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.  
Tu se' lo mio maestro e il mio autore:  
Tu se' solo colui, da cui io tolsi  
Lo bello stile che m'ha fatto onore.

In the general features of his epic composition Milton presents many points of resemblance to Virgil. His speeches, for example, though long, have always a certain concentration and dramatic appropriateness which contrasts strongly with the artless garrulity of some of Homer's. There appears to be no equivalent in Homer for the Miltonic and Virgilian formula of address "To whom in brief ...  
(5)  
replied," nor for Milton's concluding phrase "He added  
(6)  
not." Of course none of the speeches in Paradise Lost could be modelled definitely on Virgil, though Raphael opens his narrative of the wars in Heaven much in the same  
(7)  
way as Aeneas begins the story of the fall of Troy. So

---

(5) P.L. VI, 171. Cf. Tum breviter ... profatur (I, 561)  
quae contra breviter fata est (VI, 398)

(6) P.L. X, 909. See Buff ut supra, pp.30-31.

(7) P.L. V, 563; Aen. II, 3.

So also when Satan taunts Abdiel with the suggestion of oriental effeminacy, Milton probably remembered the similar gibe of Remulus; and when Abdiel in reply repeats the words which Satan had used in derision, <sup>(8)</sup> he is adopting <sup>(9)</sup> the methods of Ascanius. In more formal or concerted utterances, such as the hymn of the angel choir, it was possible to work more closely to a set original, and thus this hymn bears a marked resemblance to Virgil's hymn to <sup>(1)</sup> Hercules.

From Virgil, Milton learnt something of the use of repetition.

I fled, and cry'd out Death;  
Hell trembl'd at the hideous Name, and sigh'd  
From all her Caves, and back resounded Death. (II, 787)

There is something like this in that sixth eclogue which so obviously impressed Milton at the time of writing Lycidas, <sup>(2)</sup> but even more striking is the passage in that part of the fourth Georgic which describes the fate of Orpheus:

Eurydicen vox ipsa et frigida lingua  
a miseram Eurydicen! anima fugiente vocabat:  
Eurydicen toto referebant flumine ripae. (525 ff.)

---

(8) P.L. VI, 187, 151, 167.

(9) Aen. IX, 635, 599.

(1) P.L. III, 372 ff.; Aen. VIII, 287 ff.

(2) Ecl. VI, 43-44.



"Spirit", secondly ab adjuncta "lewdness", this adjunct being insisted on a majore negato.

Both Milton and Virgil were fond of using proper names, and at times the similarity between them is striking. Virgil's

cessere magistri,  
Phillyrides Chiron Amythaoniusque Melampus, (Georg. III, 549)

for example, has been aptly paralleled with Milton's

Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides,  
And Tiresias and Phineus Prophets old. (7) (III, 35)

But in the use of proper names Milton had other predecessors besides Virgil, and it would be difficult to define precisely how Virgil's example differed from that of other poets.

Marlowe had used proper names magnificently to impart a majestic movement to his verse and to convey an impression of vast geographical sweep. And the two poets of whom we have already written, Ovid and Tasso, probably taught him much. It may be doubted, however, whether any of these poets can invest the names with that subtle charm, that flavour of reminiscence which is found so often in Virgil and Milton. The allusiveness of some poets is either learned or grandiloquent. We can all appreciate grandiloquence; and learning we borrow in snatches from the

---

(7) Nettleship: Vergil (Classical Writers) London, 1879, p.93 n.

commentators. But in reading Virgil and Milton, there are times when the vicarious labours of an erudite editor avail us naught. We ourselves must know the circumstance to which the poet alludes before we can groan with Aeneas

ut spolia, ut currus, utque ipsum corpus amici  
tendentemque manus Priamum conspexit inermis. (I, 486)

or fully realise the loss

which cost Ceres all that pain. (IV, 271)

Both poets had too much of true scholarship to allow their reminiscences to degenerate into mere learning, but both fall at times into the somewhat different fault of becoming too "literary". When Virgil, in the midst of describing the sufferings of Dido, tries to adorn his theme by reference to other great tragedies, the reader is shocked. Hitherto his attention has been carried forward by the poetic imagination of the author. Now when he reaches the highest point of all he must abandon this lofty plane and try to build up a conception based on the cooler notions of comparative literature. Not less but more annoying is the lapse of Milton when he pauses for a moment to assert the importance of his own subject as compared with

Of stern Achilles on his Foe pursu'd  
the wrauth

---

(8) Aeneid IV, 469.

Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage  
Of Turnus for Lavinia disespous'd,  
Or Neptun's ire or Juno's, that so long  
Perplex'd the Greek and Cytherea's Son. (IX, 14)

In both cases the author tries to lighten his own task. He asks us to remember the impression made upon us by certain other great poems, and then to conjure up for ourselves something of the same kind, in an equal or higher degree, in the reading of his own. Only slightly does he fall short of the bland impudence of Wordsworth's Simon Lee:

O Reader! had you in your mind  
Such stores as silent thought can bring,  
O gentle Reader! you would find  
A tale in everything.  
What more I have to say is short,  
And you must kindly take it:  
It is no tale; but, should you think,  
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

9.

"Milton," said Tennyson, "had evidently studied Virgil's verse." Wordsworth, in a letter to Lord Lonsdale, is more explicit: "I have long been persuaded that Milton formed his blank verse upon the model of the Georgics and the Aeneid." He adds: "I am so much struck with this resemblance that I should have attempted Virgil in blank verse, had I not been persuaded that no ancient author can

be with advantage so rendered." Many English translators of Virgil have been equally conscious of the resemblance, but few of them have shared Wordsworth's good sense in realising the dangers of turning Virgil into Miltonic verse. Wordsworth's "can", of course, must be taken as applying only to those with whom matters of possibility and impossibility are serious and insuperable. Such things do not affect Milton. "There are certain magical effects," it has been said, "particularly in the Virgilian hexameter, produced by an exquisite but audacious tact in the employment of licence, which can never be reproduced in English. Milton, and Milton alone among Englishmen, had the secret of this music, but he elicited it from another instrument." (1)

The difference in the instrument must always be borne in mind, and not less important is the difference in the mode of composition. "Milton, debarred by blindness from the help of pen and paper, had to compose Paradise Lost in his head and dictated a passage only when he had got it into satisfactory form. ... Virgil, we are told, wrote a first draft and then worked on it until perhaps there was not a word of the first draft left." (2) This difference is

---

(1) J. Churton Collins: Ephemera Critica, p.317.

(2) J.W.Mackail: Virgil, p.146. Richardson reports: "I have been told he would Dictate many, perhaps 40 lines as it were

important. The poet whose attention is on the written rather than the spoken is apt to be meticulous to the verge of preciousness; but he who has the spoken word always in mind may tend to vociferousness. These, be it understood, are not the characteristic qualities of either of the authors with whom we have to deal. They indicate, not the extent, but only the direction of the difference. Milton had learned his craft by another method as the Cambridge manuscript testifies, and Virgil did not sit at the feet of Epidius for nothing.<sup>(3)</sup> Yet the difference remains. There is, we feel, a more delicate and fragile fibre in the verse of the Aeneid than in that of Paradise Lost. Virgil's style is more epigrammatic than Milton's. Not that he seeks the brevity of mere witticism as Pope does, for example, or Ovid. Nor does he display the concise repartee of a vehement vein such as Milton's own

---

Note (2) continued from p.455.

in a Breath, and then reduce them to half the number." Pattison (p.151) accepts this in spite of its obvious derivation from Suetonius: cum Georgica scriberet, traditur cotidie meditato mane plurimos versus dictare solitus, ac per totum diem retractando ad paucissimos redigere, non absurde carmen se ursae more parere dicens et lambendo demum effingere. Phillips reports that Milton wrote "in a parcel of ten, twenty, or thirty verses at a time, which being written by whatever hand came next, might possibly want correction as to the orthography and pointing." Would he have specified orthography and pointing if there had been any of the more drastic revision suggested by Richardson? (3) Cf. Professor Garrod's preface to the Oxford Book of Latin Verse, pp.xxxiv-xxxvi. On Milton's earlier methods of composition, see Grierson's edition I, xiv-xv.

Not to know mee argues your selves unknown

or

Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n,  
for these obviously are things to be said not written. Yet  
he is much more quotable than Milton. "His single words and  
phrases, his pathetic half-lines" linger differently in the  
memory. And we recognise another aspect of this same tendency  
in a certain lack of freedom in the movement of the verse in  
the earlier part of the Aeneid which seems to suggest a sort  
of careful scheming to make the thought fit into the hexameter.  
In Milton there is not this haunting sense of metrical  
conscience. Right from the first his verses do all that is  
required of them so easily and with so much to spare that  
they appear to know it not.

Yet the Virgilian influence on Milton's verse is  
unmistakable.

"The variety of cadence and elaborate structure of  
Virgil's hexameters no doubt incited him to emulation.  
He must have felt that the unencumbered eloquence,  
which is suited to the drama, where perspicuity is  
indispensable, would be out of place in the stationary  
and sonorous epic. Therefore, without seeking to  
reconstruct in English the metres of the ancients, he  
adapted the complex harmonies of the Roman poets to the  
qualities of our language. Like Virgil, he opened his  
paragraphs in the middle of the line, sustaining them  
through several clauses till they reached their close  
in another hemistich at the distance of some half-dozen  
carefully conducted verses. His pauses, therefore,  
are of the greatest importance in regulating his music."(4)

---

(4) J.A.Symonds: Blank Verse, London, 1895, pp.96-97.

The variety of his pauses and the habit of beginning and ending his periods in the middle of a verse were apparently the features of Virgil's style which most impressed Milton's contemporaries, (5) and in the next century we find the author of Letters concerning Poetical Translations and Virgil and Milton's Art of Verse (6) asserting that this variation in pause is "the Soul of all Versification" and confining his comparison between these authors to this topic. To draw up quantitative tables illustrating the pause-variations of the two poets would serve no useful purpose, (7) since Milton had precedents for pauses in all positions in the blank verse of the Elizabethan dramatists. They too would provide examples of the beginning and ending of periods within the verse.

We must note, however, that when Milton sets forth his conception of verse as consisting "only in apt numbers, fit quantity of Syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another," he says no word of the dramatists.

---

(5) e.g. Dryden: Preface to Sylvae (ed. Ker, I, 255-56); Nova Solyma (trans. Begley, I, 264-65).

(6) This work is known to me only through Omond: English Metrists, and Havens: The Influence of Milton on English Poetry.

(7) See e.g. R.W.Evans: Treatise on Versification, London, 1852, p.53 (Homer and Virgil) and p.84 (Tasso, Milton, Dryden).

Despite his reference to "some both Italian and Spanish Poets of prime note," his chief justification for his verse is its likeness to "that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin." In some instances perhaps the influence of Virgil may be clearly demonstrated. The lines,

mortalis mucro glacies ceu futilis ictu  
dissiluit, (XII, 740)

illustrate a device often used by Virgil: that of holding a word over from one verse to the next, where it is followed by a strong pause. The device is noted by the author of Nova Solyma,<sup>(8)</sup> and Milton had noted this particular passage sufficiently to imitate it in his

From his slack hand the Garland wreath'd for Eve  
Down drop'd. (IX, 892)

Virgil is fond of emphasising a verb in this way, (9)

(8) I, 264.

(9) e.g. Aen. I, 61-2; I, 537-8; II, 758-9; III, 259-60. Pre-Miltonic translators of Virgil had been at pains to reproduce this effect, e.g. Douglas's rendering of II, 550-53

hoc dicens altaria ad ipsa trementem  
traxit et in multo lapsantem sanguine nati,  
implicuitque comam laeva, dextraque coruscum  
extulit ac lateri capulo tenuis abdidit ensem,

emulates Virgil's traxit and extulit with his own "Funderit" and "Festynnit":

and with that word, in tene,  
The auld trumbling toward the altair he drew,  
That in the hait blude of his sone, sched new,  
Funderit; and Pirrus grippis him by the hair  
With his left hand, and with the vdir all bair  
Drew furth his schynand swerd, quhilk in his syde  
Festynnit, and vnto the hiltis did it hyde.

and Milton does so no less frequently. (1) Adjectives too  
(2)  
are similarly used, and so are proper names. In the  
latter case the preceding line is often descriptive or  
suggestive. It gives such clues as may rouse our  
expectation, but the name itself is withheld till the  
line following, as in

Vrbs antiqua fuit (Tyrii tenuere coloni)  
Karthago, (3)

or

One next himself in power, and next in crime,  
Long after known in Palestine, and nam'd  
Bëëlzebub. (4)

---

Note (9) continued from p.459.

There are many examples in the extract from Surrey given in  
Skeat's Specimens of English Literature (e.g. 254, 368, 602,  
712), though these do not correspond so closely with the  
original. Ben Jonson in The Poetaster renders  
speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem  
deveniunt

by

Dido a cave, the Trojan prince the same  
Lighted upon.

(1) e.g. P.L. I, 572-3; II, 486-7; II, 878-9; III, 52-3.

(2) e.g. inscius (II, 372), saucius (II, 529), nescius  
(IV, 72), crudelis (IV, 311), stridens (IV, 185), arduus  
(V, 480), innumerable (I, 338), abominations (almost  
adjectival I, 389), erring (I, 747), victorious (II, 142),  
irreparable (II, 331), wide gaping (II, 440), forbidding  
(II, 475), inglorious (III, 253), viewless (III, 518),  
undazzled (III, 613), luxuriant (IV, 260), diurnal (IV, 594).

(3) I, 12. Cf. also I, 96-7, 286-8, 346-7, 713-4.

(4) I, 79. Cf. also I, 471-2, 486-7; II, 108-9, 629-30;  
III, 469-73.

Such resemblances as these are little affected by the essential differences between Latin and English prosody. But Milton's poetry is characterised not only by its "sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another" but by "apt Numbers" and "fit quantity of Syllables." And since questions of numbers and quantities - in English verse at least - are apt to be hotly disputed, we shall do well to approach this part of our task with caution. We may say, at least, that accent and quantity are important in the verse both of Virgil and Milton. In Latin quantity was a prime element and it was used in a way that could not be reproduced in English. Milton's use of long and short syllables is not an essential part of his metrical system. On the other hand the distribution of accents is relatively more fixed in English than in Latin, although Milton assumed sufficient liberty in the matter to allow himself to reproduce some of Virgil's characteristic effects.

In the Latin hexameter the accent is fixed only in the last two feet. There the ordinary prose accent of the word is usually made to coincide with the ictus of the foot. In the other feet this coincidence is usually avoided. Yet Virgil will write such a verse as

venimus, aut raptas ad litora vertere praedas. (I, 528)

The classical dactyl, in general, moved with a different pace from that of the so-called stress-dactyl of English verse. But the three dactyls in this verse are stress as well as quantitative dactyls, and are obviously intended to produce something of the same headlong rushing movement as is conveyed by the English measure. Apparently, then, to go no further, Virgil uses this accentual reinforcement of quantity not only in the fifth and sixth feet of the verse but also - when some special effect is intended - in the feet immediately preceding and following these, the fourth and the first.

The fourth is of no interest to us, since it would be hard to fix an analogous position within the very different structure of the blank verse line. This difficulty does not attend the first; and Virgil's frequent use of stress-dactyls in this foot is surely important in view of the frequency of Milton's inversion of accents in his first foot, which gives a similar dactylic movement to the beginning of his lines. That Virgil did this deliberately may be surmised from his commencing verses with words such as he frequently uses in his fifth foot. Such in the first Aeneid are litora,<sup>(5)</sup> ostia,<sup>(6)</sup> and a whole series of datives

---

(5) 3, 668. Cf. 86.

(6) 14. Cf. 400.

(7)  
and ablatives in -ibus. He also seems to use this initial stress-dactyl to give special emphasis to verbs:

excititur pronusque magister  
volvitur in caput, (8)

as does Milton also:

That underneath had veins of liquid fire  
Sluc'd from the Lake. (9)

Of accents in other parts of the line it is well not to say too much. Though resemblances may be perceived, they are not easily demonstrated. Perhaps we may mention such a line as

And towards the Gate rouling her bestial train. (II, 873)  
After the periodic pause at "Gate", we expect an easy, unaccented re-beginning and the unforeseen jerk of "rouling" with its stress reinforced by the initial litera canina is something of a shock. Ought we to feel the same in Virgil's  
qua data porta, ruunt et terras turbine perflant? (I, 83)

## 11.

This brings us to another characteristic of Virgil

---

(7) 129, 190, 429, 508, 559, 599, 620, 671, 694, 756.  
Cf. 15, 17, 42, 64, 74, 84, 90, 95, etc. Note especially 756

(8) I, 115. Cf. I, 81-2, 160-1, 419-20; VI, 602.

(9) I, 701. Cf. I, 9-10, 113-14, 744-5.

which was much appreciated in the seventeenth century. "His  
verse," says Dryden, <sup>(1)</sup> "is everywhere sounding the very thing  
in your ears, whose sense it bears." This is equally true  
of Milton and in places where both authors are imitating  
specific sounds it is often easy to perceive the resemblance  
between them. In the lines

on a sudden op'n flie  
With impetuous recoile and jarring sound  
Th' infernal dores, and on thir hinges grate  
Harsh Thunder, (II, 879)

Milton not only preserves the hinge of Virgil's

tum demum horrisono stridentes cardine sacrae  
panduntur portas, (VI, 573)

but even supplies the harsh long a sound which it loses in  
translation. His fierce Phlegeton too and Lethe the River  
of Oblivion are obviously reminiscent of Virgil. <sup>(2)</sup>

So it is sometimes when the sound-painting is  
intended to produce a sense of motion or of effort. The  
sliding sibilants of Virgil's

facilis descensus Averno:  
noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis (VI, 126)

are remembered in Milton's

a passage broad,  
Smooth, easie, inoffensive down to Hell. (X, 304)

---

(1) Preface to Sylvae (ed. Ker, I, 255)

(2) P.L. II, 580 ff. Cf. Aen. VI, 550, 714.

But in the contrasting passages some difference in method is apparent. In Virgil's

sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,  
hoc opus, hic labor est, (VI, 128)

the effect is produced by the periodic structure of the sentence and the parallelism of phrase suggestive of false starts, pauses and fresh beginnings. Milton's

long is the way  
And hard, that out of Hell leads up to Light (II, 432)

is similar, inasmuch as "and hard" and "out of Hell" are periodic insertions doubling the load of the sentence and delaying its forward motion. But what especially lends weight to the sentence is its use of monosyllables. This was less easy in Latin than in English, though Virgil certainly goes as far as the genius of his language will allow him. No other Roman poet uses monosyllables so effectively and it is hard to see how anyone in Latin could go beyond his fit via vi or even the hoc opus, hic labor est just quoted. The early part of the first Aeneid shows how surprisingly far Virgil could go towards anticipating some of Milton's effects. Thus in half a dozen lines he can pass from

ipsa Iovis rapidum iaculata e nubibus ignem  
disiecitque rates evertitque sequora ventis,  
illum expirantem transfixo pectore flammam  
turbine corripuit scopuloque infixit acuto (I, 42)





than some which that poem contains,

Embryos, and Idiots, Eremites and Friars. (III, 474) (3)

These phrases of Milton correspond very closely with Virgil's imber et ignes, litora longe, limina linguunt and the recurring murmure montis and such like expressions which occur in the last two feet of his hexameters. (4) We even find in Virgil an example of archaic alliteration which might scan in the Old English manner:

moenia magnis magna para. (III, 159)

12.

A "learnedly elaborate" style and an artificial subtlety in diction have been singled out as the general marks of distinction between the literary epic and Homer. (5)

---

(3) The effect in these places is not quite the same as Spenser's

Much daunted with that dint, her sence was dazd.

(F.Q.I, i, 18)

Add faith vnto your force, and be not faint. (I, i, 19)

His gall did grate for grieffe and high disdaine. (ibid)

The cruder metres of the Shepheardes Calender come much nearer -

Whose witt is weakenesse, whose wage is death. (Feb. 88)  
wasted with wormes. (Ibid. 113)

- but such a work as the Shepheardes Calender could not be allowed by the critical without Virgilian sanction.

(4) I, 743; V, 23; III, 616; I, 55, 245.

(5) Jebb: Homer, p.17.

Such a distinction may be necessary, but it is even more necessary to remember that the style of a Milton or of a Virgil can never be the distinguishing mark of a whole class of poets. There be many Caesars ere such another Julius. No other poet has divined the secret "of that mysterious combination of traditive with original elements in diction, which Milton and Virgil ... have effected."<sup>(6)</sup> The resemblance between these two poets has usually been recognised, so much so that some of our translations of Virgil have been too Miltonic to be truly Virgilian.

Yet the difference between them is hard to define. There is some truth in Sellar's remark: "To English readers the verse of the Aeneid may appear inferior in majesty and fulness of volume to that of Milton in his passages of most sustained power; but it is easier and less encumbered and thus more adapted to express various conditions of human life than the ordinary movement of the modern epic."<sup>(7)</sup> But we must remember that Milton too could write simply:

As when he wash'd his servants feet, so now  
As Father of his Familie he clad  
Thir nakedness with Skins of Beasts. (X, 215)

It is Sellar himself who points out that the stately movement

---

(6) Pattison: Milton, p.206.

(7) Virgil, p.420.

of Virgil's verse "does not readily adapt itself to the description of the process of kindling a fire or preparing a meal -

ac primum silici scintillam excudit Achates  
suscepitque ignem foliis atque arida circum  
nutrimenta dedit rapuitque in fomite flammam. (I, 174) (8)

Ironically enough, one of the passages in which Milton's diction is least adapted to the simplicity of his theme is that where he has this of Virgil in mind:

how we his gather'd beams  
Reflected, may with matter sere foment,  
Or by collision of two bodies grinde  
The Air attrite to Fire. (X, 1070)

Dryden has described the difficulty which besets the writer who tries to reproduce the variety of Virgil's diction in English. "Virgil," says he, "above all poets, had a stock, which I may call almost inexhaustible, of figurative, elegant and sounding words: I, who inherit but a small portion of his genius, and write in a language so much inferior to the Latin, have found it very painful to vary phrases, when the same sense returns upon me ... Words are not so easily coined as money; and yet we see the credit not only of banks but of exchequers cracks when little comes in, and much goes out. Virgil called upon me in every line for some new word: and I paid so long, that

---

(8) Ibid., p.419.

I was almost bankrupt." (9) Accordingly Dryden had recourse to borrowing. Milton shared one part of Dryden's disability, and felt something of the same necessity. Sometimes he seems to take words directly from Virgil, such as convex or the adjectives horrent, torrent and corny. (1) Usually, however, he can find words already established in English like extinct, fraud, urges (2) to which he gives a distinctly Virgilian significance. Even such common words as cloud, hold, globe are often used in a figurative sense reminiscent of Virgil. (3)

Even when not used figuratively, there is often a suggestion of Virgilian influence in Milton's employment of common words. The verb "arrive", for example, had been used transitively before Milton, yet when he wrote

ere he arrive  
The happy Ile, (II, 409)

(9) Dedication of the Aeneis (ed. Ker, II, 231-32)

(1) P.L. VII, 266, Aen. IV, 451; P.L. II, 513, Aen. I, 1 d-e, X, 178; P.L. II, 581, Aen. VI, 550; P.L. VII, 321, Aen. III, 22. See also P.L. V, 7, Aen. VIII, 456.

(2) P.L. I, 141, Aen. IV, 322; P.L. IX, 643, Aen. X, 72; P.L. I, 67, Aen. VI, 561. Cf. also exercise (P.L. II, 89, Aen. VI, 739) and remains (P.L. II, 443, Aen. VII, 596).

(3) P.L. VI, 539, Aen. VII, 793 (but cf. Iliad IV, 274); P.L. II, 1043, Aen. I, 399; P.L. II, 512, Aen. X, 373. Cf. circling (P.L. VII, 342, Aen. I, 234), belched (P.L. I, 671, Aen. III, 576), horned (P.L. XI, 827, Aen. VIII, 77)

it is not likely that he was altogether unmindful of Virgil's  
et terram Hesperiam venies. (II, 781)

We may perhaps even detect a similarity in the use of tense in  
Milton's

He scarce had ceas't when the superiour Fiend  
Was moving toward the shore (I, 283)

and Virgil's

haec celerans iter ad navis tendebat Achates. (I, 656)

That Satan, after expressing his intention of rousing his  
followers, should wait patiently to hear Beelzebub's panegyric  
before starting to move were unthinkable. We must stay to  
listen till the end of the speech; but when we turn to Satan  
again we find that he is already in motion. So, while Virgil  
causes us to linger by reason of his long recital of the  
historic associations of the presents which Achates is to  
bring, Achates we find has already started on his journey.

13.

Enough has been said to show that Milton studied  
Virgil very carefully and that this study has left its mark  
on Paradise Lost. Yet the really important results thereof  
cannot be indicated by these precise and tangible classifica-  
tions. That which is essential to poetry cannot be catalogued.

We cannot attempt to demonstrate that which lies beyond the reach of demonstration, but perhaps we may get somewhere nearer the root of the matter by considering one or two passages typical of their authors' usual manner.

The first appearance of Dido has little in common with the episode of the changing of the devils to "less than smallest dwarfs". But note the following passages:

qualis in Eurotae ripis aut per iuga Cynthi  
exercet Diana choros, quam mille secutae  
hinc atque hinc glomerantur Oreades; illa pharetram  
fert umero gradiensque deas supereminet omnis  
(Latonae tacitum pertemptant gaudia pectus):  
talis erat Dido. (I, 498)

or (like) Faerie Elves,  
Whose midnight Revels, by a Forrest side  
Or Fountain some belated Peasant sees,  
Or dreams he sees, while over head the Moon  
Sits Arbitress, and neerer to the Earth  
Wheels her pale course, they on thir mirth & dance  
Intent, with jocond Music charm his ear;  
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.  
Thus incorporeal Spirits to smallest forms  
Reduc'd thir shapes immense. (I, 782)

Note, for example, how Virgil's "tail -

illa pharetram  
fert umero gradiensque deas supereminet omnis -

corresponds to Milton's

they on thir mirth & dance  
Intent, with jocond Music charm his ear.

Note also how

(Latonae tacitum pertemptant gaudia pectus),

considered as a parenthesis of contemporaneous circumstance,  
corresponds to

while over head the Moon  
Sits Arbitress,

but, as a further extension of the "tail", it finds its  
equivalent in

At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.

Note, finally, how admirable and conclusive are the endings  
of the two passages we have quoted. And having done so, let  
us not fail to observe that neither Virgil nor Milton chooses  
to stop there. Virgil continues:

talem se laeta ferebat  
per medios instans operi regnisque futuris;

and Milton:

and were at large,  
Though without number still amidst the Hall  
Of that infernal Court. (4)

Now let us consider another passage:

Iamque rubescebat radiis mare et aethere ab alto

---

(4) "Both (i.e. Virgil and Milton) habitually practise an  
artifice almost peculiar to them, that of carrying on the  
period for another line after it seems to have ended ...  
The effect is neither that of a final clinching stroke,  
as it is very remarkably in Dante, nor that of a dying  
cadence or echo, in the way in which it is often very  
beautifully employed by Spenser; it is rather that of  
an enrichment, a superflux, as of water that arches itself  
in a full glass above the level of the brim." J.W.Mackail:  
Springs of Helicon, p.184. Cf. Milton's revision of XI,  
548 in the second edition of Paradise Lost.

Aurora in roseis fulgebat lutea bigis,  
cum venti posuere omnisque repente resedit  
flatus, et in lento luctantur marmore tonsae. (VII, 25)

The first two verses rouse our expectations and keep our interest suspended by the periodic doubling of the two phrases rubescibat radiis mare and aethere ab alto Aurora in roseis fulgebat lutea bigis. But this does not lead to the correspondingly protracted fall which we expect. Instead we are let down suddenly:

venti posuere.

For the rest of the line we ride along comfortably enough only to fall headlong into a new depression which waits for us at the beginning of the next:

(5)

flatus.

