

MILTON'S THEORY OF POETRY

by

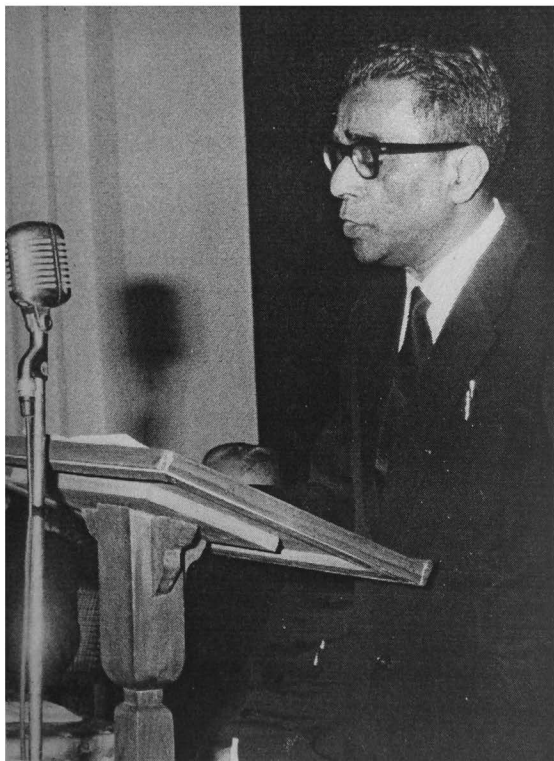
R. K. DasGupta

I Sarmistha