The concluding part of the verse struggles painfully to recover.

Something of the same effect may be seen in such lines as

Mean while the Adversary of God and Man,  
Satan with thoughts inflam'd of highest design,  
Puts on swift wings, and toward the Gates of Hell  
Explores his solitary flight. (II, 629)

Here "the Adversary of God and Man" and "Satan with thoughts inflam'd of highest design" is a similar periodic doubling.

---

(5) Cf. the similar pause, though with differing accent in P.L. VI, 912 after "Yet fell".

The resolution of this suspension is almost equally striking in its unexpected simplicity:

Puts on swift wings.

Then the remaining part of the line moves us along gently to prepare us for the next step which comes at the beginning of the verse following.

Milton and Virgil's fondness for these effects in periodic structure might be illustrated from their frequent use of such tags as "with ambitious aim", "with ambitious mind", "magno cum murmure montis" and "vasto cum murmure montis". Consider the effect of the inserted "with reiterated crimes" in the passage:

That with reiterated crimes he might  
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought  
Evil to others, and enrag'd might see  
How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth  
Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn  
On Man by him seduc't, but on himself  
Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd. (I, 214)

The first two lines give an effect of cumulation and sudden collapse, not unlike that of Virgil's venti posuere. And in the later part the "Treble confusion" breaks in upon the "Infinite goodness, grace and mercy" with at least equal effect with Virgil's flatus.

14.

Virgil's influence, then, was different from that

of Ovid or Tasso. Milton did not look upon him as a writer who put forward admirable ideas but was unable or afraid to follow them up. Neither did he regard him as a source of information or of half-digested material which might be refined into poetry. Virgil is a supreme master of poetic art. Milton does not borrow and adapt Virgil's episodes, but his own arrangement and composition and the general principles of his decoration are deeply influenced by Virgil's methods. But it is in texture that he approaches most nearly to Virgil. Like Virgil, he is master of a lordly utterance unlike anything which is found in other poets. Magnificence of diction and dignity of rhythm are in every line. The style is ever the same; the onward movement never loses momentum nor rushes furiously away. Yet there is within this sameness of style a richness and variety of diction adapted to a great diversity of occasions; and without violent changes of tempo, the manifold contrasts in thematic material and rhythmical figure produce subtle yet striking variations in speed and in emotional excitement. The style of Milton, as of Virgil, is always recognisable. Its chief features may easily be noted and classified as those of Shakespeare's, for example, may not. Thus both Milton and Virgil have had a great army of imitators. And the imitators have failed. To catalogue the devices employed

by Milton or Virgil is one thing. To suppose it possible to foretell just how these devices would be used on a particular occasion is another. As well might one by significant drum-taps, knockings of Fate, galloping horses and other such programme apparatus strive to foretell the development of a Beethoven movement or the range of its modulation. "His rhythm," writes Dr. Mackail of Milton, though the description is meant to apply to Virgil also, "is perpetually integrating as it advances; and not only so, but at no point can its next movement be predicted, although tracing it backward we can see how each phrase rises out of and carries on the rhythm of what was before it, how each comes in not only rightly, but as it seems inevitably."<sup>(6)</sup>

---

(6) Springs of Helicon, p.183.

## C H A P T E R     V.

---

### SPENSER.

"whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas".

#### Areopagitica.

1.

Before the time of the Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity, Milton shows few signs of the serious study of Spenser. The greater part of his earlier poems had been in Latin and we should therefore hardly expect Spenser's influence to be so well marked as that of Ovid; but it seems even to have been less extensive than that of Sylvester. Yet the earliest English poem of any importance is quite Spenserian in manner. For an elegy in English, Milton recognised that Spenser was the best model. And this is all that Milton, as yet but an occasional versifier, was likely to care about.

To such an author, and at such an age, the lines On the Death of a Fair Infant are wholly creditable. The modified Spenserian stanza in which they are written is well handled, although the opening has a certain stiffness of cadence suggesting that Milton had little thought at the outset of anything else but working in satisfactorily the four nice phrases at the beginning of the first four lines; but even so, this surpasses its original in The Passionate

Pilgrim. The whole of the first three stanzas is a pretty piece of fancy suggested by the lines in the Lay of Clorinda:

What cruell hand of cursed foe vnknowne,  
Hath cropt the stalke which bore so faire a flowre?  
Vntimely cropt, before it well were growne,  
And cleane defaced in vntimely howre. (31 ff.)

Milton mythologises on the theme thus suggested in the manner of Ovid, and then commends the offspring of his fancy by showing its likeness to Ovid's story of Hyacinth.

There is nothing in all this to indicate that the writer felt any serious grief, but Christian usage demanded that he should offer himself some sort of consolation. And so he introduces a conventional modulation in the manner of Clorinda's

Ah no: it is not dead, ne can it die,  
and thereupon deserts Astrophel for the loftier flights of The Ruines of Time:

Most gentle spirite breathed from aboue,  
Out of the bosome of the makers blis,  
In whom all bountie and all vertuous loue  
Appeared in their natiue propertis,  
And did enrich that noble breast of his,  
With treasure passing all this worldes worth,  
Worthy of heauen it selfe, which brought it forth.

His blessed spirite full of power diuine  
And influence of all celestiall grace,  
Loathing this sinfull earth and earthlie slime,  
Fled backe too soone vnto his natiue place,  
Too soone for all that did his loue embrace,  
Too soone for all this wretched world, whom he  
Robd of all right and true nobilitie. (281 ff.)

Such is the height to which Milton's muse would now aspire.

But he cannot forget the Metamorphoses so easily and must needs introduce reminiscences of the story of Astraea and of the giants' assault on Olympus. <sup>(1)</sup> He lacks the power to draw out his theme. He cannot fix his eye on the object. The fullness and continuity, the serene assurance of mastery is not yet his. His texture is scrappy and amateurish. And indeed who but a novice would attempt to apply the tone and manner in which the master had celebrated

The worlds late wonder, and the heauens new ioy  
to so unimportant a person as his own baby niece?

Yet this novice is one to be reckoned with. His powers are imperfectly controlled but they are obviously considerable. In spite of all its uncertainty and hesitation the poem bears traces of an inward purposefulness, albeit only partially realised. The writer will have something definite to say though he may have to wait before he discovers it.

He grew vp fast in goodnesse and in grace,  
And doubly faire wox both in mynd and face.

Which daily more and more he did augment,  
With gentle vsage and demeanure myld:  
That all mens hearts with secret rauishment  
He stole away, and weetingly beguyld. (Astrophel, 17 ff.)

---

(1) Metam.I.149 ff.

Thus Spenser had written. How like and how unlike are these last two lines to Milton's

Thereby to set the hearts of men on fire  
To scorn the sordid world, and unto Heav'n aspire.

Already the next great chapter in the history of English poetry has opened. Here we have the earliest foretaste of the poet who will carry us beyond the fashioning of a "gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline".

At present, however, the only theme which inspires Milton's muse, apart from elegy, is anti-Roman polemic. The reminiscences of Spenser contained in In Quintum Novembris (2) are interesting only as affording evidence of Milton's early knowledge of the second book of the Faerie Queene. In the Vacation Exercise there is nothing to suggest that it was Spenser who had revealed to him the poetical possibilities of his native language.

2.

The Nativity Ode marks the real emergence of Milton the poet, and represents a very great advance upon On the Death of a Fair Infant. In part this advance is along

---

(2) e.g. 148; cf. F.Q. II, vii.23.

lines which had been indicated in the earlier poem. There is, for example, the same imitation of Spenser. Yet Milton has obviously passed beyond the hand to mouth methods which he formerly employed. No longer does he piece together his poem by imitating this passage and by working up a theme suggested by that. The Nativity Ode is not a patchwork but a poem with a unity of its own. Its structure may owe something to Spenser since the poem has several points of resemblance to the April eclogue. The infant Saviour, for example, is set in the same position of honour as Spenser's Queen Elizabeth. Both cause amazement to the Sun, when he beholds a greater sun below.(3) The power of both is attested by the figures of ancient mythology.(4) Both are greeted with olive as bringers of peace.(5) And in each poem we have the same somewhat arbitrary conclusion wherein the poet breaks off his tedious song.(6)

Structurally, therefore, the Ode may reveal a

- 
- (3) Nat.Ode 80, April 73.  
(4) Nat.Ode 173, April 100.  
(5) Nat.Ode 45, April 121.  
(6) Nat.Ode 239, April 149.

closer approach to Spenser than had been attained in On the Death of a Fair Infant. On the other hand, however, the characteristic difference in the genius of the two poets, already apparent in the earlier poem, is also further developed. There it had appeared only accidentally; here it is seen even in the choice of subject. The theme of On the Death of a Fair Infant was of the same type as Spenser's own, but there is a fundamental and far-reaching difference between the poetry which sings the Son of Heaven's eternal King and that which celebrates Gloriana.

Here, however, we perceive something of the difficulty of discriminating between the original and the traditive elements in Milton. The mature Milton, we have insisted, read other poets not merely to find out what he could take from them but chiefly to allow them to help him to discover what was in himself. And it is where he is most truly himself that the main fruit of his Spenserian studies is to be found. It is, that is to say, not in the structure of the Ode, which may be taken from the Shepheardes Calender, but in its theme, which is not borrowed at all - being brought to Milton by the first light of dawn on Christmas morning.(7)

---

(7) Elegy VI. 87.

But before this visitation Milton had certainly fed on thoughts such as might move these numbers, and those thoughts were suggested by Spenser. Obviously the Hymne of Heavenly Love had called forth a response somewhere very deep down in Milton:

Beginne from first, where he encradled was  
In simple cratch, wrapt in a wad of hay,  
Betweene the toylefull Oxe and humble Asse,  
And in what rags, and in how base aray,  
The glory of our heauenly riches lay,  
When him the silly Shepheards came to see,  
Whom greatest Princes sought on lowest knee. (225 ff.)

That the Hymnes should thus have moved him is not surprising, for it is in them that Spenser tells

of secret things that came to pass  
When Beldam Nature in her cradle was.

Like Ovid and Du Bartas he begins

ante mare et terras et, quod tegit omnia, caelum,

Before all Time, all Matter, Form and Place,

and he is as eager to mount "the Aires steepe-staires" as Du Bartas himself or as the author of the Vacation Exercise. It is in this universal setting of all time and all space that Spenser makes his reference to the Nativity, and it is thus that Milton also considers it. Hence the difference between this Ode and the similar poem by Crashaw. The

Nativity is seen by Milton not in its human but in its purely intellectual aspect. It is bound up inseparably with a developed view of the universe and therefore demands a symbolical and universal setting. The Sun and stars are affected by this event, and even in his swaddling bands the babe must reveal his power to control the whole crew of false divinities.

The lines on the Passion and the Circumcision suggest that Milton had taken note also of Spenser's following stanzas:

From thence reads on the storie of his life.  
The story of His life Milton read at all times, but that he now read it with a particular purpose in view may be surmised from his reading it not only in the Gospels but also in the poetic form of Vida's Christiad.

3.

For many years after the Nativity Ode Milton refrained from attempting anything of equal magnitude. He is content with lower flights, and apparently he has learned to respect the lower flights of others. The Faerie Queene, for example, does not reach the lordly heights of Du Bartas,

but, if the author of the Hymnes could make such a poem his chiefest care, there must be something more in it than meets the ear, something more than the first careless perusal by young readers is likely to reveal. Even in the Nativity Ode there are signs of Milton's study of the Faerie Queene.(8)

The "old Dragon underground" who

Swindges the scaly Horrour of his foulded tail  
is obviously reminiscent of that encountered by the Red-Cross Knight:

His huge long tayle wound vp in hundred foldes,  
Does ouerspred his long bras-scaly backe,  
Whose wreathed boughts when euer he vnfoldes,  
And thicke entangled knots adown does slacke,  
Bespotted as with shields of red and blacke,  
It sweepeth all the land behind him farre,  
And of three furlongs does but little lacke;  
And at the point two stings in-fixed arre,  
Both deadly sharpe, that sharpest steele exceeden farre.  
(l.xi.11).

It is in the elegy which accompanied the Nativity Ode that Milton first differentiates between the sage and serious poets and the others. And as an example of the former kind he cites, not a bard of the school of Du Bartas or Hesiod, but the writer of the earliest romance. The reference to Odysseus's journey through the halls of

---

(8) especially in the use of the Alexandrine.

Circe and even to the underworld bears some resemblance to a later reference in Areopagitica to Spenser's Cave of Mammon and Bower of earthly bliss. One wonders whether Spenser would not have been mentioned here had it not been for the requirements of Latin verse composition and perhaps also for Milton's wish to satisfy Diodati's affectation of Graecicism. At all events L'Allegro, with its high triumphs of Knights and Barons and its

store of Ladies, whose bright eies  
Rain influence, and judge the prise,

indicates that Milton's reading in romance was not confined to the Odyssey. Il Penseroso, too, celebrates great Bards who have sung

Of Turneys and of Trophies hung;  
Of Forests, and enchantments drear,

while the reference to "sage and solemn tunes" and the line,  
Where more is meant then meets the ear,  
seem to refer particularly to Spenser.

In Comus Milton himself tells of forests and enchantments drear and also professes an allegorical intention. Moreover, in this poem of feasting and revelry he most unnecessarily thrusts in a reminder of his statement in

Elegy VI on the serious teaching of great bards who sing of adventures on enchanted islands and in the underworld. It can hardly be by accident that the opening lines of the poem should so obviously suggest the manner of one such bard:

Before the starry threshold of Joves Court  
My mansion is, (9)

nor that the whole story should present such obvious points of resemblance to the temptations in the Bower of Bliss and to the rescue of Amoret from Busirane. Leading sentiments such as

Vertue could see to do what vertue would  
By her own radiant light, though Sun and Moon  
Were in the flat Sea sunk (373 ff.)

are taken from Spenser(1) with so little disguise as to suggest that Milton was only too ready to make his literary allegiance plain to all except to the unpurged ears of the simple and illiterate. The Elder Brother's celebration of Chastity -

She that has that, is clad in compleat steel,  
And like a quiver'd Nymph with Arrows keen  
May trace huge Forests, and unharbour'd Heaths,  
Infamous Hills, and sandy perilous wildes - (421 ff.)

will lose half its effect on an audience which knows not

---

(9) Cf. Faerie Queene I, i, 32; I, i, 39 etc.

(1) Cf. Vertue gives her selfe light, through darknesse for to wade. F.Q. I, i. 12.

Belphoebe and Britomart nor that conception of the true wayfaring Christian set forth in Belphoebe's rebuke to Braggadichio (2) and afterwards celebrated by Milton in Areopagitica.

Yet it has been asserted that the Spenserianism of Comus is a thing of no account, mere lumber, "high-flown commonplace borrowed from the Elizabethans (which) was no doubt considered by the Bridgewaters as very suitable for their young people to represent".(3) All this nonsense, so we are assured, is effectively disposed of in the enchanter's great speech beginning:

Wherefore did Nature powre her bounties forth,  
which, in fact, represents Milton's real opinions. Another writer, without going so far as this, will have it that in Comus Milton has already assured himself of the insufficiency of mere Platonic doctrines. (4)

In this poem, then, we are asked to believe, Milton definitely repudiates that Spenserian influence which

---

(2) In woods, in waues, in warres she wonts to dwell,  
And will be found with perill and with paine;  
Ne can the man, that moulds in idle cell,  
Vnto her happie mansion attaine. F.Q.II.iii.41.

(3) Newbolt: A New Study of English Poetry, pp 204-05.

(4) R.L.Ramsay: Morality Themes in Milton's Poetry (Studies in Philology XV, 1918) pp.144-45.

was overwhelming in the Nativity Ode and which apparently has lost none of its force even so late as the Areopagitica. He is deriding a conception of poetry which he had already professed in the sixth elegy and which apparently inspired every subsequent poem, except of course such harmless squibs as the Hobson poems. If such was Milton's intention, it has been accomplished with a more than Euripidean subtlety; indeed the complexity and unsearchableness of the author of Comus surpasses even what we can believe of Shakespeare.

As for Plato, the trouble appears to be merely that in Milton we do not find the pure undiluted Platonism of the best modern text-books. Milton, in fact, did not set himself the task of establishing in all its details the philosophical system of a man who lived many years ago at Athens, carefully separating from that system all traces of more recent additions. His intent was simply to acquire ideas likely to be of use to a god-fearing man living in England in the seventeenth century. He was thus led to consider a body of doctrines which had long exercised a great influence on the thoughts of serious men and still continued to do so. Some of these notions might originally be derived

from Plato, but if others had developed or applied them in a manner more consonant with Christian sentiment they had by so much progressed further towards the ultimate truth. Hence Milton's Platonism might be derived from authors as recent as Spenser and Ficino, whilst the "spirit of Plato" which was to tell

of those Daemons that are found  
In fire, air, flood, or under ground

might be "unsphered" more likely from the pages of Hermes or Michael Paellus (5) than from the works of Plato himself. We shall not find the true Plato in Comus, but we shall find just what Milton had chosen to learn from Platonism; and we shall do well to remember that he had not finished with Platonism even so late as The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.

We cannot, therefore, accept this interpretation of Comus. There is nothing in the poem to suggest that Milton disagreed with Spenser, whereas there is every indication that he disagreed with another school of poets represented by such men as Randolph or Carew. If he had any quarrel

---

(5) See J.H.Hanford: The Chronology of Milton's Private Studies, P.M.L.A., XXXVI, p.290, and n.155; and The Youth of Milton in Studies in Shakespeare, Milton and Donne, New York, 1925. p. 150.

with Platonism, it was not with the serious Platonism of Spenser, but with the more frivolous kind which prevailed in courtly circles. It is impossible to miss his intention in putting into Comus's mouth the cant phrase "purer fire"(6) and in associating a delight in making "one blot of all the air" with the obscene orgies of the goddess of nocturnal sport.(7) Milton's insistence on<sup>^</sup>the sun-clad power of # chastity suggests that he was piqued by the cheap cynicism of Carew's Mercury:

Plutus, the gods know and confess your power,  
Which feeble virtue seldom can resist;  
Stronger than towers of brass or chastity. (8)

And his concluding lines,

if Vertue feeble were,  
Heav'n it self would stoop to her,

are in a different key from Carew's octosyllables:

Here the fair victorious eyes  
Make worth only Beauty's prize;  
Here the hand of Virtue ties  
'Bout the heart Love's amorous chain. (9)

Such verses help to explain why Milton so rigidly kept his own Virtue from all taint of eroticism.

---

(6) 111. Cf. Randolph's Eglogue to M. Johnson (Poems 1652) p.90 and Carew's Coelum Britannicum (Muses' Library) p.228.

(7) 133. Cf. Carew's stage direction: "Before the entry of every Antimasque, the stars in those figures in the sphere which they were to represent, were extinct; so as, by the end of the Antimasques, in the sphere no more stars were seen".

Ibid. p. 206.

(8) Ibid. p. 211.

(9) Ibid. p. 225.

The most obvious connection between Milton and the cavalier poets is, however, in the great speech of Comus to which we have already referred. Obviously Milton was acquainted with such passages as the following lines of Randolph:

nature has been bountifull  
 To provide pleasure, and shall we be niggards  
 At plentious boards? He's a discourteous guest  
 That will observe a dyet at a feast.  
 When nature thought the earth alone too little  
 To finde us meat, and therefore stor'd the ayr  
 With winged creature, not contented yet,  
 She made the water fruitfull to delight us.  
 Nay I believe the other Element too  
 Doth nurse some curious dainty for mans food;  
 If we would use the skill to catch the Salamander:  
 Did she do this to have us eat with temperance?  
 Or when she gave so many different Odors  
 Of spices, unguents, and all sorts of flowers,  
 She cry'd not...stop your noses: would she give us  
 So sweet a quire of wing'd Musitians  
 To have us deafe? or when she plac'd us here  
 Here in a Paradise, where such pleasing prospect,  
 So many ravishing colours, entice the eye,  
 Was it too have us winck? when she bestow'd  
 So powerfull faces, such commanding beauties  
 On many glorious Nymphs, was it to say  
 Be chast and continent? not to enjoy  
 All pleasure, and at full, were to make nature  
 Guilty of that she ne're was guilty of,  
 A vanity in her works. (1)

The close resemblance between this passage and the

---

(1) Muses' Looking-Glass, Act II Sc.iii (Ed.1652.p.29) Cf. Professor G.C.Moore Smith's letter in the Times Literary Supplement, January 19,1922.

speech of Comus is unfortunate for Sir Henry Newbolt's theory. If the enchanter's speech is Milton's tribute to "liberal manners", it is a left-handed one. If the noble audience applauded it - as Sir Henry supposes - from their hearts, they were gloriously deceived. For what has Milton done but adapt for them Colax's remarks in support of the very liberal sentiments of Acolastus:

I cannot see  
A fat voluptuous sow, with full delight  
Wallow in dirt, but I do wish my selfe  
Transform'd into that blessed Epicure.  
Or when I view the hot sollatious Sparrow  
Renew his pleasures with fresh appetite,  
I wish my selfe that little bird of love.

- But this adaptation is a very different thing from its original. Really all that Milton has borrowed from Randolph is the moral:

nature has been bountifull  
To provide pleasure, and shall we be niggards  
At plentious boards?

For the picture of Nature's fertility and luxuriance, which is the really impressive feature of Comus's speech, the poet of In Adventum Veris had no need to borrow of Randolph. And the richness of perception and the sincerity of this picture argue strongly against the possibility of Milton's

sharing Comus's and Randolph's (2) point of view. The man who had felt so deeply could not cheerfully accept so shallow a conclusion. It is not a conclusion which would readily commend itself to a sincere and honest man seriously working out his position. It savours rather of that intellectual flippancy which takes delight in putting together something which looks like a serious vindication of a very shocking thesis. These lines are obviously not put together in this way. Nor need we be dismayed to find that Milton can put Randolph's case better than Randolph himself, that he has so much more poetry as to argue a greater portion of the essential "experience" which poetry requires. For him it was a prime

---

(2) Randolph often reminds us of the poems of the Horton period. e.g. his "blythe, buxome and deboneere" (Aristippus ed. 1652, p.17), his barley-breaks and triumphs of knights and barons (Poems, p.105), his Goblins, Elves etc. (p.115), and his frolic wind (p.94). Yet there is sufficient difference in tone to suggest what a different poem L'Allegro would have been had it been written by Sir Henry Newbolt's Comus-Milton. In Comus Milton seems to remember Randolph's frequent cynical allusions to the dragon and the Hesperian fruit. (Poems. p.54, Muses' Looking-Glass, p.32, Amyntas, p.5), whilst a remark of the Lady seems to remember

vertue sure  
Were blind as fortune, should shee choose the poore  
Rough cottage man to live in. (Poems. p.130)

The whole tone of the poem is a protest against such sentiments as

barren base Virginitie, (Poems. p.97)  
and Virginitie (whereof chaste fools do boast;  
A thing not known what 'tis, till it be lost) (Poems.  
p.53)

with its Elizabethan commonplace of leading Baboons in hell.

condition of virtue that he should see and know, even though he yet abstained. Because Milton's was not a "blank virtue", a mere "excremental whiteness", there is not need to reckon him forthwith of the devil's party. So far, indeed, from indicating his adherence to the party of Randolph, these lines are specially remarkable as affording some indication of his reasons for thinking so highly of Spenser.

To suppose that Spenser supplied him with "high-flown commonplace" very suitable for the young Bridgewaters to perform but altogether without appeal to the mature experience of grown men is to misunderstand both poets. Was the admiration of Sidney and Raleigh mere childishness? And what is it in the works of such men as Randolph and Carew which marks them out as more experienced in the world of men than the author of Mother Hubberds Tale and the Veue of the Present State of Ireland? To Milton, at any rate, the teaching of Spenser was no high-flown commonplace, and Milton admired it simply because it differed so much from the cloistered and fugitive systematising of scholastic philosophers. It was the Spenser who destroyed the Bower of Bliss who could also create the Garden of Adonis. Spenser, like Milton, was as keenly aware as were such men as Randolph

of the exuberant fecundity of Nature. But though each may have "recognised in himself the same generous forces as in vegetation and the luxuriance of animal generation" (3) neither had the amplitude of imaginative sympathy which might lead them to desire to be transformed into one of Comus's epicurean rout. Yet Spenser, and Milton too, could ardently desire a state of things where love might be an unerring light and joy its own security.

Comus obviously was not the place to explain how the conceptions of the Garden of Adonis differed from those of Randolph, and unfortunately Milton, even for dramatic purposes, could not be shallow. He could not quite hit off Randolph's superficiality and bravura. Yet we must notice that Comus's speech, as first conceived, lacked much of the potency which it now possesses. At first all his arguments had been gathered together in a long prepared harangue, a piece of fine language learnt for the occasion. Morals apart, the Lady has a perfect right to be annoyed at this unprovoked display of eloquence, and in a few well-chosen

---

(3) D.Saurat: Milton, Man and Thinker. p. 15.

words she drives the charlatan from his declamatory heights. To his sententious generalising,

This will restore all soon,

she replies impatiently but to the point,

'Twill not restore the truth and honesty

which (with that touch of asperity so necessary in dealing with those for whom polite language serves only to evade ugly facts) Comus himself has already lost. His arguments are not worth answering. What is this pampered child of luxury to know of the true laws of nature? These will be best understood by those just men, now pining with want, who have serious work to do and who could assure him that there is no need to fear the possibility of earth's becoming encumbered with her store. Comus now loses his temper and reverts to his native idiom:

Come y'are too morall.  
This is mere morall stuff, the very lees  
And settlings of a melancholy blood.

But this scene, the dramatic centre of the whole poem, could hardly be left in this form. Obviously the whole thing would lose interest if Comus at this crisis were to be allowed to bore the Lady and the audience with this long recital. So Milton breaks up this speech, rearranging it and

inserting remarks by the Lady. She, in becoming thus verbal, not only forgets a lady's manners, but by bandying words with him sets herself on level terms with Comus. In this encounter Comus now obviously comes off best. Instead of boorishly thrusting upon us a prepared speech, he now speaks like a man inspired, the words come naturally to him as the occasion demands. He must really believe what he says to be thus able to meet triumphantly every objection. As for the Lady, her remark,

I had not thought to have unlockt my lips  
In this unhallow'd air,

now sounds somewhat foolish since she has already unlocked them twice to some purpose. And since virtue has thus insisted on having her share of the discussion it is but unreasoning petulance to protest:

I hate when vice can bolt her arguments,  
And vertue has no tongue to check her pride.

Milton seems to have realised what he had done, and it would appear that he was endeavouring to restore the balance when he added to the Lady's part the important lines:

Shall I go on?

Or have I said enough? To him that dares  
 Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words  
 Against the Sun-clad power of Chastity,  
 Fain would I something say, yet to what end?  
 Thou hast nor Eare, nor Soul to apprehend  
 The sublime notion, and high mystery  
 That must be utter'd to unfold the sage  
 And serious doctrine of Virginitie,  
 And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know  
 More happiness then this thy present lot.  
 Enjoy` your deer Wit, and gay Rhetorick  
 That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence,  
 Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinc't;  
 Yet should I try, the uncontrouled worth  
 Of this pure cause would kindle my rap't spirits  
 To such a flame of sacred vehemence,  
 That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathise,  
 And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,  
 Till all thy magick structures rear'd so high,  
 Were shatter'd into heaps o're thy false head.(779 ff.)

We may admit that this is "ingenuously bald and confiding" and that such lines have little of the lyric ravishment which characterises the preceding speech of Comus. But to conclude therefore that Comus, and not the Lady, speaks with the voice of Milton is a capital error. In fact wherever bald confidingness is found in the works of Milton, it is always possible to detect the presence of that "superior power" which Comus himself discovered in the Lady's words. (4) It is found in the sixth elegy, in a

---

(4) Comus, 800 ff.

very important letter to Diodati (5) and in well-known passages in The Reason of Church Government and An Apology for Smectymnuus. And nowhere do we get nearer to Milton than in these passages, especially in those where he tells of ideas and aspirations which cannot fitly be expressed as yet or in such a place. And so it seems that the Lady in Comus is dramatically ineffectual simply because she represents Milton so completely. Such phrases as "blind mouths" for example are quite Miltonic, but "Fool" is not therefore fit language for a Lady. In her the valiant crusading of her maker must be regarded merely as a breach of good manners. The "time serves not yet" of The Reason of Church Government and its out-of-hand condemnation of "libidinous poetasters" and "vulgar amourists" must be taken at their face value by reason of the Paradise Lost which followed. But in the dramatic economy of Comus the Lady has no circle of private studies to fulfil and the audience have no reason to expect that she will write a similar poem. Therefore her declaration of what she could do but won't reads like a paltry

---

(5) September 23, 1637.

evasion. It must be our imagination and not hers. Comus is himself a poet, and he therefore cannot fail to be impressed by great poetry in potentiâ, but the audience will not be thus affected.

We, however, who are not concerned with dramatic effect, may notice two things: first, that the Lady professes a "sage and serious" doctrine; and, second, that she accuses her enemy of shallowness. The creatures of our poet's imagination are not thus Miltonically touched but to Miltonic issues.

5.

Lycidas affords ample evidence of Milton's lack of sympathy with mere shallowness and also of his continued interest in the poet who was to him the "sage and serious" teacher par excellence. Exquisitely artificial as it is, Lycidas is also a very sincere and deeply-felt poem. But it must be understood in the right sense - as a manifesto, that is, not as an elegy. The untimely death of King led Milton to express the customary regrets, but it also had the more important result of causing him to consider what

use he himself was making of the life which had been spared to him. Thus he reviews his own position, expressing his judgment on the Church which he has abandoned and setting forth his hopes and fears concerning the poetic career he has chosen. The speech of St. Peter, we have seen, is indebted to Dante, but it owes something also to the passage in Spenser's May eclogue which Milton afterwards quoted in the Animadversions. (6) And certainly it was Spenser who had chiefly guided him to the conception of the "homely slighted shepherd's trade", which he here presents. (7)

His contemptuous "scrannel pipes of wretched straw" is, like Spenser's reference to Tom Piper, "an Ironicall Sarcasmus, spoken in derision of these rude wits, whych make more account of ryming rybaud, then of skill grounded vpon learning and iudgment." (8) Milton does not wish his poetry to be praised by weak wits -

So praysen babes the Peacoks spotted traine: (9)  
he will devise no "dapper ditties to feed youth's fancy," (1)

---

(6) P.W.III,84. Maye 103 ff.

(7) Cf. June. 67.

(8) E.K's gloss on October 78.

(9) October 31.

(i) Ibid. 13-14.

no songs of Amaryllis or Naeara. Even his own Comus would have agreed with Spenser that poetry might go beyond bereaving men's souls of sense.(2) Poetry must set itself a loftier ideal, one that this degenerate age can hardly appreciate. But to what end?

who would euer care to doo braue deed,  
Or striue in vertue others to excell;  
If none should yeeld him his deserued meed,  
Due praise, that is the spur of dooing well? (3)

The hope of material reward is out of the question, but even the noblest mind may surely attach some importance to the praise of one's fellow-men.(4)

From this last infirmity of noble mind Milton was more free than Spenser, who always hankered after Court favour. But he handles it gently for Spenser's sake. Obviously he had taken counsel with Spenser on the matter, and some phrases of Spenser had lingered in his memory. "The spur of doing well" is one of these. Another may be detected in the line:

Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,

---

(2) October. 27.

(3) Teares of the Muses 451 ff.

(4) October 19.

which is an obvious echo of Spenser's

Comes the breme winter with chamfred browes. (5)

Even the phrase "blind fury" seems to have been taken from Spenser, (6) and Milton must have been particularly impressed by it to apply it so improperly to Atropos.

Lycidas, as we have already seen, is very much indebted to Virgil, and in fact bears something of the same relationship to Paradise Lost that Virgil's Eclogues bear to the Aeneid. The pastorals of other Renaissance poets, however, were also modelled on the Virgilian pattern and were similarly intended as precursors to some great epic. That Milton succeeded where others failed is due in some measure to the fact that, with him, the teaching of Vida was supplemented by that of Spenser. Milton's study of The Shepheardes Calender is very important, since the author of The Shepheardes Calender came nearer to Virgil's own intentions than the majority of latter-day pastoralists. For Spenser's object was not merely to exercise himself in an approved though not very exacting form of verse, preparing himself thereby to pass on to a greater work. He sought rather, even as Virgil

---

(5) Februarie. 43.

(6) Ruines of Rome. 323.

had done, to add something to his native literature, to enlarge its scope, to bring it into line with the great classical literatures, to demonstrate the high capabilities of his own language. In this Milton succeeded more completely than his master. The art of The Shepherdes Calender is not that of the Eclogues, whereas Lycidas will bear comparison with anything. But the more Lycidas goes beyond Spenser, and the more nearly it approaches Virgil, so much the more completely does it fulfil Spenser's own intention.

Milton was an accomplished writer of Latin verse, and though he had done but little of late, the Epitaphium Damonis was to be written not long afterwards. Yet the most Virgilian example of his art, written as it was for an academic audience, was in English. The significance of this more appears when we remember his solicitude for the well-being of the vernacular, as expressed in the letter to Buonmattai, and his assurance to Manso of the importance and antiquity of the English muse:

Sed neque nos genus incultum, nec inutile Phoebus.

Did not Tityrus tread those shores of old? There is a special propriety therefore in Milton's invocation of the "sisters of the sacred well". Chaucer had made Helicon a well,

in spite of Boccaccio;(7) and so had Spenser, though E.K. had heard also of a mountain so called. (8) Milton does not name his well, but there is just that touch of reminiscence in his invocation which gives his Muses a definitely English connection. Thus Lycidas foreshadows much of Milton's later development. The form is Virgilian but the impulse is derived in no small measure from Spenser. Virgil may be taken as the standard of art to which the English epic should aspire. But for the ideas and aspirations which such an epic should enshrine, he turns for guidance to the chiefest bard of his own country. He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things had need not only of good models but of sage and serious teachers.

6.

On his Italian travels Milton would find Spenser more useful to him than any other English poet. No other had been so deeply affected by Italian culture. No other could help him to understand the importance of romance

---

(7) Hous of Fame 521; Anelida and Arcite 15. See Skeat's note to the latter passage.

(8) April 42. Cf. Herford's note.

to a man of such exalted poetic ideas as Tasso. No other poet could so fully reveal to him the importance of the Italian discussions on the relation of Romance to the Epic. It is hard to suppose that he who wrote to Manso of his own Arthurian project should not have been led to mention Spenser's peculiar treatment of this favourite figure of Tasso. Some talk of Spenser they must have had, or how should Manso know of Tityrus? For who could Tityrus be but the Tityrus of the Shepherdes Calender? (9) Like Spenser, Milton intends to carry on the tradition of his native poetry.

In the prose works there are but few references to Spenser, and these throw but little light on Milton's poetic intentions. The quotation from the May eclogue in the Animadversions and the mention of the Cave of Mammon, (1) like the allusion to Talus in Eikonoklastes, (2) illustrate the regard for Spenser as a moral teacher which Milton professed in Areopagitica, but they afford no evidence of his interest in Spenser as a poet.

It is in Paradise Lost itself that we must look

---

(9) - Februarie 92. See E.K's note.

(1) P.W. III. 84, 81.

(2) P.W. 1. 346.

for signs of Milton's continued study of Spenser during this period. Those who can lightly dismiss Dryden's assertion that Spenser was Milton's original must surely underestimate the force of the echoes of Spenser's phraseology which are to be found almost on every page of that poem. Such phrases as "gentle purpose", "addressed for fight", "swim in mirth" (3) immediately recall the manner of the Faerie Queene. So too does the use of such words as casts, gride, wons, dreadless, battailous. (4) Plays upon words like arm and harm, fruitless and fruit, (5) and such antitheses as semblance and substance, war and guile (6) also seem to be derived from Spenser. Then there are words and phrases from the Italian - high disdain, impurpled, the matter of my song, travelled, sdeined, intelligence (angel), inclined (bowed), emprise (7) and the like.

- 
- (3) P.L.IV, 337, F.Q.III, viii, 14; P.L.VI, 296, F.Q.V. ii. 12; P.L.IX, 1009, F.Q. I, xii, 41, II, iii. 40.
- (4) P.L.III, 634, F.Q. passim; P.L.VI, 329, F.Q. II, viii, 36. P.L.VII, 457, F.Q. passim; P.L.VI, 1, F.Q.V, iii, ii; P.L.VI, 81 F.Q. I. v. 2, See also P.L.IX, 890. F.Q. I, ii, 15 and III, iii, 17; P.L.II. 683, F.Q. II, vii, 42; P.L.VI, 362, F.Q. I, xi, 20 etc.
- (5) P.L.VI, 656, F.Q. I xi, 27; P.L.IX, 648, F.Q. II, vii, 55.
- (6) P.L.I. 529, F.Q. II. ix, 2; P.L.II. 41, F.Q. II, xi, 7, VII, vi, 21. Cf. also P.L.IV, 108, F.Q. I. v. 43.
- (7) P.L.I. 98, F.Q. I. i. 19; P.L.III, 364, F.Q. III, vii, 17; P.L. III, 413, F.Q. III, iv, 3; P.L. III, 501, January argument; P.L. IV. 50, F.Q. passim; P.L.VIII, 181, H.H. Beautie, 84; P.L. XI, 250; F.Q. V. ix, 34; P.L. XI, 642 (638 in Beeching's text) F.Q. I, ix. 1.

Most of these are recognisably Spenserian. Such phrases, however, as "adamantine chains", "tempestuous fire" and "avenging ire" (8) are more characteristically Miltonic. So also we should hardly expect such Latinism as reign (kingdom), secrets (secret places), defends, (9) or such unusual constructions as "the only sound of leaves" and "the subjected plain" to be supported by Spenser. (1) Thus it is also in the incidents and situations of Paradise Lost. That the love of Adam and Eve should owe something to the Faerie Queene and Epithalamion (2) might be expected, and it is not surprising that the wars in Heaven show some recollection of Spenserian combats (3), but the flames dividing before Satan, the rage of the infernal hosts and Adam's conduct on hearing of Eve's trespass are less obvious occasions for such recollection(4)

- 
- (8) P.L. I.48. Hymne of Love, 89: P.L. I, 77, VII, 184, Hymne of Heavenly Beauty, 181-82.
- (9) P.L. I, 543, F.Q. II, vii, 21; P.L. II, 972, F.Q. VI, xii, 24; P.L. XII, 207, F.Q. II, xii, 63.
- (1) P.L. V, 5, F.Q. V. xi, 30; P.L. XII, 640, F.Q. I, xi, 19.
- (2) P.L. V. 44, IX, 453, F.Q. III, xi, 45, II, vi, 24; P.L. IV, 605, V, 17, Epithalamion, 288, 74.
- (3) P.L. VI, 100, F.Q. L, v, 2; P.L. VI, 189, F.Q. II, viii, 33; P.L. VI 193, F.Q. VI, iv, 5; P.L. VI, 257, F.Q. V. iv, 45; P.L. VI, 296, F.Q. V. ii, 12; P.L. VI, 327, F.Q. IV, iii, 9; P.L. VI, 362, F.Q. I xi, 20; P.L. VI, 368; F.Q. I, vi, 43; P.L. VI, 576, F.Q. V, i, 12; P.L. VI, 656, F.Q. I, xi, 27. See also Mammon P.L. I, 684 ff., F.Q. II vii. 36.
- (4) P.L. I, 222, F.Q. III xi, 25; P.L. I, 666, F.Q. I, iv, 40; P.L. IX, 892, F.Q. III, iv, 30. Cf. P.L. V, 472. Hymne of Heavenly Beauty, 43.

7.

When Milton celebrated Spenser as a sage and serious teacher, he was not influenced by the mere fact that Spenser wrote allegories with a moral significance. Such things may be found abundantly in the works of many monastic writers of the middle ages - fugitive and cloistered virtue-mongers for whom Milton had no great regard. The author of Areopagitica would not sequester into simplified codifications of virtues and vices. Good and evil grow up so inseparably in this world of ours that without evil there can be no good. Our business is to ordain wisely in the world of evil in which we find ourselves, not to make to ourselves a small moral world of our own. The possibility of error is a glorious challenge to man's spirit of adventure: we can only achieve greatly by daring greatly. Virtue is conquest, not avoidance. A dram of well-doing is of more effect than many times as much forcible hindrance of evil-doing.

Milton's praise of Spenser is illustrated by a reference to the second book of the Faerie Queene, and if we may judge from the number of reminiscences found in Paradise Lost this book probably affected Milton very deeply. It has

a heavy sobriety of tone which marks it out from the other completed books. It is not conceived in terms of the ordinary love-story of romance. Guyon's guide is not a gentle lady but a prosaic Palmer. An angel is sent from heaven to protect him. The usual aiders and abettors of Spenser's knights were not potent enough for one who had strayed boldly from the land of faery to explore hell and the other portions of the infernal regions. Here Spenser reaches out towards the Inferno and the sixth Aeneid. Here obviously therefore, he is on ground which Milton also need not fear to tread.

In one other place only does Spenser's Muse forget the task she had assigned him - to sing of Knights' and Ladies' gentle deeds - and that is in the Mutabilitie cantos. And if Spenser considered himself all too mean even for his original task, he could justly complain at being borne up aloft to tell of things done in heaven far past the memory of man. Here we have to do with things of more than ordinary importance. Spenser can even compare his own awe in this unfamiliar region with that which fell upon the apostles at the Transfiguration.(5) And in truth his is a

---

(5) F.Q. VII.vii.7.

universal theme, a tale not of knights and ladies but of deities in council. The whole of nature's governance is assailed by a threatened return of Chaos. (6) But it is a theme beyond Spenser's powers. Though he rises to Miltonic heights at the end, he is still unsatisfied. He sees that all things around, even the best and fairest, are subject to Mutability, yet he cannot believe that Mutability is the ultimate power.

When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare,  
Of Mutability, and well it way:  
Me seemes, that though she all vnworthy were  
Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet very sooth to say,  
In all things else she beares the greatest sway.  
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,  
And loue of things so vaine to cast away;  
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,  
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,  
Of that same time when no more Change shall be,  
But stedfast rest of all things firmly stayd  
Vpon the pillours of Eternity,  
That is contrayr to Mutabilitie:  
For, all that moueth, doth in Change delight:  
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally  
With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:  
O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabbaoths sight.

Now, in truth, neither Spenser nor Milton could thus heroically cast away the "love of things so vain". The

---

(6) F.Q. VII.vi.14.

world they saw about them was fair and lovely. True it was that the pursuit of beauty might lead men astray. Ought we therefore to disregard it? Must the lover of real truth and goodness be indifferent to it? Neither Milton nor Spenser could bring himself to think so. However much the wayfaring Christian in this world of evil may be called upon to resist its seductive power, both poets felt that beauty was an essential part of ultimate truth and goodness. We have already remarked how Spenser, who could destroy the Bower of Bliss, yet makes use of this symbol of a garden paradise in very different circumstances elsewhere. There are, for example, the gardens in the Hymne of Love and in the fourth book of the Faerie Queene, and chief of all there is the Garden of Adonis. (7) In these is endless delight but no fear therefore of being led to do amiss. Here decay or sin is unknown. Love is indeed an unerring light and joy its own security. This Spenser conceives to be the real intention of things. Yet this state is not found on earth, where all is subject to the enemy Time. How can these things be reconciled? Spenser's explanation is a pretty piece of Pythagorean fancy. We are exposed to Time's blasts only for a period; then we shall return to the Garden

---

(7) Hymne of Love, 280; F.Q. IV.x.21; III,vi,29.

again. And we shall continue this process through endless cycles.(8)

In the Mutabilitie fragment, however, he approaches the question in another mood. No longer is he satisfied with perpetual succession - "eterne in mutability". 'Tis true many of Earth's best treasures come from mutability. Mutability can bring on her behalf the procession of months and seasons, the interchange of Day and Night - things which make Earth lovely to the poet's eye. But she also brings life and death. And death is not now regarded in a pleasant Pythagorean light. It is no simple change of state. It represents decay and ruination - all that is opposed to creativeness. The reign of Mutability threatens the return of Chaos. Since Mutability reigns on earth can we be sure of the great unchanged above? What if Mutability were mistress also of the Heavens?

Milton's answer is contained in Paradise Lost. He, like Spenser, felt the abundance and fertility of nature quite as much as any of the rout of Comus, and he recognised in himself "the same generous forces". He could,

---

(8) F. Q. III, vi, 32-33.

therefore, easily conceive how simple ought to be the relationship between man and nature: that it ought, in fact, to be precisely what Comus had presented it as being. But since the earth is not a Garden of Adonis, it would appear that the ways of God herein need some justification. This is to be found in the fact that God had originally created earth such a garden. Hence Milton's insistence on the lasting Spring and the unreproved pleasure of Eden. That this paradise exists no longer is due solely to man who has rejected the proffered boon. The terms upon which it might have been retained matter little to Milton. So long as they were intelligible and easy to keep, God had done all that could be required of Him. Thus Milton insists on man's free-will and shows that by his fall the whole face of nature has been changed. But this unfortunate and abnormal condition on earth ought not to diminish our faith in the God of Sabbaoth. Mutability cannot seize upon the heavens, since none can be subject to her but those who have willingly accepted her dominion.

8.

Milton's explanation, as he would readily have admitted, is not original. All this was contained in the

Bible. How can we be sure then that he was indeed seeking to resolve Spenser's difficulty, and not merely working out the doctrine implied in the early chapters of Genesis? True it is that he lays stress on the points requisite for such a solution, but this may be mere accident. Indeed the very fact of his choosing a biblical subject, and the form in which he embodied it, may be taken as marking a great falling-off in his interest in Spenser.

But Spenser, we must remember wrote other poems besides the Faerie Queene. It was not his romantic fictions which had originally moved Milton to write the Nativity Ode and inspired those other exceptional outbursts, The Passion and The Circumcision. If we return to the Hymne of Heavenly Love, we shall find that the scheme set forth therein includes not only a Christiad but also the story of the fall of men and angels. Milton's experimental poems deal only with events in the life of Christ, and we have no means of knowing whether he hoped to deal with the Fall also or not. Yet in the Nativity Ode, the most comprehensive of these poems, we find that Spenser's balanced scheme is more or less implied. The true subject of the poem is Paradise Regained:

the Saviour's coming is expected to restore the former age of innocence. Though this is not in fact accomplished, it is the wilful suspension of disbelief in such an event which provides the material of the poem. Indeed Milton's anxiety to make the most of the phenomena which attended the Saviour's birth accords but ill with his sober knowledge that these things avail naught since the age of gold will not return until the second advent.

Thus in this poem the whole future development of Milton is foreshadowed. He, the arch-idealist, cannot wait for the second advent. The age of gold is the prime necessity of his genius. He cannot sequester into Atlantic and Utopian polities, but must have his paradise here and now. In his early days at Cambridge he could lay before his hearers a way of life which would enable them to listen to the music of the spheres. And now that he has once again found his true vocation, the silver chime again seems to bless his ears. If only it would last, time would run back and fetch the age of gold. And in spite of wisest Fate, Milton would not take "No" for an answer. He could not. Speckled vanity and leprous sin must melt away from the earth. If Christ had not accomplished this, then Christ

could not be the subject of Milton's epic. And so, unknowing what he did, Milton demanded from the religious devotion of the English people that which Christ Himself had not performed. By hook or by crook it was imperative that the full consummation of God's purpose on earth should be brought to pass in time for Milton to sing thereof in new and lofty measures amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints.

Paradise Lost, therefore, may be the fulfilment of the first part of the scheme propounded in the Hymne of Heavenly Love, but more especially it is the token of Milton's inability to carry out the second and more important part of the design. This is suggested partly by the title - which gave Elwood his cue - but even more by the whole framework of the poem. Paradise Lost is not merely a tragedy: throughout it looks forward to a great future restoration. Without this the design is incomplete. And since this restoration is not yet accomplished, the poem is not so much a justification of God and His ways to men as a plea to God to make it possible for Milton to justify Him. Undoubtedly the poet has done all that he could. Paradise Lost is a monument of his life-long

struggle against Satan. Yet Satan is triumphant. Milton seems to have been half-aware of this and to have been much perturbed by the very completeness of his own self-justification. When the commander of an outpost can show that he has done all that is possible with the forces at his disposal, the blame for any lack of success must lie with headquarters.

Perhaps he might have been more successful had he not been so anxious to present the original paradise as a Garden of Adonis. He might then have found that paradise had been regained for true Christians, if only in idea. Happier far it might be than the other, since man through knowing good and evil had gained a nobler conception of pleasure. The joys of paradise might be known on earth at a solemn music, for example. But having presented Eden as it is presented in Paradise Lost, it was too much to expect that men should be satisfied with Michael's assurance of "a paradise within thee happier far". Milton was uneasy about it. As an experiment probably, he submitted the poem to Elwood.

"Thou hast said much here of 'Paradise Lost', but what hast thou to say of 'Paradise Found'?" Elwood's re-

mark abundantly justified Milton's worst fears. To that extent the worthy Quaker is entitled to the credit of having suggested Paradise Regained. But he can hardly have realised the trial of faith to which his chance remark had condemned Milton. "He made me no answer," Elwood reports, "but sat some time upon a muse; then brake off that discourse and fell upon another subject." It is not for nothing that Paradise Regained has been compared to the Book of Job. Milton is no dealer in empty piety. His is no vacuous and forthright acceptance of God's works, but a faith which burns more fervently by conflict with difficulties which the conventionally pious have not wit enough to perceive or perhaps lack courage to face.

Like Job however he could not justify himself in the eyes of men. He produced such a Paradise Regained as he could in true faith and honesty. His Christ is presented not as the Saviour who restores paradise by taking upon Him the sins of the world. Such a conception might be acceptable to most people, but it comes too near to justifying the doctrine of Comus. To relieve man of his sins may suggest a restoration of man's original irresponsibility. So Milton's Christ is presented rather as a model

to all those sons of Adam who would enjoy the paradise within them. A wayfaring Christian Himself, He shows the way to attain the only paradise which the wayfaring Christian can know on earth. It is impossible that Milton should have believed this poem to be as completely successful as Paradise Lost. But he "could not hear with patience" a work which meant so much to him lightly decried by the shallow ignorance of public opinion.

9.

Milton's choice of subject, then, does not prove that he had forgotten Spenser. On the other hand it may be the outcome of his continued meditations on that poem of Spenser which had inspired the first serious efforts of his muse. There seems to be ample evidence that Milton's study of the Bible story was affected by his reading of Spenser and especially of the Hymnes. Spenser's suggestions in setting and motivation have coloured his conception of the events related in Paradise Lost. The result may be a more perfectly ordered and more lucid whole, but it is different from what we find in Genesis.

In the Hymne of Heavenly Love, as in Paradise

Lost, the universe is pictured as a pantheistic monism:

Before this worlds great frame, in which al things  
Are now containd, found any being place  
Ere flitting Time could wag his eyas wings  
About that mightie bound, which doth embrace  
The rolling Spheres, and parts their houres by space,  
That high eternal powre, which now doth moue  
In all these things, mou'd in it selfe by loue.

There is of course no Arianism in Spenser. The Son is begotten before the creation of angels. But his phrase "elder than thine own nativity" (9) reminds us of Milton's two-fold interpretation of the word "beget" in the Treatise of Christian Doctrine, (1) and suggests the frame of mind in which we should regard Abdiel's attempt to establish the Son as "the eldest of the heavenly Peers" (2) We may note also, in the passage quoted, the phrase "moved in itself" as indicating a similar characteristic of infinite existence to that postulated by God's withdrawing into a part of Himself in Paradise Lost. (3)

Spenser places the heaven which is the abode of the angels outside the "round heaven" of the sidereal universe. (4) Apparently also "deepest hell and lake of damned fire" were also to be found in this outer region since, Earth

---

(9) Hymne of Love, 54.

(1) P.W.IV.80.

(2) Hymne of Love, 56, P.L.V, 832 ff.

(3) P.L.VII.170 ff.

(4) H.H.Love, 57 ff; H.H.Beauty, 64 ff.

was not yet created at the time of Satan's fall.(5) Spenser does not say so, but in attempting to realise the position Milton was led to this conclusion (6) Also before the world's great frame found any being space there was apparently existing in the "high eternal power" or co-existing with it, an ugly prison known as Chaos (7) Things in Chaos were hidden from heaven's view, yet heavenly love could work in it. So was the world created.

The story of the Fall given in the Hymne of Heavenly Love corresponds very closely with that in Paradise Lost. The angels in the heavenly kingdom, for example, are employed in much the same way. (8) The motive of Satan's rebellion is pride,(9), and it is to supply the waste and empty place left by the fall of the angels that earth is established as a "colony" of heaven. (1) The rebels, it should particularly be noted, are cast out not by Michael, but by the breath of God.(2)

The Hymne of Heavenly Love, however, affords

- 
- (5) H.H.Love. 89.  
(6) Treatise of Christian Doctrine. P.W.IV.490.  
(7) Hymne of Love, 57. ff.  
(8) H.H.Love, 57. ff.  
(9) Ibid. 78 ff.  
(1) Ibid., 99 ff.  
(2) Ibid., 87.

but a synopsis and gives few hints for the characterisation of the chief actor in these events. Spenser has dealt largely with the wiles of Satan elsewhere, but the disguises in which the arch-enemy appears in the Faerie Queene would, one might have thought, have prevented him from exercising any notable influence on Paradise Lost. When Milton, with Dante in his mind, presented Satan in the Nativity Ode as a dragon underground, he very naturally thought also of the dragon encountered by the Red Cross Knight. But the Satan of Paradise Lost has so little in common with Dante's monster that it is surprising to find that he also owes something to Spenser's dragon.

His "sail-broad vans" (3) were probably a reminiscence of the following lines:

His flaggy wings when forth he did display,  
Were like two sayles, in which the hollow wynd  
Is gathered full, and worketh speedy way:  
And eke the pennes, that did his pineous bynd,  
Were like mayne-yards, with flying canuas lynd. (I.xi,10)

Spenser insists on the "unusual weight" (4) imposed upon the air by such a monster:

Then with his wauing wings displayed wyde,  
Himselfe vp high he lifted from the ground,  
And with strong flight did forcibly diuide  
The yielding aire, which nigh too feeble found  
Her flitting partes, and element vnsound,  
To beare so great a weight. (I.xi,18.)

---

(3) P.L.II, 927.

(4) P.L.I, 227.

x. Cf. however Petrarch Sonnet 262:  
Fior, frondi, erbe, ombre, antri, onde, aere soavi,  
Valli chiusi, alti colle, e piagge apriche.  
and P.L. II, 621

The description of the dragon's mode of progression,

Halfe flying, and halfe footing in his hast, (I,xi,8.)  
was obviously remembered by Milton,(5) who learned also from  
Spenser the use of the closely packed line to suggest the  
difficulty of his journey: (6)

Faint, wearie, sore, emboyled, griemed, brent  
With heat, toyle, wounds, armes, smart and inward fire.  
(I,xi,28)

The fight between Abdiel and Satan has little in common  
with that between the Red Cross Knight and the Dragon, but  
Satan's recoil suggests to Milton a simile obviously remember-  
ed from Spenser's description of the overthrow of the dragon.(7)

Of the other characters in Paradise Lost Sin and  
Death are the most obviously Spenserian. Their allegorical  
intention alone would suggest the influence of Spenser, even  
if Sin did not bear a recognisable likeness to Error,(8) and  
even if Death did not share with his namesake in the  
Mutabilitie fragment the unusual qualities of a lack of shape  
combined with grimness of feature.(9)

---

(5) P.L. II, 941.

(6) P.L. II, 948. \*

(7) P.L. VI, 195 ff. Cf. F.Q. I, xi, 54.

(8) P.L. II, 650 ff; F.Q. I, i, 14-15.

(9) P.L. II, 666 ff.; F.Q. VII, vii, 46. In P.L. II, 675-845 there  
are at least eight reminiscences of the Faerie Queene.

The style of Paradise Lost, like its form, is rather in the manner of Virgil than of Spenser. The difference between Milton and Spenser is due in no small measure to the essential differences in their chosen instruments. The Spenserian stanza is made to echo and re-echo; in blank verse the essential is continuity, sequaciousness. The one expands by accretion, the other by dilation. The one is contrapunctal, moving by free imitation between parts and always tending to move in a circle; the other is harmonic, progressing by modulation.

This is the manner of Spenser: (1)

Beside his head there sate a faire young man,  
 Of wondrous beautie, and of freshest yeares,  
 Whose tender bud to blossome new began,  
 And flourish faire about his equall peares;  
 His snowy front curled with golden heares,  
 Like Phoebus face adorned with sunny rayes,  
 Diuinely shone, and two sharpe winged sheares,  
 Decked with diuerse plumes, like painted layes,  
 Were fixed at his backe, to cut his ayerie wayes. (II, viii, 5)

This is obviously in the early suite-form, the parts well disposed and plenty of imitation between right hand and left. The first line tells us that the young man was fair and young, the second that he was fair and young. Again we

---

(1) This stanza is cited by Raleigh in this connection, Milton. p. 200.

are told that he was so young that he was only just beginning to be - fair (which is the theme of the fourth line and played by the other hand); added to this we have the assurance of the fifth that he indeed was fair. Then we modulate; the seventh and eighth lines add a new detail. The ninth adds nothing fresh, since it might be assumed that his wings were mounted as they should be and intended for their obvious purpose. These in fact are but the cadence bars intended to confirm the new key, with the little flourish at the end which regularly precedes the double bar and repeat.

And this is Milton's manner:

And now a stripling Cherube he appeers,  
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face  
Youth smil'd Celestial, and to every Limb  
Sutable grace diffus'd, so well he feigned;  
Under a Coronet his flowing haire  
In curles on either cheek plaid, wings he wore  
Of many a colourd plume sprinkl'd with Gold,  
His habit fit for speed succinct, and held  
Before his decent steps a Silver wand. (III,636 ff.)

Milton does not tell us much more than Spenser, though he takes just as many lines. Nor, for that matter, do the opening bars of a sonata of Beethoven always tell us much more than a corresponding number of bars in one of Bach's

---

Allemandes. Often the period doublings of Milton and of Virgil may logically be considered as something like repetition.(2) But there is a vast emotional difference between these "repetitions" and Spenser's. Those make suspension more suspended; these give the satisfying and obvious rejoinder. There is in Milton as in Virgil a different sense of motion, a sense of leading somewhere. They never play the usual tricks upon us and then lead us no further than the dominant or the relative major. There is in them that "sequaciousness", that power of rare and unexpected "integration" which we feel in the beginning of the Waldstein Sonata.

The Spenserian manner obviously would not do for Paradise Lost. Take this passage, for example:

why do I overlive,  
Why am I mockt with death, and length'nd out  
To deathless pain? how gladly would I meet  
Mortalitie my sentence, and be Earth  
Insensible, how glad would lay me down  
As in my Mothers lap? there I should rest  
And sleep secure. (X.773 ff.)

Then imagine these wild disconcerting leaps translated into something as neat and compact as:

Why doo I longer liue in lifes despight?  
And doo not dye then in despight of death:

---

(2) Cf. S.E. Winbolt: Latin Hexameter Verse, 1903, Appendix: Theme and Variation in Virgil, pp. 261-63.

Why doo I longer see this loathsome light,  
And doo in darknesse not abridge my breath,  
Sith all my sorrow should haue end thereby,  
And cares finde quiet; is it so vneath  
To leaue this life, or dolorous to dye?

(Daphnaida, 442 ff.)

It is like attempting to rewrite the elemental opening of the Appassionata in the manner of Bach's Partitas.

Yet in spite of these differences Milton's style owes something to Spenser. It has been pointed out (3) that Spenser anticipates Milton's alliteration upon w "to give the sense of vastness and desolation". Thus, for example,

Who trauels by the wearie wandring way,  
To com vnto his wished home in haste. (I.ix,39)

has the same effect as Milton's

To stoop with wearied wings, and willing feet  
On the bare outside of this World. (III.73)

Spenser's

• And through the world of waters wide and deepe (I.i,39)  
is echoed in Milton's

The rising world of waters dark and deepe (III,11.)  
with the addition of that alliteration on d often used by  
Spenser to express gloom and darkness: (4)

---

(3) E. de Selincourt: Introduction to the Oxford Spenser,  
p.lxv.

(4) Ibid. p. lxv.

Darke, dolefull, drearie, like a greedie graue,  
(I,ix.33.)

and by Milton himself in such lines as

Defac't, deflourd, and now to Death devote  
(IX,901)

and in phrases like "downcast and damp".

From Spenser Milton also learned something of the use of assonance. His fondness for the long i-sound and that, hardly less marked, for the long a-sound make his use of Spenser's phrases "tempestuous fire", "avenging ire", "adamantine chains" particularly important. Professor de Selincourt has already drawn attention to the stanza in which Spenser "enforces the contrast between Day and Night by emphasising throughout the stanza the vowels a and i:"(5)

And after these, there came the Day, and Night,  
Riding together both with equall pase,  
Th'one on a Palfrey blacke, the other white;  
But Night had couered her vncomely face  
With a blacke veile, and held in hand a mace,  
On top whereof the moon and stars were pight,  
And sleep and darknesse round about did trace:  
But Day did beare, vpon his scepters hight,  
The goodly Sun, encompast all with beames bright.  
(VII,vii,44)

The same contrast is suggested by the rhyme-words of the following:

---

(5) Ibid. p. lxxv n.

Th'Almighty seeing their so bold assay,  
Kindled the flame of his consuming yre,  
And with his onely breath them blew away  
From heauens hight, to which they did aspyre,  
To deepest hell, and lake of damned fyre.

(Hymne of Heavenly Love, 85 ff)

Milton also uses this contrast between a and i to suggest elemental conflict, and the plunging from heaven to the horrors of hell. Note also, in this connection, his play upon the theme of Day and Night:

Him the Almighty Power  
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th'Ethereal Skie  
With hideous ruine and combustion down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,  
Who durst defie th'Omnipotent to Arms.  
Nine times the space that measures Day and Night  
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew  
Lay vanquisht, rowling in the fiery Gulfe  
Confounded though immortal: But his doom  
Reserv'd him to more wrath; for now the thought  
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain  
Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes  
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay  
Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate:  
At once as far as Angels kenn he views  
The dismal Situation waste and wilde,  
A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round  
As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,  
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace  
And rest can never dwell, hope never come  
That comes to all. (I.44.ff)

Here the juxtaposition of vowels is particularly striking:  
flaming, sky; chains, fire; nine times, space; day, night;  
lay, fiery, pain; baleful eyes; dismay, pride, hate; waste,

wild; sides, flamed; flames, light, sights, shades. Almost as noteworthy is the quasi-rhyming effect of the final words: sky, fire, night, pain, eyes, dismay, hate, wild and flames.

It was Spenser's weakness as well as his strength that he was an Elizabethan and that he wrote in an elaborate verse-form. He could not say simply what was required and no more. But he was able to suggest to Milton what a man might do if he had no stanza to fill. Then might such lines as

Whom that most noble Briton Prince so long  
Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,  
That I must rue his vnderserued wrong, (I, introd., 2.)

or

But as the mother of the Gods, that sought  
For faire Eurydice her daughter deere  
Throghout the world, with wofull heauie thought  
(Daphnaida, 463.)

become something like

which cost Ceres all that pain  
To seek her through the world. (IV.271.)

But who, except Milton, could have benefitted by the suggestion? Who but Milton had the art which could take a delightfully Elizabethan piece of oxymoron like

Whose yeilded pride and proud submission (I,iii,6.)

and convert it into that very different thing:

Yeilded with coy submission,modest pride,  
And sweet reluctant amorous delay?

---

## CHAPTER VI.

---

### ALL SEEMLY AND GENEROUS ARTS.

"At quanto satius esset, academici, quantoque dignius vestro nomine nunc descriptas chartula terras universas quasi oculis perambulare, et calcata vetustis heroibus inspectare loca, bellis, triumphis, et etiam illustrium poetarum fabulis nobilitatas regiones percurrere, nunc aestuantem transmittere Adriam, nunc ad Aetnam flammigerantem impune accedere, dein mores hominum speculari, et ordinatas pulchre gentium respublicas; hinc omnium animantium naturas persequi, et explorare, ab his in arcanas lapidum et herbarum vires animum demittere. Nec dubitetis, auditores, etiam in coelos evolare, ibique illa multiformia nubium spectra, nivisque coacervatam vim, et unde illae matutinae lachrymae contemplerini, grandinisque exinde loculos introspicite, et armamenta fulminum perscrutemini; nec vos clam sit quid sibi velit aut Jupiter aut Natura, cum dirus atque ingens cometa coelo saepe minitatur incendium, nec vos vel minutissimae lateant stellulae, quotquot inter polos utrosque sparsae sunt, et dispalatae; immo solem peregrinantem sequamini comites, et ipsum tempus ad calculos vocate, aeternique ejus itineris exigite rationem. Sed nec iisdem, quibus orbis, limitibus contineri et circumscribi se patiatur vestra mens, sed etiam extra mundi pomoeria divagetur."  
- Prolusio III.

### I

In considering the literary influences which helped to form the poetic character of Milton, the study of his relations with his predecessors in the art of poetry is of the utmost importance. The mind must learn to know itself by learning to know those holy minds with whom here-

after it is to enter into everlasting companionship.(1)  
But Milton would have held it impossible for the mind to know itself unless it sought also to know its Creator and to penetrate into the ultimate causes of things. But it must first have filled the world itself in the expatiation of its magnitude, and have entered so completely into the conditions and mutations of kingdoms, states, cities and peoples that it might be considered as living in every age or as having been born coeval with Time.(2)

To study thoroughly the evidences of Milton's studies in theology and philosophy, in history and geography, contained in Paradise Lost is obviously impossible within our limits. Nor is it any part of our purpose. So many of these indications are concerned with the what rather than the how of Milton's poetry. It is not with these as with the borrowings from Spenser or Virgil. Other poets, who have not been influenced by their predecessors in the same way as Milton, have used freely in their poetry information on matters such as theology and history which they have

---

(1) Prolusion III, ed. Symmons, VI,160.

(2) Prolusion VII, ibid., 189.

acquired from their general reading. We shall not, therefore, undertake a detailed inquiry into Milton's reading in these matters, since our object is not merely to indicate that Milton was more learned than most poets; so much is already known. Rather we shall seek to show briefly that, even here too, his reading has helped to determine his poetic character.

In theology and philosophy, then, we have to consider solely the importance of these studies in the history of Milton's poetic development. We are not concerned to define Milton's place as a thinker. If that were our task, we should have to discover just how much he held in common with this man and again with that. We might find a certain portion left over which was peculiar to him, or perhaps held in common with only a few others deriving from the same archetype. This we should point out as Milton's contribution to thought or as evidence of his belonging to a particular school of thought.

We must remember that Milton was not merely a professional student pursuing a course of studies under professorial guidance. He was an impressionable and imaginative man with strong opinions working out his own salvation.

If we are to approach the sources of his poetry, we must consider not alone those authors who have been cited as the authorities of his intellectual system (3) but the more primary influences which acted upon his imagination, popular traditions, for example, the philosophy he studied in early life and the commonplaces of the schools. In working out the details of his system at a later date, Milton no doubt would make much use of those authors who provided the best means of welding his opinions together into a consistent whole. But the authors who afforded the most satisfactory

---

(3) I do not quite understand the principle on which these authorities are arranged by M.Saurat. In his account of the growth of Milton's views there is little or no reference to literary influences except a casual and, I believe, overconfident, allusion to the passing of Platonic influence. (Milton: Man and Thinker, pp.17-18) Then on pp.248 ff. we get the sources. Since we are told (p.124) that Milton boldly took a passage from the Zohar and made it the very centre of his metaphysics, we might expect here not so much sources for the fall of man as some of the authorities which led him to pose the questions which the Zohar answered so triumphantly. I have my doubts about the Zohar passage. If we are to dispose of Fichte and Hegel as does M.Saurat, (p.123) it seems rather perverse to pretend that this idea of retraction amounts to much more than a figure of speech. In our present study, however, we are not concerned with the vitality of Milton's solution. It is enough if we can understand the manner in which he conceived the situation. In the more simple, sensuous and passionate element of poetry it is the clearness of outline of the constituent elements which impresses, rather than the closely woven texture of the whole.

solutions for the problems which then arose, and so formed links in the chain of his exposition, were not necessarily those who had fixed the prime points in his belief. And since Milton the poet is apt to reaffirm positions which he does not think proper to justify in the cooler element of prose,(4) we must not neglect the earlier authorities who first moved his imagination.

Milton himself lays great stress on the importance of getting these fundamental conceptions firmly established at the beginning. Thus in a letter to Gill(5) he criticises those who attempted the study of theology without a proper grounding in philosophy. It may be objected, of course, that Aristotle and Plato could be taken for granted. Milton did not regard their philosophy as an imaginative creation nor his obligation to them as a personal debt. He would see them as discoverers not devisers, and their ideas, once enunciated, would be essential truths in which no man could hold any property. But we are not concerned with Milton's

---

(4) Cf. Introduction p.15 on the creation of man. Sir Thomas Browne who agrees with the Paradise Lost version as to the essential difference between the creation of man and that of animals significantly supports his opinion by "the flat affirmative of Plato, and not a negative from Aristotle." (Religio Medici, Part I, par. 36.)

(5) July 2, 1628.

progress in that abstract and impersonal truth which lives outside of time or space. Our business is with the poetic and sensuous imagination. Now although Plato and Aristotle deal with the abstract, they do so in the concrete medium of language and are obliged to use figures and analogies drawn from the world of sense. In this they too are imaginative and creative writers who influence men's minds in a manner not essentially different from the poets. And in Hermes Trismegistus the appeal is almost wholly to the imagination. Nor must we forget the very great contemporary popularity of the crude, yet in their way impressive, "Theologicall, Philosophicall, Morall, Poeticall, Historicall, Emblematicall Observations" of such works as Sylvester's *Du Bartas* and Heywood's Hierarchie of the Blessed Angells. Even scholarship in these pre-Bentleian days, and as represented by such men as Mede, seemed more intent to sate the curious appetite than to strengthen the digestion. ∫

The inspiration of the Prolusiones and of the Vacation Exercise is obviously the same as that of *Du Bartas*:

And, though our Soule liue as imprison'd here,  
In our frail flesh, or buried (as it were)  
In a dark Toomb; Yet at one flight she flies  
From Calpe t'Imaus, from the Earth to Skies;

Much swifter then the Chariot of the Sun,  
 Which in a Day about the World doth run.  
 For, sometimes, leauing these base slymy heaps,  
 With cheereful spring aboue the Clouds she leaps,  
 Glides through the Aire, and there she learns to knowe  
 Th'Originalls of Winde, and Hail, and Snowe,  
 Of Lightning, Thunder, Blazing-Starrs and storms,  
 Of Rain and Ice, and strange Exhaled Forms.  
 By the 'Aires steep-stairs, she boldly climbs aloft  
 To the Worlds Chambers; Heav'n she visits oft,  
 Stage after Stage; she marketh all the Sphears,  
 And all th'harmonious, various course of theirs:  
 With sure account, and certain Compasses,  
 She counts their Starrs, she metes their distances  
 And differing pases; and, as if she found  
 No Subject fair enough in all this Round,  
 She Mounts aboue the Worlds extreamest Wall,  
 Far, far beyond all things corporeall;  
 Where she beholdes her Maker, face to face,  
 (His frowns of Iustice, and his smiles of Grace)  
 The faithfull zeal, the chaste and sober Port  
 And sacred Pomp of the Celestiall Court. (6)

To Milton, as to Du Bartas,

The World's a School, where (in a generall Story)  
 God alwayes reads dumb Lectures of his Glory;  
 A pair of Stairs, whereby our mounting Soule  
 Ascends by steps aboue the Arched Pole:  
 A sumptuous Hall, where God (on euery side)  
 His wealthy Shop of wonders opens wide:  
 A Bridge, whereby we may pass o're (at ease)  
 Of sacred Secrets the broad boundless Seas.(7)

Milton evidently was as much impressed as Sir Thomas Browne  
 by Hermes' allegorical description of the infinite:

---

(6) The Sixt Day of the First Weeke, 1611 edn., pp.166-67.  
 Hooker (I,vi,3) enforces this idea with a footnote from  
 Hermes and then significantly proceeds to a commendation  
 of "Aristotelical Demonstration".

(7) The First Day &c. p. 5.

Sphaera, cujus centrum ubique, circumferentia nullibi.(8)

The cosmos of Paradise Lost has for its centre the whole stellar universe, and its circumference is undefined. It might seem also that the author of Areopagitica had noted with interest the aphorism quoted by Hooker from this same Hermes: "to purge goodness quite and clean from all mixture of evil here is a thing impossible." (9) Milton's worst fear for Cambridge was that it might relapse into the merely theological studies of an earlier age. Obviously the man who could reject Calvin and yet accept Euripides as an interpreter of Scripture and who preferred Spenser to Scotus or Aquinas must not be considered like the scholar of a theological seminary.(1)

From the theological, philosophical, moral, poetical, historical, emblematical point of view of the seventeenth century, the great work of Plato was the Timaeus. For many years it had been the only work of Plato known to the West, and by reason of its great influence on Christian writers it was naturally regarded with great

- 
- (8) Religio Medici, Part I, par.10; Christian Morals, III, 2; Pseudodoxia Epidemica, edn. 1658, p.4.  
(9) Ecclesiastical Polity, V, xxiv, 16.  
(1) Animadversions &c. P.W.III, 73; Christian Doctrine, P.W.IV, 278; Areopagitica, P.W.II, 68.

respect. Milton imbibed the ideas of the Timaeus through Trismegistus and no doubt through a hundred sources, though he certainly knew the original.(2) It was undoubtedly from the Timaeus and its derivatives that he derived the conception of a God whose nature was such that for the creation of less than gods He needed to employ secondary agents. Moved by benevolence He produced Cosmos from Chaos, wishing to make everything like unto Himself. Plato insists on the essential distinction between Being, represented by God, and Becoming, represented by the Cosmos. Christian thinkers had followed Plato rather than the Old Testament in their attempts to define God in terms of essential Being and Goodness, and Plato's account of creation had been found not incompatible with Genesis. Chaos could be identified with the condition of the earth before the

---

(2) See Todd's notes on P.L.III, 708, 713, VII, 173, 505, 548-57. and Baldwin in Pub.Mod.Lang.Assocn XXXV, pp.210-17, 1920. We must guard against the danger of carrying the ideas of twentieth century scholarship into our dealings with the seventeenth century. Professor Murray, for example, can dismiss the Timaeus as the "most definitely futile, or the least understood of Plato's speculations" (Greek Literature, p.310) It was in the light of Windelband that M.Saurat (La Pensée de Milton, p.274) argued that "Against his better knowledge, not deceived" was sufficient to disprove Milton's Platonism. This would prove Sir Thomas Browne no Platonist. (See Pseud. Epidemica, 1658, p.2.) Both for Browne and Milton the authority of I Timothy II, 14 was beyond question.

coming of light,(3) and the imperfection of matter, and therefore of all worldly things, had easily commended itself to the theologians. Working from the identification of Goodness and Being, the Schools had established the formula: God is Goodness and Being, and evil non-existence. The world is a half-way house between these two extremes. (4) Sin does not come from God, but can be brought into being e nihilo. "Sin is a monster begotten of the mind. Sin is our mind's free action in opposition to the mind of God, and to what He has prescribed." (5) Perhaps this is why Milton was loth to believe that the creation itself was evolved e nihilo. The works of God must derive from essential Being, not from essential not-Being.

We have seen how Milton commended Aristotle in the Prolusiones, and the treatise on logic, although directed

- 
- (3) Cf. Wisdom, XI, 17. Gospel of Bartholomew (Apocryphal New Testament, ed. M.R. James, p. 171); Cursor Mundi (ed. Morris, E.E.T.S. Part I, 365); History of Dr. Faustus, chap. XII; Du Bartas, 1611, p. 8; Bacon: Advancement of Learning, Book I, VI, 2; Grotius: Adamus Exul, Act II; Nova Solyma (ed. Begley) II, 12.
- (4) Nova Solyma, II, 189. Cf. Christian Doctrine. P.W. IV, 182. Comus, 593 ff.
- (5) Nova Solyma, II, 31. See also p. 158.

against the futilities of scholastic Aristotelianism, is itself really an attempt to present Aristotelian dialectic in a more satisfactory form. The numerous points of contact between this treatise and the Treatise of Christian Doctrine show how deeply Milton's mode of reasoning had been coloured by Aristotle.(6) Aristotle had explained the state of Becoming by the doctrine of matter and form. His matter, however, is not the inert substance of Plato's Chaos violently handed by the external power of Deity. It is essentially a thing of potentiality, a substratum in which a tendency to achieve itself in form is always at work.(7) This conception of matter is sufficiently marked in the Treatise of Christian Doctrine, and even in Paradise Lost, we find traces of its influence. Thus in the creation Milton dilates upon the fertility and productiveness of earth implied in the words of Genesis: Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind".(8) The conception of the lines

on the watrie calme  
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspred,  
And vital vertue infus'd, and vital warmth  
Throughout the fluid Mass. (VII, 234)

---

(6) Cf. Sumner's notes pp. 23, 34-35, 41, 54, 89, 90, 132 etc.

On Aristotle see 24, 34, 173, 178, 185, 192, 278, 280.

(7) Cf. Christian Doctrine, 180.

(8) e.g. VII, 279, 313, 453.

differs essentially from Plato's picture of the Deity ladling out diluted portions of the universal soul or binding things together in arbitrary union. Yet Milton's creation is not merely a concession to popular belief. He cannot believe with Aristotle in the parallel eternity of God and matter. That would separate us for ever from God and deny the essential hope of Christianity. So that, while accepting the idea that matter develops by reason of an inner potentiality, Milton feels that this potentiality is itself divine. God is not only the primary cause but also the efficient, material, formal and final cause of everything which exists. Spirit being the more excellent substance may contain the corporeal within itself.(9)

That there is something in God which is yet not, properly speaking, God Milton attempts to prove from the mention of the "back parts" in Exodus.(1) He was not alone in conceiving the created world in this sense,(2) nor in conceiving of the relation between God and creation in

---

(9) Christian Doctrine, P.W. IV, 179-181.

(1) Ibid. 183.

(2) Heywood: Hierarchie &c.(1635), p.370. Cf. Religio Medici Part 1. par. 13.

terms of Aristotle's four causes, though his conclusions differed from those of Hooker, for example, or Browne.(3) The normal relation of the world to God, after it is once created, is quite Aristotelian. All creatures should be moved by a sort of appetite for the Divine. This is the true condition of being, but man's freedom of will gives him the power to choose whether he will accept true being or death and destruction. Reason, the instinctive sense of true being, cannot lead him astray. If he errs, it is in despite of reason.

Space does not permit us to follow up these ideas in detail or to trace all those authors of the Platonic and Aristotelian succession who helped Milton in the development or application of these ideas. How far Milton's heresies are traceable to his philosophical preconceptions is also a matter hardly to be discussed in this place. We may note, however, that while Milton rejected the Hermetic notion of the corporeal as essentially evil, his attitude towards the Christian sacraments may have been partly influenced by Hermetic ideas, and a recent criticism of the religion of the Hermetic groups as "a doctrine of sal-

---

(3) Ecclesiastical Polity, I.iv.1; Religio Medici, Part I, par.14.

vation without a saviour" (4) suggests a danger which Milton's own Christology only just evades. So too Dr. Swete's account of the pseudo-Dionysius may suggest some of the consequences of Platonising in theology: "God Himself is Absolute Being, the Superessential Essence, beyond all words, or thought or naming, from Whom all things are and to Whom they return. Dionysius finds room in his system for the Incarnation and the Trinity, which are stated in fairly orthodox terms, but his Christology is practically monophysite, and his Trinity is rather a process of revelation than the eternal subsistence of Three Persons in the Divine Unity." (5)

2.

We shall not consider the accommodation which Milton found necessary to bring his philosophy and theology together. We must note, however, that, even if the Old Testament did teach the same lessons as Milton learned from philosophy, it did so in a very different way. Its doctrines are set forth not in an abstract medium of pure

---

(4) Times Literary Supplement leading article, May 14, 1925. Cf. Hermetica (ed. Scott) Oxford 1924. ff., Vol. I. pp 8, 12-13.

(5) Patristic Study. p. 111.

thought but in tangible historical terms. Whom Plato and Aristotle tentatively suggested, Him the Old Testament declares unto us. It is hardly necessary perhaps to point out how deeply Milton was affected by the Hebrew conception of God. It can be hardly more necessary to insist that from no other book could the author of Paradise Lost have received such an impression of God's working through the ages. It is important that Milton's philosophical notions had to be checked by such an historical record. So were they kept within the region of what was poetically presentable, "teaching over the whole book of sanctity and virtue, through all the instances of example". Spenser had transformed his philosophy into poetry by much allegorical ingenuity and by the invention of an original mythology of his own. Milton found all that he wished to convey already implied in the story of Adam and Eve. The story was known to all men and all men regarded it as a centre of doctrine.

Not only did Milton's reading of the Bible thus help in rendering his ideas poetically tractable, it even helped to define the poetic spirit which set forth this material. Milton calls upon the Muse of the Old Testament

to assist his song, as well he might, who believed that true poetry was the gift of "that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases." Milton aspired to become a poet of the same order as Isaiah, and his tone throughout is as of one sent by God to tell this people. In form also, as in spirit, his work owes something to the Bible. Job, in its brevity, more resembles Paradise Regained, but it resembles Paradise Lost in being one of the few epics which imply no higher unit of society than the family, in setting forth the ideal of fortitude, and in being concerned mainly with one man and his wife and Satan. Perhaps also, Job was of service in showing that classical common-sense, dramatic motivation and the orderly setting forth of things past were not beneath the dignity of the sacred Muse. For the rest, however, Paradise Lost is like the Apocalypse of St. John, "the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies." That is to say that it is not really a tragedy at all, but a great pageant on a more than

epic scale which sweeps by before the seer. Dr. Johnson found that Milton's personal interventions in Paradise Lost impair the integrity of his design, but in fact they are essential to the design. Each marks a stage in the progress of the great spectacle. As in the early days of The Passion he had been caught up by the chariot of Ezekiel, so now we follow the course of his wanderings in the spirit, whether the Heavenly Muse teach him to venture down the dark descent, or up to reascend to the realm of light consisting of Heaven and the pendent world. Half-way through his wanderings, the Muse anticipates the coming separation by returning her earthly guest to his native element, and just before the catastrophe the bard sees that all intercourse with Heaven must now cease and he must change his notes to tragic. After this catastrophe the great pageant is checked. Milton has to rush about from Hell to Earth and back to Heaven trying to keep it in motion. He traverses the whole region in less than fifty lines.(6) He has to double back in point of time.(7) He has to pick up the loose ends of his story at odd times.(8) The result is not only that pro-

---

(6) X, 570-620

(7) X, 229.

(8) X.332.ff.

phetic vision gives way to narrative, but that there is also a distinct falling-off in imaginative force. Yet in the end the poem settles down very surely to its close in the vision of Adam and Eve wandering away through the subjected plain of Eden.

Poetry is more simple, sensuous and passionate than logic, and Paradise Lost presents as fact much which the Treatise of Christian Doctrine suggests with hesitation.(9) But we must not therefore assume straightway that Milton's mythology is not to be taken seriously. The Muse which inspired Moses and had played with her sister Wisdom in presence of the Almighty Father might not relate more of truth than it concerned man to know, but she did not lie. A prophet, like Isaiah, might proclaim high matters which he could hardly justify in the cooler element of mere demonstration. But his prophecies were not the less true therefore, "When God commands to take the trumpet...it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what conceal." If he asserts things which lie beyond the comprehension of cool reason, that is merely because there are things which must be asserted since cool reason could never find them

---

(9) e.g. Christian Doctrine. P.W. IV.184-85.

out. This was the view in Milton's day not only of lunatics, lovers and poets, and it was formulated without reference to the exigences of epic composition. Witness Margaret Fell's account of George Fox's preaching in Ulverston Steeplehouse:

"What had any to do with the Scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth? You will say, Christ saith this, and the Apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?" This opened me, so that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly that we were all wrong. So I sat me down in my pew again and cried bitterly. And I cried in my spirit to the Lord, We are all thieves, we are all thieves. We have taken the Scriptures in words and know nothing of them ourselves.

Milton had himself insisted on this point of view in the days of his highest hopes, in the great prayer in the Animadversions:

as thou didst dignify our fathers' days with many revelations above all the foregoing ages, since thou tookest the flesh; so thou canst vouchsafe to us (though unworthy) as large a portion of thy Spirit as thou pleasest: for who shall prejudice thy all-governing will? seeing the power of thy grace is not passed away with the primitive times as fond and faithless men imagine, but thy kingdom is now at hand, and thou standing at the door.(1)

So too, we find in the Christian Doctrine: "Under the gospel we possess, as it were, a twofold Scripture; one external,

---

(1) P.W.III, 72.

which is the written word, and the other internal, which is the Holy Spirit, written in the hearts of believers, according to the promise of God, and with the intent that it should by no means be neglected." (2) This Spirit "is a more certain guide than Scripture" (3) "Every believer has a right to interpret the Scriptures for himself, inasmuch as he has the Spirit for his guide, and the mind of Christ is in him; nay, the expositions of the public interpreter can be of no use to him, except so far as they are confirmed by his own conscience." (4) The Scriptures are defective, but the defects must be supplied "not by decrees of popes and councils... but by the same Spirit." (5)

In the Christian Doctrine Milton is engaged as a public interpreter. His concern is with the external Scripture alone and his business is merely to arrive at the meaning of the text.(6) He claims that "no novelties of doctrine are taught".(7). Yet to the individual believer novelties of doctrine were permissible, since the philological interpretations of the public interpreter might be over-

---

(2) P.W.IV.447.

(3) Ibid., 449.

(4) Ibid. 444.Cf.Treatise on Civil Power &c., P.W.II,524.

(5) Ibid.446.

(6) Ibid. 443.

(7) Ibid. II. Apparently his anti-Trinitarian views are not due to any special enlightenment but plain and explicit in the Bible.

ridden by the dictates of the Spirit. And Milton himself, as an individual believer, had the right to go beyond the Scriptures so long as he did not contradict the Scriptures. Thus the Christian Doctrine may be intended partly to prevent the Scriptures from being interpreted in such a way as to conflict with Milton's own further beliefs. When dealing with the creation of angels and the time of their fall, for example, Milton does not insist on the version given in Paradise Lost - that would be to transgress the limits of the public interpreter - but he rejects the over-confident interpretation of Scripture which would exclude this version. (8)

It is possible then that Paradise Lost, in some ways, is a better statement of Milton's beliefs than the Christian Doctrine. If this be so, however, how shall we account for the large amount of later tradition which appears in the poem? "We are expressly forbidden to pay any regard to human tradition, whether written or unwritten" (9)

---

(8) Milton needed to defend his liberty in the matter. See e.g. Chillingworth: "An Answer to Some Passages in Rushworth's Dialogues (1687). Rushworth mentions as a doctrine defined by the Church in opposition to the Fathers. "That the Angels were not created before the visible world". (p.131) Chillingworth remarks: (p. 233) "The Council of Lateran hath defined this against the express judgment of twenty Fathers, of which Nazianzen, Basil, Chrysostome, Cyrill, Hierom, Ambrose and Hillary are part."

(9-) P.W. IV.451.

Perhaps this prohibition is intended mainly for the public interpreter. God still has the power to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases, and the true believer surely ought to be able to recognise the inspired gifts of God wherever found. Such a believer, in putting forth his complete statement of the ways of God to men would be justified in relying on the Spirit within him. He might reject councils or fathers of the church,(1) but he might accept ideas of even more recent date so long as the Spirit approved. "The Spirit which leads to truth cannot be corrupted, neither is it easy to deceive a man who is really spiritual".(2) The tradition which Milton rejected was essentially that of the Catholic theologians. He objected to "intricate metaphysical comments" (3) and the "useless technicalities and empty distinctions of scholastic barbarism" (4) "If we will but purge with sovereign eyesalve that intellectual ray which God hath planted in us, then we would believe the scriptures protesting their own plainness and perspicuity, calling to them to be instructed, not only the wise and learned, but the

---

(1) Ibid. 451-52.

(2) Ibid., 448.

(3) Ibid. 441.

(4) Ibid., 442.

simple, the poor, the babes, foretelling an extraordinary effusion of God's Spirit upon every age and sex, attributing to all men, and requiring from them the ability of searching, trying, examining all things, and by the Spirit discerning that which is good." (5) Milton might reject Scotus and Aquinas but not Spenser, and among both learned and simple in every age he was not unwilling to learn of those who were imbued with the Spirit and so were able to recognise the plain straightforwardness of the ideas of Scripture. The true interpretation must be simple and able to hold the popular imagination.

Thus it is not stated in Genesis that the serpent was really Satan himself.(6) To a true believer, however, this was self-evident, and the belief had been generally accepted. So, too, the story of the war in Heaven and the fall of Lucifer is nowhere related in the Bible. But Christ himself had seen Satan fall from Heaven (7) and St.Peter refers to the punishment of the angels that fell,(8) and it was generally believed that Isaiah and Revelation alluded to these events.(9). These things are not insisted on in

---

(5) Of Reformation in England. P.W.II,387-88.

(6) Christian Doctrine,P.W.IV,253.See Mede Discourse XL in Works (1677). p. 223, and Nova Solyma, II.57.

(7) Luke X, 18. Cf. Vondel's preface to Lucifer.

(8) II Peter,II,4. Vondel cites Jude,6.

(9) Isaiah XIV, 9 ff., Revelation XII,7 ff. Vondel and Heywood (Hierarchie, p.342) cite also Ezekiel XXVIII,13 ff.

the Treatise of Christian Doctrine, but it is unlikely that Milton regarded them merely as convenient poetical fictions. His account of the "political transaction" in Heaven has not the same support in popular tradition,(1) but is based on similar materials.(2) It is true that "the appearance of the Son at a certain date was necessary to his drama. Had the Son been created first, and, as in the Treatise of Christian Doctrine, been really the only God the angels could possibly have known, Satan would have had no cause for rebellion on that particular day of Heaven's great year. Nor would his angels have seen any cause to follow him and call him

Deliverer from new lords." (3)

But we must not too readily accuse Milton of sacrificing a

---

(1) But cf. Andreini's Adamo (ed. Allodoli, 1913) I, iii, 459 ff., II, iv, 1103 ff., IV, iii, 2629 ff.

(2) Hebrews I, Psalm II.

(3) Saurat: Milton, Man and Thinker, p. 209.

point of doctrine for the sake of dramatic effect. (4)

---

(4) M.Saurat seems to me over-daring in asserting that in his account of the elevation of the Son Milton was merely "looking for a valid poetical reason for Satan's rebellion" (p.209) and that he adopted it "for poetical reasons without believing it".(p.262) The very doctrine of the "retraction" to which he himself attaches so much importance is, after all, not stated in the Christian Doctrine, but depends upon this same angelic narrative. The story of the "transaction" does not seem very difficult to connect with Milton's general conception of things. The angels occupy with regard to the Son a position analogous to man's position with regard to the Christ. The Son therefore was in the beginning and all things were made by Him.(John I,2,3). He was in the angelic world and that world was made by Him although it knew Him not (John I,10) and when he came unto His own, His own received Him not. (I,11) Christ has authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man (V.27) Perhaps, therefore, the Son would need to be in some sort the son of angels to have authority over them. Anyhow the text in Hebrews "for to which of the angels etc." suggests that He must have had a form and status approximating sufficiently to that of angelic beings to make such an alternative almost conceivable. Had He been obviously of another order, there was no need to suggest what was manifestly out of the question. It would seem then that, God Himself being unknowable, the supreme test of goodness whether for angels or men is to recognise the Godlike in their own form. To deny it is that sin against the Holy Ghost which "hath never forgiveness" (Mark III,29) Satan and his followers had at least as much chance of knowing that the Son was from the beginning as had the Jews of understanding Christ's remark "Before Abraham was I am" (John VIII,54.) In Paradise Regained Milton insists on our regarding Christ as a man. If we respond to the Godlike in this man, that is all our concern and all our hope. The Crucifixion may be necessary for the fulfilment of the Almighty's scheme, but we are not concerned with that. To inquire into it would be perhaps an intellectual rather than a religious exercise. The recognition of the Godlike in any form was an essential element in Milton's belief. It was the reason for his worship of good books and for his veneration for great poets, as compared with his contempt for the grammarian Salmasius and for all forms of mediocrity in literature. Grace, Inspiration (theological and aesthetic), conscience, reason, all those things which are not voluntary exercises of personal talent but seem to be controlled by something outside man himself, meant very much the same to Milton.

Abdiel at least can see that Satan is no "Deliverer from new lords", and insists that it was this "new lord" who had made Satan himself and all the spirits of Heaven. The Treatise of Christian Doctrine explains that the word "beget" is applied to the Son in a double sense.(5) Literally the Son <sup>was</sup> begotten before all things and existed from the beginning under the name of logos or word. But if his unction to the mediatorial office could even metaphorically be described as a begetting, we may suppose that it somehow involved the taking on of a new form, a manifestation in a new medium. Abdiel insists on the mediatorial office of the Son,(6) and the mediator can hardly appear until the angels have begun to find some difficulty in devoting themselves to the unrevealed God. The Son is the active divine essence within the substance of creation. He can create without being revealed. Since He is of purer essence than the substance of angels, He can only appear after some separation of the elements has taken place, when the bad is already separating from the good and when the individualistic tendencies of Satan are already partially developed. If, at the time of the Son's elevation, Satan had not already developed the germs of pride, he would have obeyed

---

(5) P.W.IV. 80-81.

(6) P.L.V.842 ff.

this last command of God as he had obeyed  
(all other commands. The situation is, of course, difficult to conceive. Presumably Satan had formerly been able to receive earlier commands from the Unrevealed because he had in himself sufficient of Sonship to do so, but having lost this he henceforward has to receive them mediately through the Son, now revealed as a separate essence. Since Milton has insisted that all these things take place in time, our conception of the propter hoc would be much strengthened if the post and ante were more clearly defined. But he has warned us of the insufficiency of human language to describe these matters, and has a right to expect that we shall not press him too strongly. After all, when the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us the Son is appointed heir to all things, we do not find it necessary to suppose that the Almighty is preparing for His own demise.

Not all of Paradise Lost, however, is to be justified in this way. The Sin and Death episode, for instance, though not less serious in intention, must obviously be regarded in another light. The interpreter of Milton, as of the Bible, must use "care in distinguishing between literal and figurative expressions" (7) The Treatise of

---

(7) Christian Doctrine, 443.

Christian Doctrine notes the poetical personification of Wisdom in Proverbs and Job; (8) Sin is personified in Genesis and Death in many places. (9) There is a constant tendency in the Bible to refer to these two as living beings. By Adam's fall "sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (1) The relation between them is defined by St. James: "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death", (2) and by the statement in Romans that sin brings forth fruit unto death.(3) Sin apparently was conceived by the sacred writers as resembling the "strange woman" of the Wisdom literature. In Ecclesiastes the woman is more bitter than death, and in Proverbs she is contrasted with Wisdom and becomes therefore a type or symbol of sin (4). From the same source we learn that her lips drop as a honeycomb and her mouth is smoother than oil, though her end is bitter as wormwood, and that her house is the way to hell going down to the chambers of death.(5) For the employments of Sin and Death there were the references to the gates of death, that to the keys of hell and of death (6) and the text in Genesis: "If thou

---

(8) Ibid. 174.

(9) Genesis, IV, 7. Revelation VI, 8. Romans VI. 9, etc.

(1) Romans V. 12.

(2) I, 15.

(3) VII. 5.

(4) Eccles. VII, 26; Proverbs VII, 4-5. (5) Ibid. V, 3-4, VII, 27.

(6) Job XXVIII, 17, Psalms IX, 13, CVII, 18 etc. Revelation I, 18

dost not well, sin lieth at the door" (7). Milton was not the first to follow up these suggestions, though he may have been original in attributing to Sin and Death the construction of the broad way which leadeth to destruction.

Other elements of later tradition such as the indernal council and the differentiation between Satan and Beelzebub are certainly used mainly for dramatic reasons. But these have little bearing on the essential purpose of the poem.

### 3.

What was the probable extent of Milton's knowledge of the hidden virtues of stones and plants is an inquiry which would yield but meagre results, and, since Milton did not much affect the euphuistic graces of literature, but little addition to our knowledge of his poetry. History, however, is very closely related to poetry, and shares with it the power to "allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune.(8) And Milton himself has assured us of the advantage of studying a

---

(7) IV.7.

(8) Prolusio III (Symmons VI,157-58)

poet's geography.(9). In such a poem as Paradise Lost history and geography are of particular importance. The bareness of the theme and its lack of incident can only be compensated by a wealth of allusion. And since this theme is universal in its implications and affects all times and countries, such allusions will naturally be drawn largely from historical and geographical sources.

Of Milton's assiduity in the study of history there is no lack of evidence in his letters to Diodati, his Commonplace Book and his History of Britain. The history which could best serve his purpose of setting forth the ways of God to men was that contained in the Bible, and we find that most of the historical allusions in Paradise Lost are scriptural. Few men have been more familiar with the history of the Old Testament, and fewer still have had the power to call those times to life as vividly as Milton in such passages as that describing the wanton passions of Sion's daughters and Ezekiel, by the vision led, surveying the dark idolatries of alienated Judah.(1) But the history of other nations is not forgotten. We are reminded how

---

(9) Ibid. 159.

(1) P.L.I, 452 ff. Occasionally the effect is less fortunate, e.g. IV, 167 ff., I, 503 ff.

Xerxes, the Libertie of Greece to yoke,  
From Susa his Memnonian Palace high  
Came to the Sea, and over Hellespont  
Bridging his way, Europe with Asia joyn'd, (X,307)

an orator renowned in Athens or free Rome is pictured in the act of addressing his audience, and the populous North is conjured up pouring forth her multitudes

to pass  
Rhene or the Danaw, when her barbarous Sons  
Came like a Deluge on the South, and spread  
Beneath Gibraltar to the Lybian sands. (I,351.)

Such passages have not the bookish air which we feel amid the impressive grandeur of historical allusion in some of the later Roman poets, nor are they used merely to adorn expende Hannibalem flights of rhetoric. They seem rather to be vivid recollections of things seen, the easy outflowings of reminiscence of one coeval with the world itself.

From the point of view of the setting forth of Paradise Lost, Milton's study of geography was even more important. "The study of geography", he says in the preface to A Brief History of Moscovia,"is both profitable and delightful", and in Of Education he wishes his scholars to learn "the use of the globes, and all the maps". His own interest in geography demanded something more than mere exactness in "setting down longitudes and latitudes", (2) yet

---

(2) History of Moscovia, P.W.V,394.His own use of the word "longitude" in P.L. is not that of the exact geographer.

he did not neglect the study of maps which was necessary for any systematic knowledge of the subject. The atlases of those days were altogether braver and more fanciful than those to which we are accustomed,(3) but there is evidence to show that Milton found them interesting not only because of their sea-horses and camels and Tartar horsemen. It has been shown that the reference in Lycidas to Namancos was probably suggested by the maps of Ortelius and Mercator.(4) Even so late as 1656 we find Milton negotiating for the purchase of a new atlas, and it is possible that even in Paradise Lost the references to Nysa (5) and Tremisen (6) are reminiscent of Ortelius.

But Milton's interest went beyond this. He regretted that the more methodical geographers had not related more fully the manners, religion and government of the various countries. He found, however, that those who had first-hand information on these matters were too voluminous and impertinent, and in his History of Moscovia he endeavoured to gather together "what was scattered in many volumes, and observed at several times by eye-witnesses....to save the

---

(3) See E.N.S.Thompson: Milton's Knowledge of Geography, Studies in Philology, April 1919. pp. 164-67.

(4) A.S.Cook: Two notes on Milton, Mod.Lang.Review, 1907,121-28

(5) Thompson, op. cit., 164.

(6) Ibid. 160.

reader a far longer travail of wandering through so many desert authors." This work is, in short, simply a composite of the narratives found in Hakluyt and Purchas. He preserved "only those details that seemed most essential, and, by leaving out many trivial experiences that had impressed the minds of the actual travellers, lost much of the personal and graphic touch that their accounts possess." (7) Yet even in the preface to this work, it is evident that it is chiefly the necessity of the occasion which causes him to censure as desert authors those "who yet with some delight drew me after them, from the eastern bounds of Russia to the walls of Cathay", If we would truly estimate the effects of reading these authors, we must turn not to the History of Moscovia, but to Paradise Lost. Milton owed to them some prosaic information:

The river Pechora or Petzora, holding his course through Siberia, how far the Russians thereabouts know not, runneth into the sea at seven-two mouths, full of ice.(8)

and again

From Cazan to the river Cama, falling into the Volga from the province of Permia, the people dwelling on the left side are Gentiles, and live in woods without houses; beyond them to Astracan, Tartars of Mangat, and Nagay: on the right side those of Crimme.(9)

---

<sup>Y</sup>  
(7) Ibid. 153. For Milton's treatment of his sources see pp. 151-54.

(8) P.W.V. 396.

(9) Ibid., 398.

But from them also came the inspiration for such similes as

As when two Polar Winds blowing adverse  
Upon the Cronian Sea, together drive  
Mountains of Ice, that stop th'imagin'd way  
Beyond Petsora Eastward, to the rich  
Cathaiian Coast, (X, 289)

and

As when the Tartar from his Russian Foe  
By Astracan over the Snowie Plaines  
Retires, or Bactrian Sophi from the hornes  
Of Turkish Crescent, leaves all waste beyond  
The Realme of Aladule, in his retreat  
To Tauris or Casbeen. (X,431) (1)

Milton's Paradise is obviously indebted to

Purchas's account of the hill Amara:

The hill Amara hath alreadie been often mentioned, and nothing indeed in all Ethiopia more deserueth mention....This hill is situate as the nauil of that Ethiopian body, and center of their empire, vnder the Equinoctiall line, where the Sun may take this best view thereof, as not encountering in all his long iourny with the like Theatre, wherein the Graces and Muses are actors, no place more graced with Nature's store. . .the Sunne himself so in loue with the sight, that the first & last thing he vieweth in all those parts is this hill. . .Once, Heauen and Earth, Nature and Industrie, haue all been corriuals to it, all presenting their best presents, to make it of this so louely presence, some taking this for the place of our Fore-fathers Paradise. And yet though thus admired of others, as a Paradise, it is made a prison to some, on whom Nature had bestowed the greatest freedome. . . It is situate in a great Plaine largely extēding it selfe every way, without other hill in the same for the space of 30 leagues, the forme thereof round and circular, the height such, that it is a daies work to

---

(1) For the sources of these allusions see A.H.Gilbert: A Geographical Dictionary of Milton, 1919, s.v. Vaiguts, Pechora, Cathay, Astracan, Bactrian, Aladule, Tauris, Casbeen. For the Tartar simile cf. also Purple Island XI, 47, 48. Did Milton derive his interest in Russia from the sons of Dr. Giles Fletcher?

ascend from the foot to the top.(2)

Milton insists that this is not the true Paradise,(3) yet his own Paradise certainly owes something to it.(4) So too, it is possible that the state of Satan owed something to such narratives as that of Sir Thomas Roe, in Purchase his Pilgrimes, who thus describes his visit to Sultan Parvis second son to the Mogul:

I was brought in by the Cotwal: at the outward court were about one hundred horsemen armed, being gentlemen that attend the Prince setting out to salute him, making a lane of each side: in the inner court he sat high in a gallery that went round with a canopy over him, and a carpet before him, in great, but barbarous state....To describe it rightly, it was like a great stage, and the Prince sat above as the mock kings do there.

These things, however, concern rather the material of Paradise Lost, and do not differ essentially from borrowings from other sources. It is more important for us to note that Milton's interest in geography, combining as it did the study of maps with the reading of travellers' tales, produces a distinctive quality in Milton's geographical allusions. From the first is derived perspective, from the second vividness of impression. The information is not abstracted, as in the History of Moscovia,

---

(2) Purchas his Pilgrimage (1617) pp 834-44. See Lane Cooper: The Abyssinian Paradise in Coleridge and Milton, Modern Philology, 1906. pp. 329 ff.

(3) P.L.IV, 280-85.

(4) P.L.IV, 540-50. Cf. Lane Cooper ib sup.

but focussed rather. We are not presented with a desiccated tabulation of facts, but are carried through the air like the spirits in Mr. Hardy's Dynasts. We perch with the vulture on the snowy ridge of Imaus, then fly with him towards the springs of Ganges and Hydaspes, alighting by the way on the barren plains

Of Sericana, where Chinese drive  
With sails and Wind their canie Waggon Light  
(III,437)

At another time we are night-foundered on the Norway foam mistaking a slumbering whale for an island, or sailing from Bengala, Ternate or Tidore, or watching the parting sun

Beyond the Earths green Cape and verdant Isles.(5)  
Sometimes we are raised to an eminence whence we can behold

all Earths Kingdoms and thir Glory, (XI,384)

and sometimes we are so high uplifted beyond Earth that even the kingdoms are indistinguishable though, strangely enough, we may still see the tiny ships

Ply stemming nightly toward the Pole. (II,642)

If in the History of Moscovia Milton lost much of the personal and graphic touch of the actual travellers, in Paradise Lost, he succeeded not only in preserving that touch but even in adding it in his account of regions far

---

(5) I, 203; II,638; VIII,631.

beyond any described in Hakluyt or in Purchas. The spirit of the explorers is carried by him right out into the other world. Satan is not only the great warrior and statesman but the great adventurer. (6) And nowhere is his superiority more pronounced than in that passage where he undertakes the perilous expedition which all the others have shirked. There is no lack of graphic first-hand touches in the story of his journey. It is no small matter to describe how God's new creation appeared to the first outsider who visited it, Yet Milton's account is, at least, adequate (7). In spite of its other-worldly setting, probably no poem owes more to its impressions de voyage than Paradise Lost. (8) Perhaps that is why one cannot help being a little impatient with those whose interest in Milton's cosmography seems to be confined to the exact determination of latitudes and longitudes. We need no diagrams of the cosmos of Milton. From eastern point of Libra to the fleecy star that bears Andromeda faroff Atlantic seas beyond the horizon, whether he sing of

Taurus with the Seav'n  
Atlantick Sisters, and the Spartan Twins  
 Up to the Tropic Crab; thence down amaine  
 By Leo, and the Virgin and the Scales,  
 As deep as Capricorne, (X. 673.)

---

(6-) X.440.

(7) P.L.III, 540 ff.

(8) e.g. II, 622 ff., II, 890 ff.; III, 74 ff.; III, 591 ff.: III, 722 ff.; IV, 130 ff.; IV, 210 ff.

or of Satan

Betwixt the Centaure and the Scorpion steering  
His Zenith, while the Sun in Aries rose, (X.328)

whether he refers to stars and constellations or to technical terms like colure, or equinoctial line, he can always invest his lines with that romance which attends Marlowe's use of geographical proper names. Milton's universe has all the attraction of a country in romance. We are interested in it, and we believe in it because we have first-hand reports from those who know it. And if cartographers, in spite of Satan's personal experience, tell us that it is impossible that he should ever have beheld

This pendant world, in bigness as a Starr  
Of smallest Magnitude close by the Moon, (II,1052)

we shall always know which to believe.

---

CONCLUSION:     THE RISE OF THE EPIC.

Cede Meles, cedat depressa Mincius urna;  
Sebetus Tassum desinat usque loqui.  
-Salzilli.

Cedite Romani scriptores, cedite Graii  
Et quos fama recens vel celebravit anus.  
-S.B., M.D.

"And now Milton is reduced to his true standard."  
Lauder.

1.

Our consideration of Milton's reading, though but partial, has been of a kind which raises rather wider questions than those broached by the usual editorial inquiries into the origin of Paradise Lost. The authors dealt with in Part II are not sources. Nor is there any reason to suppose that Milton took any one of them as a model of form and sought merely to imitate his structure. Sedulous aping in an author of any standing is seldom the fruit of long devotion, or the sign of mature work. If these writers could command Milton's attention so long as they appear to have done, his interest in them must have gone much deeper than that. He was not studying Ovid or Tasso or Virgil or Spenser, but rather through them he sought to learn something of the essential thing, poetry itself. Thus the importance of these authors is not that Milton imitated them, but that they coloured his whole conception of the purpose of poetry. Their influence is primarily an influence upon Milton and only secondarily

an influence on Paradise Lost.

So far then, whether in relating the events of his life or in considering the authors he studied, we have been concerned with the development of Milton's poetic character. But if such an inquiry is to have any significance, we must consider further how far this conceptions of his poetic character will help us to an understanding of his poetic achievement. We must consider whether the usual conception of Paradise Lost as an "artificial" epic is really satisfactory. We must consider also whether the conception we have formed of Milton is sufficient to account for his writing that poem, or whether he must be supposed to have borrowed any great part of it from some other author. The two questions are connected and the second will entail some further inquiry, but we may derive some suggestions relative to the first from the materials already presented.

This is not the place to enter upon a detailed discussion of the validity of the accepted doctrine of "authentic" and "artificial" epics. The terminology, however, is at least misleading. Homer, for example, has so much in common with Virgil and Milton that, if his works were really produced under the same conditions as the other

"authentic" epics, he must surely have been the most abnormal, and therefore unnatural, of all epic poets. If, however, we agree to base our definition, not at all upon the qualities of the thing itself, but on certain characteristics of the age in which it was produced, we may admit that Paradise Lost was written in a cultured age and that it is in that sense "artificial". But the word inevitably suggests more than that. It is applied not only to such authentic pieces of literature as the Aeneid and Paradise Lost, but to the epics of Trissino, Ronsard, Chapelain and others who wrote under the impression that to copy Virgil or Homer was to imitate nature. Non regionam da lor. Works like these are obviously, even from the purely literary point of view, artificial. Addison it was who first taught us to regard Milton as a poet of this sort. The best way of commending him to the eighteenth century was to show that he had acted in accordance with its own critical principles. To a later critic, however, like Scherer, this was far from being a recommendation: "Milton's poem presents a sort of tertiary formation, the copy of a copy. It is to the Latin epics what these are to Homer." We may add to this Matthew Arnold's remark: "To call Paradise Lost a theological

poem is to call it by too large a name. It is really a commentary on a biblical text, - the first two or three chapters of Genesis." Here we have the strongest possible indictment of the poem formulated with commendable brevity and precision. Its form, intention and substance are alike censured as merely academic and curious. That critics of such a calibre should have no difficulty in demonstrating the inadequacy of Addison's critical standards is no wonder, but that they should demolish Addison and think that Paradise Lost was thereby shaken to its foundations is matter for amazement. Even the much maligned John Dennis had seen how impossible it was to judge Paradise Lost by the methods used in the Spectator papers. His appreciation of Milton's achievement is no doubt exaggerated, but he has a truer insight into Milton's prime intention. To him Milton is

"one of the greatest and most daring genius's that has appear'd in the world, and who has made his country a glorious present of the most lofty but most irregular poem that had been produc'd by the mind of man. That great man had a desire to give the world something like an Epick poem; but he resolv'd at the same time to break through the rules of Aristotle. . . Milton was the first who in the space of almost 4,000 years resolv'd for his country's honour and his own, to present the world with an original poem; that is to say, a poem that should have his own thoughts, his own images, and his own spirit." (1)

---

(1) The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, 1704.

The truth probably lies somewhere between these extremities of opinion.

As we have so often insisted, Milton learned more from books than most other poets. In this he differs not only from bards of the heroic time but even from many poets of later periods. And in spite of the part he played in the public life of his time, Milton does not strike us as one who know the world in the same way as Homer or Shakespeare. Yet if he lived less completely in his own age than some other poets, it is at least fair to remember that this tendency was characteristic of the age itself. It was an age more concerned than most with gathering up into itself the wisdom of all the ages. In dealing with the seventeenth century it is dangerous to identify the "literary" with the "artificial" or to over-emphasise its difference from the authenticity which comes of tribal upheavals. Such events as the Thirty Years War in Germany or the Civil War in England were partly induced by intellectual notions, and by the concern which men felt for the true interpretation of a Book. Is it not true that the temper of the English Puritans was often more nearly akin to that of

the Hebrews of whom they had read than to that of their natural ancestors of a few generations back? Man's destiny had been influenced by forces other than those set before us by the geographer and the anthropologist, and we ought not to pretend that these are unreal, illegitimate or unnatural.

Undoubtedly Milton's original intentions had been merely literary. The enumeration of the classical genres and of the best models of each in The Reason of Church Government, and the hope to produce something comparable with these in his own language suggests a point of view like that of Ronsard and Du Bellay. And the epic proposed in Mansus and the Epitaphium Damonis was inspired by ideals similar to those of the Franciade, to provide his country with an illustrious ancestry drawn from the same epic stock as those of Greece and Rome. Soon, however, he was to find a more immediate and authentic impulse in the events of his own day. His comparison of the acts of his countrymen to the exploits of the ancient epics might still suggest, however, that this impulse would perhaps find expression in an artificial and borrowed form. The events of the time might be expected to furnish a situation, like

that in King Alfred's reign mentioned in the Cambridge manuscript, sufficiently like those in Homer and Virgil to be treated in Homer's or Virgil's manner. This, however, would be to misrepresent Milton's reading of the happenings of his day. The events which inspired him were not those distinguished by their being most adapted for treatment after the accepted models, but events significant of the special function of his age as the inheritor of all the ages, events which gave meaning to the whole progress of the world-order up to that time. We must not think of Milton, therefore, as one of the artificial epic writers who fall back on Homer and Virgil for aid in relating stories of a Homeric or Virgilian kind. His poem will be original in conception, and its form will probably be irregular enough to abandon Aristotle sometimes at the dictates of Nature. Dennis, like Milton's widow, is undoubtedly right in insisting that Milton did not borrow or imitate in the usual sense of literary borrowing or imitation. Yet his debt to earlier poets is beyond dispute. Perhaps his relation to them may be partly understood by analogy with that of the essential Homer to the earlier "Homers" of the same succession. His predecessors are not to be regard-

ed so much as models but rather as tentative efforts to find significant form for the traditions which matter most to men. These were to be gathered up and superseded in one culminating achievement.

The whole progress of mankind on earth is to Milton what the migrations had been to Homer. He has sought to learn from the sages and teachers, and especially the poets, who have guided men through this progress. The great point of difference between him and Homer is not merely that this period is so much longer than that of the migrations or that its bardic traditions were transmitted by writing rather than orally. It is that the spirit which gives meaning to it is so much less likely to seize the popular mind. This difficulty is in some measure inherent in the very nature of epic poetry. The appeal of poetry, as Professor Murray has pointed out, "seems to depend on elements that are exceedingly old in the history of human development." (2) Tragedy, apparently, can accept this condition. The story of Hamlet is based on materials which were old in the days of Aeschylus. But the epic in seeking to give shape and meaning to the whole scheme of life must

---

(2) The Classical Tradition in Poetry, p. 197.

always be in some way affected by the best that is known and thought in the world of its own age. The elements of admiration and inquiry, we must admit, do not go back quite so far as the passionate mysteries of Love, Strife and Death. The great joy and the great suffering are known to the whole animal genus; yet man's enthusiasm and his desire to know are not new and inessential things (3) but may be regarded as the differentia which completes his definition. The Psalmist was not the first to be convinced by the glories of nature of the greatness and beneficence of God, nor was the author of Job the first to be perturbed by the fact that God's dealings with men sometimes needed explanation.

Primitive heroic lays of various kinds might, no doubt, be composed by men who were not much troubled by such impulses as these, men who accepted without question the life of man as they saw it around them in all its irrational barbarousness. Milton, of course, did not know the other "authentic" epics, but even if he had they would not have

---

(3) Professor Murray's remarks on Prison Reform, Universal Insurance etc. are a little difficult to reconcile with his former statement: "I think human progress may be just as much a true inspiration to a poet as the lust of the eye or the pride of life". (Rise of the Greek Epic, 2nd. edn., p.44) I should be sorry to think that he had so far departed from his earlier opinion.

impressed him in the same way as Homer. The Iliad and Odyssey have, in their way, brought about that union of patriotism and religion which Milton also sought to achieve. In them we get something more tangible than the shadowy Wyrd of the Anglo-Saxon poems. Man's efforts are often futile and very often seem to be wrongly directed, but they are still used to accomplish some great end. Some purpose willed by intelligence is being fulfilled. In a way not wholly different from that of the Old Testament the Greeks may be regarded as a race specially favoured by the powers above, a nation in whose actions the gods are actively interested. The varying fortunes of the campaign may make it hard to see why the divine power is sometimes withheld from those who are trying to fulfil the divine purpose. Sometimes, in the Hebrew manner, the deity may be supposed to be justly offended. Often, however, the divine power is un-Hebraically allowed to change its mind, to be partially persuaded or momentarily diverted by other deities. Homer does motivate the affairs of life and suggest the attitude men should adopt towards life. To modern readers his philosophy may be unsatisfying, but

after all his gods do not treat men worse than they were accustomed to treat each other, and men do not usually expect much more of their gods than that. A poet is more likely to have to complain of the gods of the men about him than they of his. It is hard to use the accepted gods of common men for any comprehensive epic purpose.

This difficulty is hardly felt in Homer. In his time men were less affected than usually by narrow particularisms. Local loyalties had been weakened by the migrations. Men lived in a strange land where their own god might be but one of many or might even still be far away. There could be no accounting for the actions of the superior powers in such circumstances. The gods interfered no doubt, but since one could form no satisfactory conception of their purposes, it was wise to accept them as inevitable but to rely more especially on the valorous and tangible personalities of one's leaders. Homer was the educator of Hellas.(4) The Greek father who wished his son to be a good man made him learn the poems of Homer.(5) His influence must have played a great part in the establishment of the great Hellenic civilisation of later times with its notable freedom of

---

(4) Plato: Republic, 606.E.

(5) Xenophon: Symposium, 3,5.

intellectual effort and its marked absence of priestcraft and of the more horrible forms of superstition. The Greeks never learned to think of God as the peculiar possession of a single race as did the Hebrews. Nor, on the other hand, had they ever that fine confidence in the justice of God which the Hebrews were able to feel. Even the tragedians, whose faith was of a nobler sort than Homer's, are in this as un-Hebraic as he.(6) Man has not yet learned to attain the faith of the Hebrews whilst discarding their narrowness of temper.

The world into which Virgil and Ovid were born was largely dominated by Hellenic influences. The universal empire was of Rome, but the universal philosophy came from Athens. The need for something more than local gods was obvious, but pistas must have its roots in the soil. The epic poet of the new age will write in another manner than Homer's. In some ways, Ovid resembles Homer much more nearly than does Virgil. He has a greater delight in action and a more varied creativeness. He is

---

(c) Cf. Sir R.C.Jebb: Samson Agonistes and the Hellenic Drama,  
(Proceedings of the British Academy, 1907-8.)

not hedged in by the grand prejudices of his race. He can flit round the heavens and explain the causes of things with the greatest familiarity. But the learning of his poems will not make good men. His enlightenment, his break from local tradition, is merely sophisticated. It does not answer to the real experiences of men. He has no message for mankind such as the Roman Virgil has to deliver. For Virgil, unlike Ovid and in spite of Shelley, did not see man and nature only in the mirror of Greece. The author of the Georgics belonged to a race with a religion of its own. Such utterances as

Aude, hospes, contemnere opes et te quoque dignum  
Finge deo

or

Disce puer virtutem ex me verumque laborem,  
Fortunam ex aliis

are essentially Roman, and they help to show how much of the spirit of ancient Wisdom was in the Roman character. Virgil is uneasy in his dealings with the Olympians. The gods only become respectable and dependable insofar as they are bound to the service of the Roman Empire. And men continued to believe in the Empire long after the gods were forgotten. Even Milton, though he does not share the mediaeval belief

that the restoration of that empire is necessary to man's temporal welfare, fully realises what was lost by its fall. "And with that empire fell also what before in this Western world was chiefly Roman; learning, valour, eloquence, history, civility, and even language itself, all these together, as it were, with equal pace, diminishing and decaying." (7) Rome did not save the world, and therefore cannot be regarded as the supreme instrument of Providence. Yet though the Aeneid must therefore be held not to have achieved the full intention of the epic, Milton would no doubt have allowed that Virgil had done all that could be done by a pagan.

Tasso's project had promised more. Tasso himself had the advantage of being a Christian, and his theme offered a means of indulging patriotic ardour without succumbing to national exclusiveness. His Italians were to be the praise and heroic song of all posterity, not by winning a fading triumphant laurel out of the tears of wretched men (of Christian men, at any rate), but by their zeal in promoting the pure worship of God. Moreover Tasso was a real poet, not - like so many in his time - a curious antiquary in poetic form. He is not nurtured only by bookish

---

(7) History of Britain, P.W. V. 234-<sup>3</sup>45.

theoric but derives from the living poetic tradition of the Romanzi. But he has not written the epic of Christendom. What should be patriotism is often merely covert flattery of his patrons, and his attitude to the Crusades is a piece of deliberate make-believe. It was sufficiently obvious in Tasso's time that the Crusades had done very little towards the accomplishment of God's purpose on earth. Then again, the poetic influence of Tasso's immediate predecessors was not fused with the older and profounder traditions of the epic to produce a new thing with a form of its own. Rather the material of the romances was artificially forced into a ready-made shape borrowed for the purpose from Homer.

To Milton at all events it was plain that God's work on earth could not be accomplished by any project associated with Roman Catholicism. And he would be the more assured that Tasso's attempt was premature by his own belief that the crowning triumph of Christian history was about to be accomplished in his own day and by his own people. Spenser had not lived to see that triumph. He was not the epic poet of the new age but the greatest of its heralds. In him and in the Fletchers who followed him the ideas which

were to make the new epic were taking shape. In the Faerie Queene religion and patriotism were at one: England in her opposition to Spain and the Papacy, became the upholder of true religion and the enemy of Antichrist. In the Faerie Queene, too, is the realisation that virtue must come from within, that we cannot be saved by the exploits of any leader however great.

And what are we to conclude from all this? Not necessarily that everything was accomplished in Paradise Lost. We shall not accept Dr. Samuel Barrow's nor Dryden's complimentary estimate of the relative achievements of Milton, Virgil and Homer. We do not wish to settle the order of merit among the sons of light. But we must see that to say that Milton did thus or thus because Homer had done the same is not the whole, nor yet the essential, truth of the matter. John Dennis, for example, was not unacquainted with Virgil and Homer, yet he insists that Paradise Lost contains Milton's "own thoughts, his own images, and his own spirit". Dennis's language is too emphatic and very misleading, but undoubtedly he had a meaning. Shelley also dismisses Virgil, perhaps rather unfairly, as one who "had

affected the fame of an imitator even whilst he created anew all that he copied." Yet it is not thus that he speaks of Milton. He certainly was not unaware of Milton's frequent echoes of Homeric phrase; but apparently he regarded them as inessential. We can perceive how inessential such borrowings may be when we consider how much more numerous are the parallels that may be adduced from Homer than those from Aeschylus. Yet the gnomic utterances, the Prometheus myth, the "consciousness of values" which Aeschylus shares with the other tragedians,(8) these are things which might seem to have impressed Milton more profoundly than anything in Homer. But they are not to be proved by parallel passages. The fable of Prometheus is not a thing to be borrowed, but an experience to be lived over again in one's own mind.(9) And such an influence as this, though more important than the other, does in fact even less impugn an author's originality, since what he seeks he must obviously also bring. This is not something which belongs to another. It is part of the Dichtung and Wahrheit of his own experience. The intention

---

(8) Cf. Murray: The Classical Tradition in Poetry. p. 19.

(9) Cf. Goethe: Dichtung und Wahrheit, Teil III. Buch XV.

of such reading in ancient authors is not to deck one's self in other people's finery but to strengthen one's grasp of elements which lie at the very depths of human (and therefore of one's own) nature.

Yet it would not be true to say that the influence of the classics upon Paradise Lost was all of this sort. Paradise Lost indeed does not fulfil all of Milton's intentions - the purely patriotic part of them, for example, obviously has little part therein. And since the subject finally chosen by Milton was not rich in events or situations, he was certainly tempted to adorn it by borrowing and imitation. Yet the borrowing and imitation was not intended first but after made occasional. It was by other ideals that Milton's epic intentions were nourished, and under the influence of other ideals that he had most of his commerce with other authors. The Italians who knew only his intentions and not the completed poem might well echo Propertius's

Nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade

with the amplification necessary to later times. For Milton had really intended in Paradise Lost to pursue Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.

It was to be written in the spirit of Homer and Virgil, as Milton understood it, not built up of pieces borrowed from them. This it does not quite succeed in doing. But its partial failure must not blind us to the nature of Milton's intentions. The harshest criticism, and in some ways the most unjust, of the merely classicist element in Paradise Lost is to be found not in Scherer but in Milton himself. But most readers have paid as little heed to the implied condemnation in Paradise Regained as to the final vindication of Milton's basic principles in Samson  
on  
Agnostes.

2.

Milton then did not "imitate" the ancients in the manner of the school of good sense. On the other hand, we must beware of confusing his ideas with those of the "Love and Valour" school of heroic poetry which flourished in the seventeenth century. Davenant, for example, like Milton, did not admit that Homer represented an unsurpassable standard of achievement. He was a sea-mark by which posterity might steer its course, but

"as Sea-marks are chiefly useful to Coasters, and serve not those who have the ambition of Discoverers, that love to sail in untry'd Seas, so he hath rather proved a Guide for

those whose satisfy'd Wit will not venture beyond the track of others, then to them who affect a new and remote way of thinking, who esteem it a deficiency and meanness of minde to stay and depend upon the authority of example.(1)

The poets of this school, like Milton, did not follow a single model. Scudéry, in his preface to Alaric, cites the Iliad, ~~and~~ the Odyssey, the Aeneid, the Pharsalia, the Thebaid, the Orlando Furioso and the Gerusalemme Liberata. But there is nothing in such lists as these to correspond with Milton's citation of Spenser. None of these poets dared be known to think so highly of their predecessors in their own language as did Milton of Spenser and Spenser of Chaucer. And this is a matter of prime importance, since it is obvious that Milton's connection with Spenser and with the Spenserian Fletchers is of a different kind from his connection with Virgil. A seventeenth century author like Browne of Tavistock could profess an adherence to Spenser without becoming essentially learned on that account, while the relation of Milton to the Fletchers need not have been very different from that of Shakespeare to Marlowe.

---

(1) Preface to Gondibert, (Spingarn: Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, II, 2).

In considering the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it is important that we should distinguish those forms which have their roots in the native literature from those which were created by mere emulation of the classics. The great virtue of the Renaissance was that it showed people how to do many things that they had long endeavoured to do and needed to do. Its weakness was that it also made them think that they ought to do many things which they had no real cause for doing. It supplied many needs but it propagated many fads. The Elizabethan drama is one of the greatest achievements of the Renaissance. For the origin of that drama we must look back into the native literature of the preceding age. The good and evil angels in Doctor Faustus and in Greene's Looking Glass for London, Marlowe's Wagner and Greene's Miles in Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, all look back to the old morality plays and interludes. Yet the University Wits are men of the new learning; bookish allusions in every line proudly proclaim the fact. Without the new learning Humanum Genus had never become Doctor Faustus. From the classics Elizabethan drama learned much both in characterisation and in structure. No one, however, will seize on the five-act division of Elizabethan tragedy, as

they will the twelve-book division of Paradise Lost, as a proof of mere imitation. Senecan ghosts and Orestean analogies notwithstanding, it is recognised that Hamlet does not spring from the same roots as the academic plays of the same period. There is not much to connect Shakespeare with the earlier native drama, no good and evil angels-and Falstaff (spite of Prince Hal) is no Vice- and on the other hand there are such things as Venus and Adonis and The Comedy of Errors. If, despite all this, we can derive Shakespeare, and even Marlowe, from more authentic sources than those of Gorboduc for example, then we ought to take serious thought about Milton. The contrast between Marlowe, or indeed Shakespeare himself, on the one hand and the academic drama on the other is not greater than that between Milton and the heroic poets of his age. There is the same difference between real literary vitality and mere tertiary formation. Surely we must believe that here also the Renaissance has satisfied a real need, not created an imaginary one: that classical literature has again afforded to native aspiration a means of realising itself in form, though the form achieved is not quite the same as anything found in classical literature. We cannot account for Paradise Lost by supposing

that a set of critical doctrines, proved wrong everywhere else, has for once achieved a wholly inexplicable and indefensible success. Rather we must suspect that with Milton, as with Shakespeare, the intention was already there and some of the work of preparation already done, when in the fulness of time came the genius who was able to rise to the height of the great argument.

Whether biblical story is of a kind proper for heroic song or not, it is certain that our ancestors of the heroic age insisted on utilising it in this way as soon as they became acquainted with it. Milton's own subject had been naturalised in English poetry from the time of the Caedmonian Genesis. The story was chosen no doubt with the best intentions, though of course it does not set forth the whole scheme of salvation as in Milton. In the Middle Ages there seemed to be no one who could handle any story in such a way as to bring out any such far-reaching implications. If a mediaeval author wished to teach over the whole book of sanctity, it must be very definitely by all the instances of example. So we find such works written as the Cursor Mundi and the cycles of the miracle plays. These were unwieldy and the general design which inspired them not

always easy to follow, and consequently writers were tempted to try to set forth the same system in shorter and more articulate forms. Since, however, they lacked the power to bring out and universalise the implications of a particular story, they had to forsake the biblical narrative altogether and seek the same end by different means. In the morality plays they had recourse to allegory. Not such allegories, however, as the parables of Jesus Christ which do impress us as things actually seen and are indeed striking examples of one kind of universalising of particular incidents. Mediaeval allegory has no root in life but derives from theology and scholastic philosophy. (2) We are made to see virtues and vices as things talking. This deficiency in dynamic architectonic, this inability to build up a structure based on human character and moving incident is seen <sup>even</sup> in such a poem as the Divine Comedy with its essentially scholastic and topographical framework. Dante's poem is the most coherent and satisfying production of the whole period, and it illustrates the only method by which the problem could be solved in that age. Its explanation of

---

(2) Cf. Ramsay: Morality Themes in Milton's Poetry, Studies in Philology XV, 1918. p.126

the confusion of man's present state is complete: here, on earth, we view the tapestry from the wrong side, seen from above the design is perfect. But English poets have always desired to see some reason in man's life here on this very earth which is the earth of all of us, and most of them move as comfortably in the regions of Thomist speculation as the Elizabethan <sup>dramatists</sup> in the realms of the three unities.

Both in the severely ordered Mirour de l'Omme of Gower and in the less shapely work of Langland we find the same essentials in the manner of treatment: the manual of vices and virtues, the attack on the evils of existing society from the highest place downwards, and finally the looking for the great consummation. In the first four passus of Piers Plowman we have the general social and political condition of the world set forth. Then Passus IV to VII make it clear how hard is the pursuit of virtue in a world so ordered. Men may be converted, but who shall direct them to Truth, a saint unknown to the palmers? Certainly no member of the established hierarchy, but Piers the Plowman whose credentials the priest would deny. Then follows the Vision of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobet. Gower's plan is chronological. He begins with

the coming of Sin into the world. In a sense Sin existed before created things, being in fact that chaos which preceded creation, but she was also a daughter conceived by the Devil who upon her engendered Death. From Sin and Death sprang the seven deadly sins each of whom bears five daughters to the World. By way of compensation five virtues are sent down from heaven upon each of whom Reason begets five daughters. Then we are shown how all classes of human society are corrupted by these vices. All this evil is imputed to Adam's transgression, and the concluding portion of the poem holds out the prospect of amendment. This part runs through some of the incidents of the gospel story, somewhat in the manner partly attempted in Milton's Nativity Ode, The Passion, and Upon the Circumcision, but concludes un-Miltonically with the exaltation of the Virgin as the mediator between God and man. Langland's treatment is more exhaustive. In Dowel (3) we learn something of what may be done by a king who would take the

---

(3) Dowel, who seems to be generally human perfection and sometimes Christ Himself, appears to be in some way related to the Christ of Milton.

religious orders in hand. Our hope, however, must be based on something higher than this, and in Dobet we are told of the true Saviour, His death and His triumph over Satan. But Dobest finds the poet in the position of Milton in Paradise Regained. The full accomplishment is not yet, and all there is left for the wandering Christian is to bear right onward mindless of the temptations around him.

And how much of all this persisted up to the time of Milton? First there were such works as Sylvester's Du Bartas and Heywood's Hierarchie which had all the ponderousness of the Cursor Mundi and the comprehensiveness of the Mirour de l'Omme. In the Faerie Queene too, the framework based upon the twelve cardinal virtues of Aristotle is also mediaeval, as is the whole allegorical conception of the poem, while such an episode as the House of Alma has many analogues in mediaeval literature.(4) Then there were the masques. These had at first had some connection with the moralities, from which they borrowed their first machines, and in the Interlude of the Four Elements directions are given for adapting the piece so as to bring in a disguising. And although the interludes and moralities may not throw much

---

(4) Cf. C.L. Powell: The Castle of the Body, Studies in Philology XVI, 1919, pp. 197 ff.

light upon the history of the masque,(5) there are times when the masques seem to look back to this earlier connection. Despite the new classical colouring, it is possible to see that *Astraea* and the Golden Age in Jonson's Golden Age Restored and *Irene* and *Diche* in Shirley's masque are nearly related to the Justice and Truth, Mercy and Peace of the moralities. And in the infernal opening scene of the Masque of Queens the Dame's presentation of her fellow-hags, Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, Falsehood, Murmur, Malice, Impudence, Slander, Execration, Bitterness, Rage and Mischief is not very different from certain scenes in Andreini's Adamo (6) a play whose connection with the moralities is undoubted. We have seen how in passing from On the Death of a Fair Infant to the Nativity Ode, Milton passed from the actual detail of the masque to its poetic essence. We must now note that at the same time he was really going beyond the masque towards the morality, from *Astraea* to Peace and Justice. This tendency is equally marked in The Passion where he finds the ideal masque or disguise in the life of Christ.

It is here that the influence of the Fletchers is

---

(5) Cf. H.A.Evans: English Masques, p. xxii.

(6) Act IV, scenes 6 and 7.

so important. They are not such great poets as Spenser, but in many ways they are in closer touch with mediaeval tradition. Spenser is so far affected by the paganism of the Renaissance that he can adorn his Bower of Bliss with reference to the gardens of antiquity including Eden in their number, but Giles Fletcher, though he imitates Spenser's stanza in the description of his own "false Eden", is careful to avoid such a profane comparison.(7) It is perhaps significant that Spenser had made Genius the porter both in the Bower of Bliss and in the Garden of Adonis.(8) He insists that these are two separate personages, but the similarity of name adds to the suspicious resemblance between these gardens. We recollect also that Genius had appeared of old in the Roman de la Rose, and we cannot help realising that the personifications of the Faerie Queene often have more of the luxuriant fancy of that work or of the later masques and processions than of the apocalyptic manner of the Coventry play of the Salutation and Conception or of Giles Fletcher's Christ's Victory.(9) And although the House of Alma is conceived in mediaeval fashion,

---

(7) F.Q. II,xii,52; Christ's Victorie II,40,50.

(8) F.Q. II,xii,47,48; III,vi,31.

(9) The Mammon episode and the Mutability fragment are notable exceptions.

it is but an episode. Spenser does not draw out the whole structure of his poem by extending this morality-like conception in the same way as does Phineas Fletcher.

The architectonic of the Purple Island has very little to commend it to the lover of poetry, but it does at least remind us that neither the aim nor the method of the moralities was essentially dramatic but epic rather, and it did preserve something of the intention of the moralities in an age when the drama had learned to pursue other and more proper ends. Moreover it restored Humanum Genus to the place which in Spenser had been unjustly usurped by the fashioning of a perfect gentleman. Giles Fletcher's achievement, however, is more important. Professor Murray has recently reminded us of the small effect which Christianity has had on great imaginative literature. We are still dependent on the emotional experiences of the heroic ages: Love, Strife and Death, with some suggestion of that which is beyond Death. But the Christian Middle Ages did at least struggle manfully to impose their own aspirations and beliefs upon this older tradition. Theirs was another and a very different *Comos*, one which followed and swallowed up

Death.(1) Throughout the mediaeval period there is a striving to give artistic form to the great apotheosis. That is why the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus was so popular. In the cycles of the miracle plays the wheel was made to come full circle from the revolt of Lucifer and the fall of Adam to the Harrowing of Hell. The same architectonic principle is at work in the two parts of the Digby Magdalen play, and even, in different circumstances, in the Divine Comedy, with its beginning in Hell and its culmination in Paradise. Giles Fletcher by his comprehensive title, Christ's Victorie and Triumph in Heaven, and Earth, over and<sup>after</sup> Death,<sup>^</sup> professes the intention of the miracle plays; by his debate between Justice and Mercy he emphasises his connection with such works as the moralities or the Coventry cycle; and his whole intention is to give a true version of the great triumph which had previously been based upon apocryphal materials. When we remember how deeply Milton had been affected by Spenser's setting forth of the scheme of redemption in the Hymne of Heavenly Love, we may perceive what import-

---

(1) Cf. e.g. the "unexpressive nuptial song" of Lycidas and the "immortales hymnaeos" and "Sionaeo thyrsos" of the Epitaphium Damonis. In many of the mediaeval predecessors of the House of Alma and the Purple Island we find the idea of the wooing by the heavenly bridegroom e.g. in Dowel (A-text, X, 46) Anima who lives in "the castel that kuynde made" is "a lemmon of heuene".

ance he would attach to this attempt to celebrate the regained Paradise.

There is one other point in which the Fletchers may perhaps help us to realise Milton's connection with the Middle Ages. We have seen that his political ideas were essentially unmodern. His feeling that the affairs of this world are not to be considered in and for themselves is mediaeval. Mediaeval too is the hope of a deliverer who will make them conform as they should to the heavenly pattern. The growth of the Papacy is an indication of the general acceptance of such ideas in the Middle Ages, and even those like Dante who would not admit all the claims of the Papacy wished it to be supplemented by another universal power with an equally divine sanction. But though Dante believed that l'alta provvidenza would sooner or later do something, he could not keep vainly urging the Emperor to deal properly with Florence without losing something of his hope. He knew it was time that some of the pattern should appear on this side of the tapestry, but in his great poem he confines himself to setting forth the more perfect design which appears on the other side. With the coming of the Reformation,

however, it appeared that the field full of folk was about to be put in order, that a king had arisen who should deal with the Abbot of Abingdon as he deserved. In Ochino's Tragedie we have Henry VIII and Edward VI presented as the chosen instruments of God overthrowing the devilish machinations of Antichrist. It is the same theme which inspires Phineas Fletcher's Locustae and Apollyonists and which echoes in Milton's In Quintum Novembris. But by now this sentiment had been travestied in a theory of Divine Right, and meantime the influence of Calvinism had been at work. The masque-writers had parodied and perverted the ideals of the Tragedie. If they really had believed in the religious mission of the king as did Ochino, they would not have needed to provide him with make-believe triumphs. Milton is not misled by these modern superstructures. He goes to the original heart of the myth: the essential thing to be looked for is the "two-handed engine". By whom the engine is to be operated is not a question which can be taken for granted. In his earlier prose works Milton speaks as if it might be the king, though his review of the course of Reformation in England does not suggest that this is very likely. His more serious expectation, which

emerges soon after, that this very mediaeval hope would be accomplished by a republic of the classical kind, is typical of Milton's expectations in other things besides.

It is important to realise that so much of the mediaeval tradition persisted so as to combine with the high epic enthusiasm of the seventeenth century. But Spenser and the Fletchers do not explain everything. Milton was heir to Shakespeare also, and he knew art and used judgment. His verse owes much to Marlowe and to Shakespeare, and his dramatic power connects him with them. He has not Shakespeare's dramatic creativeness, but his Satan, Eve, De-lilah and that other Satan of Paradise Regained, not to mention such as Belial and Beelzebub, show considerable power of character-presentation. They may all, as Coleridge said, have something of their author in them, but they are dramatically conceived: they are characters moving by the power within them, not mere mouthpieces. And certainly Milton would not fail to perceive that the forces of good and evil were presented with more force in Shakespeare, as also in the Greek drama, than in any doctrinal and allegorical treatments of the same theme.

The story of Adam, one might think, was in many

ways more fitted for tragedy than epic. It is not a story showing how the purposes of the mighty gods were accomplished by human endeavour, but of an offence against the supreme deity committed by the folly of man - an offence whose expiation will descend to the hero's progeny. In this it is not unlike some of the stories of Attic tragedy. And in fact Milton first conceived his subject as a tragedy. Yet paradoxically this was at the height of his epic aspirations. Had he thoroughly realised at the time the full implications of the story, he possibly would not have attempted it. But his theoretical grasp of this ancient catastrophe was carried away by his burning interest in the present hope, to the achievement of which his whole energy was devoted. One who was able to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land was not to be over-borne by the dark Satanic consequences of the Fall. The Fall alone had made such virtue necessary and therefore possible.

But this heroic enthusiasm, together with other factors both in the character of Milton and <sup>in</sup> the subject itself, made it impossible for Paradise Lost to remain a tragedy. Adam's fall is a matter requiring a universal setting. It is connected with the working of a universal scheme. Its

scope could not be less than that of the great epic achievements which would be necessary to restore the balance.

Adam's is not merely an individual error. He has an epic significance which is only falsely attributed to other heroes. He has really been chosen by God, and it can be said of him as of no other

thine and of all thy Sons  
The weal or woe in thee is plac't.

He can hardly be treated with the psychological complexity required in a tragic hero. He is deceived by no dim apprehensions of Providence. He has walked with God and the divine wishes have been explicitly conveyed to him. God is essentially in the foreground in the story of the Fall. The marvellous must appear on the same plane of immediate interest as the probable.

But though he abandoned the tragic for the epic form, Milton's work is not the less dramatic therefore. Like Homer and Aristotle he knew that the epic itself must be dramatic, and ~~his work~~<sup>he</sup> differs essentially from Spenser and the Fletchers not in his greater insistence upon mere doctrine, but in his more vital presentation of character and situation and in the dramatic unity of his structure. Whatever anticipations of Milton may be found

in mediaeval literature, it is certain that he himself is never mediaeval. There are whole tracts of mediaeval thought with which he had little sympathy. For its scholasticism and for the refinements of the Vita Nuova he cared little, although its concern for the salvation and for the proper government of mankind commanded his respect.(2) Even if it could be proved, as it cannot, that he had read all the mediaeval authors we have mentioned, we should not feel that this was a further indication of his literary indebtedness. Milton is never imposed on, so to speak, by mediaevalism, as he is sometimes by classicism. But he has sufficient in common with the feeling of the Middle Ages to justify his claim as one coeval with Time himself and to show that his chief interest, if not one of the very deepest elements in human - or anthropological - nature, was at least one fairly well established in the common heart of man. #

3.

Much, then, as Paradise Lost owed to Milton's studies, it is certain that the poem is not merely an academic exercise on an approved model. It was written because

---

(2) Cf. his citations of Chaucer, Langland, Dante and Petrarch in the early prose works.

Milton had to write it. Its form is not classical, but just such a form as the classics assisted Milton to devise for himself as the most fitting expression of his own aspirations. Its intention also is primarily Miltonic, and only in a secondary way Hebraic. Such elements of Hebraism as it contains were almost native to Milton since they were shared not only by many of his contemporaries but, in a great measure, by earlier English poets. In both of these matters Paradise Lost differs notably from the heroic poem produced in vacuo. One other point remains for consideration - the substance of the poem. Obviously Milton did not choose the story of Adam in the same way as Matthew Arnold, for example, chose the story of Sohrab and Rostum. It was not merely an interesting tale from an ancient literature. Had it been that, Milton would have had some care for local colour and have avoided the mixture of classical and Hebraic allusion which has offended some critics. To him, however, as to most men in his day, this was a story with a vital and universal significance which must account not only for the later history of the Hebrews but for the errors of paganism as well. Others besides Milton had begun to

see that if the whole scheme was to be implied in one story - instead of a whole series of stories from creation to doomsday - that story would have to be the story of Adam. (3) And before Milton's day the story had been told so many times and with so many additions that it had become in some respects a different story from that found in Genesis.

All that part which relates to the fall of the angels has no part in the story of Genesis. That the fall of the angels preceded the fall of man was a belief which went back at least to St. Augustine, in whom Milton no doubt found it. But he had no need to learn it from St. Augustine. He must have known it from childhood, since it was so commonly accepted, in the Anglo-Saxon Genesis for example, in Chaucer, (4) Gower and Langland, (5) in the miracle plays, in Spenser and in Browne. (6) So too when Milton makes pride and worse ambition rather than lust the cause of Satan's fall, this was not probably a scholarly decision based upon the due

---

(3) e.g. Grotius and Vondel.

(4) Monk's Tale.

(5) B-text, Passus I, 105 ff.

(6) Vulgar Errors, Book I, chapters I and X (edn. 1658, pp. 1, 28);  
Religio Medici, Part I, section VII.

appraisement of the ultimate authorities. Even in a popular play like Henry VIII Wolsey can assert as a matter of accepted belief that it was by ambition that the angels fell, while "proud as Lucifer" was almost proverbial (7) and the sentiment

Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n had already been attributed to Satan by at least two Englishmen (8) before Vondel, who perhaps knew neither of them, made his Lucifer hold somewhat similar language. The nine days' fall from heaven is found in authors so wide apart as Langland and Mantuan.(9) Satan was usually identified with the serpent without question,(1) though Milton's contemporaries Mede and the author of Nova Solyma were at pains to justify the identification.(2) On

- 
- (7) e.g. Chillingworth: A Letter to Mr. Lewgar &c., 1687, p.3. "And if I yield not to it (the Church of Rome), say if you please I am as proud as Lucifer". Cf. Raleigh: Preface to "Historie of the World": "Not to poynt farre off, and to speake of the conversion of Angells into Devills, for Ambition..."
- (8) Strafford: Niobe; Fletcher: Apollyonists, I, 18, 20. Cf. Purple Island VII, 10.
- (9) B-text Passus I, 119; Eclogue II, 112-114.
- (1) e.g. Chaucer: Parson's Tale 330; Donne (Selections ed. Pearsall Smith, p. 1); Browne: Vulgar Errors (ed. 1658, p.1)
- (2) Mede: Discourse XL (Works ed. 1677. p.223); Nova Solyma (ed. Begley II, 57).

the other hand, Satan was not usually identified with Beelzebub as he is apparently in the Gospels. In the History of Dr. Faustus Lucifer reigns in Orient, Beelzebub in Septentrio, and on one occasion Lucifer appears "in the manner of a man all hairy" while Beelzebub has the head of a bull.(3) These two, however, do not always stand out as the two chief devils: in the Faust book Belial and Ascheroth are apparently of the same order.(4) Yet the porter in Macbeth knows of only one devil comparable with, or perhaps superior to, Beelzebub. This differentiation between these two devils is perhaps traceable to the Gospel of Nicodemus,(5) in some versions

---

(3) Chapters XII and XIX.

(4) Newton objects that Belial was never worshipped as a god, but he is well supported in the tradition e.g. Life of St. Juliana, Skelton's Why come ye not to court? Langland: B-text XVIII, Towneley play of The Deliverance of Souls, Langland and the Towneley play also mention Astaroth, who also appears in Greban's Passion and in a famous passage of the Morgante Maggiore.

(5) This does not appear in any of the three versions given in Dr. M.R. James's Apocryphal New Testament, but in Jones's translation in Hone's Apocryphal New Testament the place of Hades is throughout taken by Beelzebub. In the Towneley play of the Deliverance of Souls, Beelzebub "prynce and pryncypall" of hell bids Rybald call astarot and anaball, bell berith and bellyal, and also "sir satan our syre" and licyfer, but there is nothing of this in the Cursor Mundi. (E.E.T.S. Part III, pp. 1030-36). In Langland (B-text XVIII, 270 ff.; C-text XXI, 297 ff.) Lucifer, not Beelzebub, is the prince of hell and is made a separate person from Satan.

of which Beelzebub is apparently identified with Hades who is finally given dominion over Satan. In Milton, too, Beelzebub seems to be essentially the prince of Hell. He is left in charge when Satan sets off on his expedition, and he does not appear on earth with Belial and the others in Paradise Regained.

Such instances as these might suggest that Milton's amplications of the story of Genesis are often more likely to be traced to the popular tradition than to his researches into Rabbinical and Patristic literature. It is hardly necessary to have recourse to the Zohar to account for the relations between Satan, Sin and Death, when these are already set forth in Miltonic terms in Gower's Mirour de l'Omme. The suggestion is already in St. James, and if one author could follow it up in this way, why not another? The tendency to conceive essential evil in a loathsome female shape seems to be fairly common in different ages, in the Furies and Gorgons of ancient legend for example, in Echidna and Scylla. In Milton's own day it was not hard to convict any old woman of witchcraft, and if one wished to assault the Church of Rome it could be done most effectively in the terminology applied to the strange woman of Hebrew literature.

Even Shakespeare, who was freer than most men from such crude and hateful fancies, can enter into the spirit of the thing when he makes Queen Margaret denounce "hell's black intelligencer" Richard III and his mother:

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept  
A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death;  
That dog, that had his teeth before his eyes,  
To worry lambs, and lap their gentle blood,  
That foul defacer of God's handiwork,  
That excellent grand tyrant of the earth,  
That reigns in galled eyes of weeping souls,  
Thy womb let loose, to chase us to our graves.  
O! upright, just and true-disposing God,  
How do I thank thee that this carnal cur  
Preys on the issue of his mother's body,  
And makes her pew-fellow with others' mean.

Similarly the association of Michael with the expulsion from Eden is perhaps ultimately traceable to the Hebrew legends of the death of Adam and the prophecy to Seth, but it had been widely circulated by the Gospel of Nicodemus and appears in such a popular writer as Andreini. When Dr. Faustus in the History (6) was granted a sight of Paradise, he saw upon the fiery wall "Michael, with his flaming sword, to keep the tree of life, which he hath in charge.(7)

And as we must beware of attributing too much to

---

(6) Chapter XXIII.

(7) The enormous size of Milton's Satan may be justified by the Gospel of Bartholomew (James: Apocryphal New Testament; p.174) but possibly goes back no further than Dante and Tasso for its original. The whale simile is quite mediaeval. See E.E.Kellett: Milton as Mediaevalist, British Review, December, 1915.p.439.

special research, so we must not attribute too much to the purely literary models. Tasso is most likely to mislead us in this respect, unless we remember that he is not only a literary model but also a witness to the tradition. We have seen that there is some "imitation" in Milton, and although angelic messengers were themselves traditional it is obvious that Tasso's sending-out of Gabriel and Michael was "imitated" in Paradise Lost. But the infernal council was not imitated in this way, although it certainly owes something to Tasso. Infernal councils were part of the tradition. The Anglo-Saxon Genesis had such a council as prelude to the Fall. In the mediaeval drama they had occurred in such plays as Greban's Passion and in the Digby Magdalen play. Latterly from Ochino's Tragedie down to Fletcher's Apollyonists they had been much used to motivate Romish attacks on the true Protestant church. Tasso, therefore, did not induce Milton to add something fresh to the tradition, nor is there anything in Milton's council which suggests a mere borrowing from Tasso.

The council in Paradise Lost is not - as Tasso's tends to be - a mere episode, but a prime element in

structure.(8) So it is in the early Genesis, in Ochino and in Fletcher. A very interesting example of the way in which the tradition could anticipate Milton and also of the degree in which it could approximate to some of Milton's chosen models is to be found in A Song called the Develis Parliament or Parliamentum of Feendis (9) At the birth of Christ the devils consult together. They do not know who is His father, but the master-devil undertakes to tempt him. Then follows an account of the temptation. Again the devils hold a parliament. Then the master-devil comes back to Hell, gives an account of his various attempts against Jesus, and says he is afraid He is coming to attack them. After this follows the harrowing of Hell as in the Gospel of Nicodemus. This resembles Job in introducing extra-mundane consultations followed by a series of temptations on earth. And it anticipates Milton not only in using infernal councils in place of Job's councils in Heaven; the chain of events - the infernal council, the setting-out of the master-devil,

---

(8) Pommrich: Miltons Verhältnis zu Torquato Tasso, Halle a.S. 1902, pp. 11 n., 28-29, argues that Tasso's is more than an episode. He relies on the importance of such an event in the traditional scheme, but does not inquire whether Tasso has given it a place in his structure commensurate with this importance.

(9) E.E.T.S. ed. Furnivall, 1867. We may even note a certain resemblance between Justice and Mercy and Virgil's Juno and Venus. Aeneas is Virgil's Humanum Genus.

the temptation, and the consequences on the master-devil's return to Hell - is essentially that of Paradise Lost.

Yet the theme of the poem is Paradise Regained, not only the Paradise Regained of Milton's poem, but the more complete triumph of the Gospel of Nicodemus - a theme which, as Sir Walter Raleigh suggested, presented great opportunities for Milton's genius, but which he was unable to adopt.

So far then from being a mere retelling of an ancient story, Paradise Lost may almost be regarded as the final crystallisation of a legend which had been growing right up to Milton's own time. Milton did indeed impose his own form upon it, and that form was largely shaped by other influences. Yet the result is by no means so artificial as might have been expected. Milton had art in plenty, but he had judgment too, and his form, if it owes something to Aristotle, is not unmindful of the nature of the thing expressed. That he did, as completely as an epic poet may, fix and make intelligible the beliefs of his age and country may be assumed from Dr. Johnson's reluctance to criticise parts of Paradise Lost which, after all, have little biblical sanction, and from the religion which Robinson Crusoe taught to Friday.(1)

---

(1) See the testimonies of Atterbury, Cowper, Hollis, Welsted, Warburton and others in Havens: 'The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, 1922. pp 5-7.

We cannot undertake to follow up all the ramifications of this tradition, but we must always keep it in mind. It is because it has been disregarded that alleged "sources" of Paradise Lost have been so readily multiplied. When Milton is found to agree with some earlier author in several matters which have no biblical authority, it has been supposed that he must be indebted to that author. But if it is understood that the accepted story contained elements not found in the Bible, the indebtedness is not so certain. It would be very difficult indeed to show instances of borrowing which could not possibly come from some other author. And in the absence of such demonstration, it must be felt as a serious weakness in these claims that few of the authors adduced, except Grotius, were men whom Milton could reasonably be expected to have read. As for Andreini, people have been content to follow Voltaire in supposing that Milton may have chanced upon L'Adamo during his visit to Italy. For Vondel there is even less to be said. Even if Milton did take some interest in Dutch affairs, it is unlikely that he was much interested in Dutch writers, or rather in writers of the vernacular. Grotius, however, was a Dutchman whom even Selden(2)

---

(2) "To quote a modern Dutchman where I may use a classic author, is as if I were to justify my reputation, and I neglect all persons of note and quality that know me, and bring the testimonial of the scullion in the kitchen." Table Talk.

could not despise, and he was one whom Milton was proud to have met.

The supporters of these claims have relied largely upon the accumulation of parallel passages. But these, unless supported by external evidence, are misleading. How natural, for example, would it be, if the dates only permitted, to suppose that

some renowned Metropolis  
With glistering Spires and Pinnacles adorned,  
Which now the Rising Sun guilds with his beams

was reminiscent of Wordsworth's sonnet, or that Iago's

Do; with like timorous accent and dire yell  
As when by night and negligence, the fire  
Is spied in populous cities.

was a deliberate parody of Milton's epic style. The epithet "dire" and the phrase "populous cities" seem unmistakable.(3) Parallel passages require very careful handling when both authors are dealing with the same subject. This caution should be applied not only to passages deriving from the Bible, but also in some cases to those embellishments of the Bible narrative which would readily suggest themselves to a man read in the classical poets. If Milton's Adam, like

---

(3) So the Nightingale sonnet might be supposed to owe something to Shirley's Hyde Park (IV,1) and the Nativity Ode to Shirley's masque (1634). For this reason too much importance must not be given to the possible recollection of this masque in L'Allegro. See The Poems of Milton, ed. Grierson, I. xix.

Grotius's, is assailed by a Virgilian gelidus tremor, that is what we should expect from men educated in the classical tradition, without supposing one to be indebted to the other. Yet Mr. Edmundson will claim for Vondel passages of Paradise Lost which are obviously derived from Ovid's sanctius his animal, from the Bower of Bliss and from the "scales" episode of Homer and Virgil.(4). If we are to work in this way, it would be easy to show that when this student of Plato in his Apology for Smectymnus alluded to "a certain sorceress, the abuser of love's name", he must have had in mind Carne in L'Adamo:

Or sappi ch'io  
 Sono l'alma d'Amor, di quell'Amore  
 Ch'indusse il tuo Fattore  
 A far di nulla il tutto. (V,1,3022)

Another device too often employed by the supporters of these claimants is the use of very Miltonic translations. (5) By such means even such a harmless verse as Ovid's

Dixit et ad litus passu processit anili,  
 (Metam. XIII, 533)

being translated

She ceased, and with uneasy steps  
 Was moving toward the shore,

---

(4) Paradise Lost, VII, 505 ff.; IV, 236 ff.; IV, 996 ff.  
 (5) Coleridge censured Hayley's "whole version" of the scenes of Andreini quoted in his Life of Milton as "affectedly and in accurately Miltonic". Edmundson is a notorious offender in this respect. Barham's translation of Grotius (1839) adds to his offences in this kind by inserting or excising whole passages at will. A great part of the scene between Adam and the angel is omitted, and an account of the fall of the angels is supplied. (pp. 18-19)

might be made to yield a striking similarity to some lines of Paradise Lost. Sometimes the practice is carried to a point which reminds us of the methods of Lauder, but it is the translation only which is interpolated.(6)

Yet with all these artificial aids it is hard to find in any of the alleged "sources" the same kind of anticipation of Milton's phraseology as we are accustomed to in those poets whom we certainly know him to have read. The recollection of Tasso in

what I will is Fate, (7)

of Dante in

And with desire to languish without hope, (8)

of Virgil in

Thir happiness,(9) thrice happy if they know

---

(6) Lauder at least does not insult his reader by supposing him utterly ignorant of classical literature. In passages whose derivation is pretty obvious he will show cause for preferring his manufactured original to that usually accepted, and he does not expect us to accept anything in translation which he cannot produce in his author's text.

(7) VII,173, Cf. Sia destin ciò ch'io voglio. G.L.IV.17.

(8) X,995.Cf. senza speme vivemo in disio. Inferno IV,42.

(9) VII,631.Cf. O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint. Georg. II.458.

or Ovid in

and at his Gilles  
Draws in, and at his Trunck spouts out a Sea (1)

or of Spenser in

Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,  
And sweet reluctant amorous delay, - (2)

these are beyond dispute. But the recollection of

En liever d'eerste Vorst in eenigh lager hof  
Dan in't gezalicht licht de tweede, of noch een minder, (3)

or of

Poi ch'è maggior contento  
Viver in libertà tutti dannati  
Che sudditi beati (4)

in

Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n

is at least not so obvious, since neither contains the antitheses  
Hell, Heaven and reign, serve - which both occur in Phineas  
Fletcher. Nor do any of these "sources" contain anything so  
strikingly near to Milton as the Sin and Death episode in  
Gower's Mirour de l'Omme, (5) a work which Milton could hardly

---

(1) VII, 415. Cf. acceptum paulis mare naribus efflant. Metam.  
III, 686.

(2) IV, 310. Cf. Whose yielded pride and proud submission.  
F.Q.I, iii. 6.

(3) Lucifer, Act II.

(4) L'Adamo IV, ii. 2616.

(5) Cf. J.S.P. Tatlock: Milton's Sin and Death, Mod. Lang. Notes,  
XXI, 239. 1906.

have known. And even if it were admitted that Milton had read them, and that echoes of these works were to be found in his poem, what would that prove? A man cannot be expected to ascertain that every phrase he uses has never been used before, nor must he be held to be vitally indebted to a book simply because he may be proved to have read it. Our study of Ovid, Tasso, Virgil and Spenser will have taught us the sort of use that Milton made of those authors whom he deliberately studied in preparation for his great poem. Is there any evidence that he benefitted in this way from Andreini, Grotius or Vondel? To establish this would require something more than a consideration of possible parallels in his finished work.

The earliest drafts of Paradise Lost certainly have some likeness to Andreini. This is seen not so much in the introduction of such characters as Death, Famine and Labour as in the circumstances that Labour, Sicknesse, Discontent and Ignorance (like Andreini's Sete, Fatica and Disperazione) are mute characters, whereas Death has at first a speaking part. But Conscience is a character of a sort not found in Andreini, and in conjunction with Faith, Hope and Charity seems to point already to a different handling of the subject. There is nothing at all to suggest

that Milton ever thought of treating the subject in Andreini's manner. The scheme of the first three drafts is essentially that of a set and solemn panegyric of a semi-liturgical kind. It suggests a sort of oratorio in which a great part of the work will be done by choruses, though these will be diversified by an introductory expositor to explain the whole scheme and a procession of soloists to testify thereto. Andreini, on the other hand, is essentially dramatic. His series of abortive attempts leading up to the great temptation provides dramatic incident and dramatic suspense. And his structure is dramatic. Act I is concerned almost entirely with the machinations of the hellish party, Act II with the various attempts culminating in the seduction of Eve by the Serpent and Vain Glory, and Act III with the fall of Adam, the joy of the demons and God's sentence. This is all very different from Milton, and the last two acts are even further removed. At the time of these first drafts Adam in Banishment is a subject by itself noted among "other tragedies" along with The Flood and Abram in Egypt.

What makes it almost certain that the conception of the earliest drafts was not borrowed is the fact that the

"oiconomie" is the last thing thought of. The first two drafts are merely lists of persons, and the suggested treatment in the third draft is based upon the second list and could hardly have been in Milton's mind when the first was drawn up. What ideas Milton had in this first list it is impossible to say. Probably nothing very definite. One thing however seems certain. The personal experiences of Adam count for very little: he is there only to motivate a somewhat morality-like scheme of the state of man, much as in Gower's Mirour de l'Omme. And the opposing groups Labour, Sickness, Discontent and Ignorance, and Faith, Hope and Charity represent the forces by which man is assailed or helped just like the array of vices and virtues in Gower. Even the scheme evolved in the third draft is not dramatic. Moses is a sort of expository chorus-prologue like that in Henry V, a device for squeezing an epic into dramatic limits. Acts I and II are taken up with the solemn scenes and acts of angelic and allegorical performers, dramatic only in the same sense as the book of Revelation. There is no motivation of the Fall till Act III, when Lucifer enters contriving Adam's ruin. This, however, is not followed up, for the chorus

now tells of Lucifer's rebellion and fall. Then Adam and Eve enter, their fall already accomplished. The procession of mutes which follows may be due to Andreini or, as Professor Grierson has suggested, to the pallidorum longa morborum cohors and turba curarum of Grotius, but obviously the piece itself is not inspired by either of these writers. If there is any debt at all, it is most probably to Giles Fletcher, who has a similar introductory scene between Mercy and Justice, and the title of whose poem Christs Victorie and Triumph in Heaven, and Earth, over and after Death indicates the same universality of intention as this suggested poem of Milton. In Fletcher, as in Milton, we have one dramatic situation - in one the Temptation in the wilderness, in the other the Fall - not treated for its own sake but smothered by the comprehensiveness of its author's intentions. The Paradise Lost of this third draft is the proper counterpart of Giles Fletcher's Paradise Regained.

In the fourth draft there is still no attempt to set forth the actual scene of the temptation, but the scheme is nevertheless more dramatic. It may be compared to the classical tragedies with their action off stage. The non-dramatic framework has been cleared away. The new

prologue is Gabriel, himself an actor in the play. The change of title is also significant: Adam Unparadiz'd is concerned with the historical event, the earlier Paradise Lost with its theoretical implications. The new title, together with the approach towards the methods of Greek tragedy, suggests immediately the possible influence of Grotius, while Phillips' statement that the opening of Satan's address to the Sun was designed for the very beginning of a tragedy makes this very probable indeed. If he was thus to introduce Satan at the outset, and cut out all preliminaries whatsoever, it is hard to see how Milton could give any body to his tragedy without bringing in the actual scene of the temptation as Grotius had done. We have already remarked upon the structural similarity between the ninth book of Paradise Lost and Comus. It seems not unlikely that this part of the poem was conceived at the time to which Phillips refers. There are indeed some indications that it was originally in dramatic form,(6) and, even if we do not

---

(6) Satan's monologue (99 ff.) is not unlike the prologue of a tragedy and expounds admirably a situation which in its present form requires no such exposition. The address to Earth is curiously parallel to the opening of Phillips' tragedy and such lines as 157-162 and 482 seem to be spoken to an audience.

go so far as to suppose that it preserves the actual work of the earlier period, we can hardly believe that Milton could work up the situation again and yet remain altogether unmindful of his earlier treatment. And if this does represent Milton's early conception of the scene, the divergence from Grotius is remarkable and shows that, if he had sources, he was very independent in his use of them.

All this, however, only carries us up to a point about fifteen or sixteen years before Paradise Lost was begun. Can we from these indications, and from our general knowledge of Milton's development, presume to foresee such a poem as Paradise Lost proved to be, or must we suppose that some entirely fresh influence came to bear upon him? The successive stages represented by the manuscript show Milton's treatment becoming more and more dramatic. That is quite natural. He had started by trying to fit the story into a dramatic form, and he found that, in that form, it could best be treated dramatically. Yet it seems that this treatment did not altogether satisfy him. It involved the omission of much which he had hoped to include: hence the note, "compare the former drafts". In finding how to treat his subject in dramatic form, Milton also discovered

that the dramatic form was not what he wanted. Adam Unparadiz'd could be done that way, but not Paradise Lost. Again, if his scheme ever did become as dramatic as we have suggested, if the temptation did become an actual part of it, Milton must by then have given up all thought of performance on a stage. The true dramatic treatment, in short, only became possible when dramatic presentation was out of the question. But The Reason of Church Government suggests that the choice of the dramatic form was largely due to the hope of actual performance, and if the piece had not at first been intended for presentation why should Milton have avoided the introduction of Adam and Eve in the state of innocence? When, therefore, the hope of performance was abandoned, Milton would undoubtedly feel that the tragic form was an unnecessary limitation.

But though the drafts do in this way help us to see why the drama could not satisfy Milton's demands, they do not go beyond that. After all, they are not a complete statement of the progress of Milton's ideas on the subject of the Fall, but a record of the various stages of his attempt to put some of those ideas into a dramatic form.

They do not show him developing his theme on this side and on that, gathering more material and fresh ideas in the process. Rather they exhibit him as discarding much that he already has, lopping off this and that, trying to express himself in a form too small for him., The fourth draft is narrower in scope than the third, but even the third cannot represent the whole range of Milton's ideas on the subject. There would be some things which obviously, even upon a most optimistic estimate, could not be so much as thought of in a work of this kind. Of Milton's uncircumscribed and unconditioned meditations on the Fall, even at the time of the manuscript, there is no record,(7) but the Nativity Ode and the Prolusiones will at least suggest how poor a reflection of his essentially "sequacious" mind these drafts present, and our study of Comus will remind us of the difficulty Milton would have had in treating of this greater temptation within so strait a form.

---

(7) Mr. A. H. Gilbert (The Cambridge MS &c., Studies in Philology, XVI, 1919) suggests that "Milton had among his papers schemes for heroic poems as well as dramas." This does not seem necessary. Certainly it is not likely that he had abandoned so soon the hopes expressed in Mansus and the Epitaphium. But though the intention was still there, it is unlikely that any definite plans were formed. An epic is a big undertaking, and Milton was prepared to spend some time on it. A tragedy is not so ponderous, and the author of Comus, having tried his hand on a work of approximately similar dimensions, might have no hesitation in starting on one, especially if he thought that it would serve an immediately useful purpose.

That he did not proceed with the subject in the years immediately following does not by any means show that he had exhausted his resources and had to wait for fresh inspiration. His poetical aspirations were for a time turned in another direction. The story of Adam and Eve, as we have seen, began to acquire a new significance in other ways from the time of the divorce pamphlets. But Milton's artistic intentions until some time, at least, after these pamphlets were bound up with a more patriotic theme. It is important to notice, however, that the ultimate intention throughout this period is epic. This was stimulated partly by Tasso, much more by the events of the time. But behind these lay Milton's unconscious desire to run back and fetch the Age of Gold. When his own age and nation had failed him, this primary need of his became apparent. The essential harmony of man living in concert with the divine was not to be realised in his day, and had not been at any time since the days of Adam. Why, then, celebrate, wars and arms? What can these accomplish, being themselves a legacy of the Fall? What hope have we from the achievements of any nation, however great? In man's fallen state it is impossible to set up the only kind of empire worth having.(8) Milton's

---

(8) "seek only virtue, not to extend your limits..Yea, other nations will then covet to serve ye, for lordship and victory are but the pages of justice and virtue".Of Reformation in England, P.W.II,407.This is one of many curious points of contact between Milton and Rabelais.

account of his long choosing and beginning late in the ninth book of Paradise Lost does not suggest that he has been inspired by some new and brilliant treatment of the subject to see new possibilities in his theme. He had, in fact, hoped for something else. He had looked to God's justifying Himself by the event. He is now reduced to justifying Him by examining the terms of His original contract with us. But he tries very hard to convince himself that this subject will serve just as well.

There is no need to suppose, then, that between 1642 and 1658 Milton spent much time in studying the Adam story and seeking out all the recent refashionings of it, as he would need to have done if half his alleged borrowings are to be accepted. In the early part of the period, when he hoped to set forth the salvation of man by the achievements of a chosen nation, there could be only one work from which he could hope to obtain any assistance - the Aeneid. Afterwards, when he tried to treat epically the individual man and his relations to God and to exalt fortitude of the true sort, the only model must be Job. The lingering doubts, however, occasioned by the long habit of contem-

plating a larger scheme caused him to bring about a sort of compromise, an epic with the directness and simplicity of action of Job, but having too the grandeur and embellishment of the Aeneid. From no earlier version of the Adam story could he derive much help for such a project as this, nor is it likely that he looked for any such assistance. Paradise Lost grows out of Milton's epic intention, not out of his reading of the story of the Fall. He chose that story because it had acquired a personal significance for him during the period following the divorce pamphlets; because it justified God in showing that the true state of man by Him intended was essentially different from the very unsatisfactory state which has since prevailed; because it gave Milton an opportunity of setting forth his prime thesis, that true liberty is internal not external, achieved by triumph over temptation not by feats of arms; because he had already worked over the ground, though with a different intention, and found the theme one that could more fittingly be treated on an epic scale than in the form of a drama; because, finally, what had become imbedded in his memory was already a fair way on the road to become poetry, and Milton, tired out with his experiences of later years, was rather anxious to

recover something of the feeling of former days. How much Paradise Lost owes to those earlier days a comparison with Paradise Regained will reveal.

Paradise Lost, then, is not the result of fifteen or sixteen years' development in a straight line away from the drafts of 1642. Milton has undergone many and various experiences in the meantime, and his aspirations have taken on a different form. But in choosing the subject for his poem, he is to some extent returning to the drafts. He may, as Phillips has asserted, have made use of some material actually written at the earlier period. More often he seems to have dealt with his drafts much in the same manner as some people have supposed him to have dealt with his "sources". The address to wedded love is probably developed from a chorus in the third draft, and the episode at the end of the fourth book of Paradise Lost from the "discourse of enmity" in the fourth draft. But if we are to bring the early drafts into such close contact with Paradise Lost, we must attach some importance to those authors who influenced these drafts and who may also have left an impression on Milton's memory which the drafts do not adequately represent.

Of these, the two Fletchers would seem to be the

most important. That Milton himself does not refer to them must be admitted, but it is unlikely that he did not know two well-known contemporary poets (graduates of his own university whose works were published in Cambridge about the time of his own residence) (9) who stood out from many of their time by their devotion to Spenser, and scarcely less likely that the writer of so much Latin verse should not be interested in the author of the Locustae. At least we may claim that for no alleged source, except Grotius, is there anything like the same probability of having been read by Milton. The parallels which Grosart adduces from them have the advantage of requiring no translation, and certainly Phineas's

To-morrow shall ye feast in pastures new,  
his "theevish night" and "sooty flagges" seem to be remembered in Lycidas and Comus (1) while it is not unlikely that in Lycidas we have also a reminiscence of Giles's

an aged Syre farre off he sawe  
Come slowly footing.(2)

- 
- (9) Locustae and Apollyonists, 1627; Christs Victorie (2nd. edn. 1632; Purple Island, 1633.  
(1) Purple Island VI, 77, Piscatorie Eclogues V, 20, Apollyonists II, 39; Lycidas, 193, Comus, 195, 604. Cf. also Purple Island VI, 68-71 and Lycidas 142 ff. and 165 ff.  
(2) Christs Victorie II, 15; Lycidas 103.

This acquaintance with the Fletchers in the period of Comus and Lycidas may be taken as practically certain. And it is quite certain that if there were any poets who could escape Milton's condemnation of "libidinous and ignorant poetasters" which was written just about the time of the Paradise Lost drafts, the two Fletchers must have been conspicuous among them. No poets of the time came so near to Milton's own conception of the purpose of poetry. Witness Giles's preface to Christs Victorie with its commendation of sacred poetry and its praise of Bartas and Spenser, and the first canto of Phineas's Purple Island with its celebration of Bartas, Spenser and Virgil.

The Fletchers themselves derived so much from Spenser that their influence is often hard to distinguish from his, yet the modifications due to them are sometimes very significant. That Phineas's Parthenia should be remembered as well as Spenser's Belpheobe in Milton's celebration of chastity is nothing. What matters infinitely more is that Milton seems to have been put in mind of the sun-clad power of chastity<sup>y</sup> not by either of these virgins, but by Fletcher's Agnia or Married Chastity.<sup>(3)</sup> A hint like

---

(3) Purple Island X,27,Comus 420 ff. ; Purple Island X,26.  
Comus 782.

this goes far to fill one of the gaps which is supposed to exist between Comus and Paradise Lost. We have seen that the two Fletchers in some ways represent a reaction from Spenser. They are less artistic, they cannot dwell in a world of poetic fancy. Phineas's reaction from this aspect of Spenserianism is seen in such a poem as the Apollyonists, in which he forsakes allegory for the more tangible realms of popular demonology and the forthrightness of religious polemic. The importance of this poem, and of its Latin counterpart the Locustae, as an influence on the first two books of Paradise Lost is generally recognised. But there is more in it than that. We have already suggested that Milton's hopes of the great restoration were partly foreshadowed by such works as this of Fletcher and the Tragedie of Ochino, and certainly nothing comes nearer to the aspiration of the early prose works than the lines of Fletcher beginning:

See, Lord, ah see thy rancorous enemies  
Blowne up with envious spight, but more with hate. (V.30)

In stanzas like

Oh is not this the time, when mounted high  
Upon thy Pegasus of heavenly breed,  
With bloody armes, white armies, flaming eye,  
Thou vow'st in blood to swimme thy snowy steed;  
And staine thy bridle with a purple dye?  
This, this thy time: come then, oh come with speed,

\*  
+  
Note 6 cont. p. 640.

This Miltonic temper of Phineas Fletcher is very significantly displayed in the battle which occupies the last two cantos of The Purple Island. The material is entirely Spenserian but it is already highly Miltonised. The story of the battle may owe something to the Hymnes: at least the "adamantine chains" of the Hymne of Love appear, already applied to Satan, (P.I. XII, 64) But it is treated in the manner of the moralities and of the assault on the House of Alma. Some of the protagonists, however, are drawn from other parts of the Faerie Queene. The Dragon encountered by the Red Cross Knight (F.Q.I., xi, 10) is identified with Satan (P.I. XII, 59), thus helping to account for his influence in Milton's wars in Heaven (F.Q. I, xi, 54; P.I. VI, 195 ff.). Error has already become Sin and daughter to Satan (P.I. XII, 27-29), and though her birth is not Miltonic the manner of her appearance in the fight is suggestive. Thus we cannot regard Milton's wars in Heaven as a mere borrowing from Vondel. They are a development from Fletcher (Cf. P.I. XII, 81 and P.L. VI, 720-21) of the same kind as is shown in the development of the scene in Paradise Lost Book III from the Justice and Mercy episode of the drafts and of Giles Fletcher. This change from the abstract to the concrete is quite normal in Milton and is sufficiently accounted for here, as elsewhere, by the influence of the classics, Tasso, the Bible, and is already anticipated in Fletcher's own Apollyonists. But there is also another change in an equally Miltonic, but less Fletcherian, direction. Fletcher's battle is related to Milton's much as were the court masques to the masque foreshadowed in The Passion (Cf. the reference to King James in P.I. XII, 55). This, I think, will help to explain an apparent inconsistency which troubled Sir Walter Raleigh (Milton, p. 98). Milton regarded human wars, even holy wars like Tasso's, as no true subject for epic, but that was only because he had come to realise that men were not capable of fighting God's battles. Even his angels have to resign that task to God Himself. But the two-handed engine must be wielded, and in view of Revelation we cannot suppose that Milton regarded his battle as merely a poetical fiction. It was indeed probably the importance which Milton attached to it that made him incline so much towards the Aeneid instead of conforming to the model of Job.



ience finds expression. But Giles Fletcher was not he who should cross the line between romance and epic. (5) His advance is in another direction. High poetry may transcend romance, but sheer moral earnestness can only deny romance altogether or make use of it at its own risk. The idea of associating the temptation in the wilderness with the Bower of Bliss is a signal instance of the enormity to which good intentions alone so often lead. It could be thought of by Belial; it was thought of by Giles Fletcher. Milton never could have done anything like that. In Comus his setting is Spenserian, and his central figure is a lady whose virtue is celebrated in Spenserian terms. Undoubtedly she is not quite like the heroines of Spenser: she is equally unbending in her attitude to evil, but she is more stiffened up with doctrine. There is, however, no incongruity between the Lady and her setting: the sense of fitness is admirably preserved. Yet Milton has certainly approached the problem from the wrong side. The central figure and not the setting had been the essential thing in Fletcher, and Milton, though his Lady's virtue is striking enough, cannot expect her to emulate Fletcher's Christ -

---

(5) Cf. W.P. Ker: Epic and Romance (Eversley Edition, p.33)

But he her charmes dispersed into winde,  
And her of insolence admonished,  
And all her optique glasses shattered.

The Lady's admonishments, coming from a mere mortal, themselves savour of insolence, and her suggestion of shattering Comus's magic structures over his false head remains only a threat. In Paradise Regained Milton dealt with the matter in another way. An influence which affects both Comus and Paradise Regained is obviously very far-reaching, and its manifestations will be correspondingly hard to detect. Giles Fletcher does not lead Milton into new paths, he gives him nothing which he had not before. He cannot show, as Phineas had partly shown, how some things might be done. But he could remind Milton of some of the more difficult things that needed to be done. If we compare the third book of Paradise Lost with the suggested scene between Mercy and Justice in the drafts and the corresponding passage in Christ's Victorie, we shall see that his influence, if less obvious than Phineas's, was perhaps hardly less fruitful. But we shall not feel that Milton owed him much.

Of Grotius and Andreini less need be said.

Milton's knowledge of Grotius' Adamus Exul and Christus Patiens is not only probable but receives some support

from the Cambridge manuscript (6). That Adam and Christ are the focal points of Milton's system is a fact which need not be insisted on, as it is unlikely that Grotius did much to confirm these views. But that Grotius should choose these two subjects shows how natural was Milton's choice to a man of his age. The chief debt to Grotius was probably the suggestion of that psychological treatment of Satan which makes him such a different figure from that found in Dante and Tasso. Possibly the angel's discourse to Adam was also of use to Milton. It is hardly in place in a drama, but it suggests matters which could more properly be worked up in an epic. Undoubtedly, however, not the least of Grotius's services is his pointing the way to better models. Milton, as we have suggested, might have thought of Virgil's gelidus tremor without him, but the recollection for example in Eve's speech,

Omne ruat in me malum,  
Si quod futurum est! Parcat, o, parcat viro! (7)

is more unexpected, and it can hardly be doubted that Milton has profited by the hint.

---

(6) See e.g. the title Adam ex- afterwards altered to Adam in Banishment and the suggested tragedy Christus Patiens.  
(7) ed. Dordraci, 1798 (propter eximiam raritatem denuo recusa) p.54. Note also the last line of Dousa's commendatory verses,  
Hei, mihi, quam dispar huic status ille fuit!

The most probable reminiscence of Andreini is in the completed poem of Paradise Lost, the "lazar-house" in the eleventh book. There is, as we have seen, little to connect Andreini with the early drafts, and it seems unlikely that he influenced the inception of the poem. Yet it is just possible. Mr. Verity has noticed that even in Comus there is a certain similarity to the scene in the Adamo in which Mondo tempts Eve.(8) . The most obvious point of resemblance between Milton and Andreini is in their motivation of Satan's rebellion. (9). Less obvious but more interesting is the possibility that some features of the infernal debate may derive ultimately from Andreini. In the preparation for the assault on man in the first act of the Adamo, Lucifer summons various evil spirits to represent the Seven Deadly Sins. Such a conception is, of course, farther from Paradise Lost than is the debate between Justice and Mercy in the early draft, but knowing the sea change that has come over the one we may perhaps suspect that the other had some influence on the characterisation of Moloch, Belial and Mammon. To

---

(8) Adamo.V.v.

(9) Ibid.I,iii,459 ff.; II,iv,1103 ff.; IV,iii,2629 ff.

say that these were indebted to Andreini's Anger, Sloth and Avarice, would be as ridiculous as to suppose that Satan was modelled upon Pride or Shakespeare's "grey-haired iniquity" Falstaff upon the ancient Vice whose function he once threatens to assume. Yet, after all, this is the only kind of obligation we should expect Milton to owe to Andreini.

Vondel, of course, could not have influenced the drafts. His Lucifer, however, was published some time before Paradise Lost, and it would have been possible for Milton, supposing him to be aware of its existence, to become acquainted with it before 1658 when he is supposed to have started upon his own poem. That two such poems should be published within a few years of each other has naturally given rise to much inquiry. The late Sir Edmund Gosse found some points of resemblance between them, such as might suggest that Milton had been influenced by Vondel, and he also called attention to Roger Williams's statement that he read Dutch with Milton during the years 1651 to 1654. It was in the latter year that Lucifer was published. This claim is obviously one not lightly to be rejected, yet it seems unlikely that a poem published so late as 1654 could have any

vital influence on Milton's schemes. In fact what strikes us first on reading the Lucifer and Paradise Lost together is the fundamental difference between these two handlings of the same story, a difference in form, arrangement, incident, motivation and character. And though Roger Williams's evidence does make such an influence appear less unlikely than we should have supposed, it is still far from making it a matter of probability. It is quite possible to over-estimate the importance of the production of Lucifer, as it would appear to an outsider. Milton's Dutch interests were of a very definite and restricted kind.

The claims made by Mr. Edmundson are a different matter altogether. Without adding to the external evidence of Gosse, Mr. Edmundson sought to establish a much more far-reaching conclusion: that in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, Milton borrowed assiduously from the Lucifer, Adam in Ballingschap, Samson and other works of Vondel. This more imposing edifice obviously requires a much firmer foundation. Milton's reading with Roger Williams might carry him as far as Lucifer, but who were the people who read Dutch to him during the following ten years, up to the

X NOTE p. 647.

The passages adduced from Adam in Ballingschap, for the most part, prove nothing at all. (Even if P.L. were not finished by 1663, not much could have been written between 1664 and the date when Elwood saw it, and that Book IX is among this latest work is a considerable assumption.) Müller: Über Miltons Abhängigkeit von Vondel, Berlin 1891, pp. 51-54 allows some of them but cancels many by reference to the Bible, to the actual text of Vondel, and to Milton's own earlier poems, and concludes: "Was den Rest der dem fünften Buche des 'Adam in der Verbannung' entnommen Citate anbetrifft, so glauben wir nicht zu weit zu gehen, wenn wir behaupten, dass Edmundson nicht unparteiisch seine Aufgabe gelöst hat." Some of these from the epic Joannes Boetgezant (1661) are much better. This again was too late to have any essential influence on Paradise Lost, but knowing how highly conventionalised was the seventeenth century epic we shall have no difficulty in accounting for the similarity. God's address and the sending-out of Gabriel (Joan. Boet. I, 90-111, 126-147) which Edmundson considers (p. 94) "would alone be sufficient to establish the fact of Milton's indebtedness" is at least enough to render some of his own earlier citations from the Lucifer unnecessary. (e.g. p. 37, where Lucifer I, 10-21 by such ingenious renderings as "with many a wheel" for "van kreits in kreits" and "where his quick wings Winnow the clouds" for "waar zijn gezwinde wieken De wolken breken" is made to yield a striking resemblance to P.L. V, 266 ff.; III, 741.) Another exceptionally good passage is the account of the assembly in hell. (Joan. Boet. IV, 1-24, Edmundson p. 108-09.) This is more convincing than Gabriel's narrative in Lucifer. But both of these are accepted episodes in the epic tradition from Tasso onwards, and the second is not unlike Phineas Fletcher. Bespiegelingen van God en Gpdsdienst must be an exceptional poem or Mr Edmundson's customary ingenuity must have failed him. I cannot imagine that any didactic poem of this kind should be so unfruitful. In most poems of this kind which preceded Paradise Lost it is possible to find all sorts of curious illustrations of Milton, some of them very striking. Putting aside Du Bartas (who, incidentally, accounts for many of Mr Edmundson's parallels) there are the Sin and Death episode in Gower and a curious anticipation of the Abdiel incident in Heywood. (See Michael's rebuke, Hierarchie, 1635 p. 340.) These, to be sure, prove nothing, but if only one or two such examples could be adduced from Vondel, they would be more convincing than e.g. the arguments concerning the form of Samson Agonistes.

date of Adam in Ballingschap (1664)? That Milton should be interested in Homer, Virgil, or Tasso would occasion no remark. So, in those days, were many other people. But that he should have Vondel read to him would certainly be unusual enough to excite comment. Again since Aubrey assures us on the authority of Phillips that Paradise Lost was finished about three years after the Restoration, and as we know that Elwood read it in 1665, it is hazardous to insist on the importance of any similarities between it and a work published in 1664. Even the parallels quoted in support of so improbable a claim, so far as they prove anything at all, may serve only to cast suspicion on those drawn from the Lucifer. X  
The general similarity in choice of subject, on which Mr. Edmandson insists, amounts to nothing. When we turn to the Cambridge manuscript we can only wonder that it should be so slight. The chorus of angels singing a hymn of the creation at the end of Act I in the third draft is exactly paralleled in Lucifer.(1) The title Adam in Banishment is exactly translated from Vondel just twenty-two years too soon, and the tragedy so called immediately precedes another on

---

(1) Grierson: First Half of the Seventeenth Century 1906.p.193.  
n.

The Flood - a very Vondelian circumstance indeed. If these projects had been carried out, and if the tragedy Baptistes had also been written, how much more convincing would Mr. Edmundson's case have been. On the evidence of the manuscript one would have thought it impossible to escape some really striking similarity. If Milton had written his series of biblical tragedies, Vondel's Joseph plays and others would have afforded a parallel. "British Troy" too must have been conceived in a frame of mind not unlike that which drew upon the Aeneid to set forth the subject of Gysbrecht van Amstel. Yet what, in fact, do we get? Vondel does not account for Paradise Regained, and, for the rest, did not Chaucer choose precisely Lucifer, Adam and Samson for the first three "tragedies" of his Monk's Tale?

The comparison between Vondel and Milton will not explain where Milton got it all from, but rightly considered it will teach us something much more important. The schemes of 1642 may appear jejune and pretentious. So indeed they were. Yet the fact that Vondel practically carried out such a programme shows at least that Milton's intentions were not unnatural at that time. That Vondel's exertions in patriotic and religious drama should culminate

in the Lucifer also helps us to understand how inevitable was Milton's final choice of subject. If we must inquire into the possibility of Vondel's influence on Milton, we should first realise that Lucifer and Paradise Lost are to be considered on different grounds from the other works which have been brought into question. In Paradise Lost Milton was ready to learn from <sup>other</sup> authors, but he does not show quite the same disposition in his two later poems. In Lucifer, Vondel achieved a work of notable originality, even though Grotius had partly led the way to a more careful and imaginative realisation of Satan's character and motives than had been customary; it is unlikely that anyone acquainted <sup>with Grotius</sup> would find the same impressive originality in Adam in Ballingschap. But though we feel that Lucifer might have impressed Milton, it seems certain that it did not. Milton's Satan is quite an independent development from Grotius. Nor has Vondel in any other way coloured his presentation of the supernatural world. It may be true, as Courthope has said, that Vondel's Lucifer, Belial and Beelzebub "sink to the level of mere political conspirators" (2) yet his picture of

---

(2) History of English Poetry, III, 405-08.

heaven is interesting and might have suggested the possibility of keeping God more in the background, of making the angelic characters more individual and of allowing them some sort of personal intercourse instead of being always on duty singing hymns and listening to divine decrees. Perhaps Milton would not have thought it proper to present heaven in this way.(3) In any case he did not do it. The case for Samson may be much more confidently rejected. If Milton had derived the suggestion from Samson of Heilige Wraak, would he have resisted the temptation to emphasise the doctrinal rather than the dramatic aspects of the story? (4) If some will not see the difference between Milton's Samson and Vondel's, that is but part of their general refusal to see any difference between Milton and Vondel. The essential difference is one they dare not admit. If Milton's study of the Iroades had immediately found vent in a Hecuba of London, if every author read had moved him first to translation and then straightway to emulation, then Mr. Edmundson's thesis might possibly be entertained. But we know that Milton's reading was after another fashion.

---

(3) But cf. P.L. I, 423; VIII, 619. And certainly it was not Milton's intention to give point to the jeers of Mammon.

(4) Cf. Grierson in Modern Languages Review XVI. (1921), 349.

651

X NOTE p. 650.

If, however, the search for "sources" be directed by some higher expectation than that of mere borrowing, it may become a matter of real critical importance. What is vitally relevant in Milton is not imitation but the firm settling of his persuasion which partly determined, and was partly determined by, his reading. Thus Ovid shocked his honest haughtiness and his high esteem of himself and of his calling. This forced Milton to defend Homer, but it was the Homer, not of the Iliad (concerning which his mind gave him misgivings, Apology P.W. III, 119), but of the Odyssey. But the lesson which he found in the Odyssey (Elegy VI) was one which he learned from Spenser. This leaning towards the Odyssey rather than the Iliad, and even the bare suggestion of Job as a possible model show the direction in which Milton was tending even in 1642. The early Paradise Lost were, as we have suggested, really (though perhaps not consciously) epic, and were the outcome of the Spenserian inspiration which goes back to the Nativity Ode reinforced by an impulse derived from Giles Fletcher. Afterwards Milton's thoughts were turned in the direction of the epic of national achievement. This tendency was, no doubt, partly due to Tasso, but it owed infinitely more to the events of the time. It left him with a hankering after an epic on the scale of the Gerusalemme and Aeneid. But when ~~xxx~~ he had abandoned war as an epic subject, what remained? Of Tasso there was the Bower of Bliss, of Virgil the Dido story. The importance of the first he had learned from Spenser, and already in Arcopagitica (P.W. II, 68, 74) he had applied its teaching to the story of Adam. The second, especially in the narrations in Books II and III, suggested a means whereby a subject not unlike that of Job could be treated in the more "diffuse" manner of the classical epic, relating it to the warfare in the Apocalypse, and presenting it not as an isolated and hypothetical divine experiment but as an episode in the working-out of God's eternal design.

It is perhaps a pity that there is no source for Paradise Lost. If there were, it would simplify matters enormously. We could then read Milton and his original side by side as we do Shakespeare and North's Plutarch. It has never been suggested that any "source" supplied with more than Plutarch supplied Shakespeare so far as the story is concerned, nor do even the most striking parallels bring us so near to the poetry of Milton as North's prose sometimes does to Shakespeare. It is difficult to see therefore why there should be so much ado in the matter, why men should be so fond as to think that the mere discovery of his sources would be sufficient to prove Milton "mortal and uninspired, in ability little superior to the poets" from whom he borrowed. X Milton certainly derived something more from his reading than did Shakespeare. But that he got, not from his "sources", but from such authors as those whom we have considered in Part II. It was his avowed intention to profit by such reading to the utmost of his ability, and there was nothing which his contemporaries would have regarded as illegitimate in such an intention. The difference between Milton and most writers of his time is not that he borrowed

more, but that he learnt more. We have tried to indicate the importance and the nature of this learning.

But he had to bring what he also sought elsewhere. He half-created what he perceived. The man who set himself to master all useful knowledge and to model his designs on the highest examples available might be expected, in most circumstances, to attain perhaps both in his thought and in his art a certain orthodox perfection, flawless, unexceptionable and impersonal. There have been people who could discover this perfection in Paradise Lost. Others have seen more truly that everything in it is essentially peculiar to Milton. A recent critic has tried to show that the thought of Milton has a universal and permanent interest. Blake, who understood Milton's intentions better than most of us, found that no man but Milton could live in the world which Milton created. So with his art. The eighteenth century tried to adopt his diction as a standard for the ordinary purposes of poetry, but Keats soon found that what was life for Milton was death for him. Perhaps our study will have helped us to see why this should be.

The violence of the reaction of both these poets

does at least emphasise the intensely personal quality of Paradise Lost. You cannot have a personal quarrel with an impersonal poem. But the essential personality which gives life to Paradise Lost must not be confused with the self-assertiveness which is also found in it. That, like the weight of allusion and "the distorted notions of invisible things", is but part of the mask and mantle in which the poet walks through eternity enveloped and disguised. We cannot hope to have approached the secret of that which Wordsworth and Shelley found in Milton. That is, of course, the essential which must always defy analysis. The points of contact, however, between Milton and pre-Renaissance authors may perhaps help us to see at least that the main intention of Paradise Lost was inspired by more than mere idiosyncrasy on the one hand or by mere learning on the other.

---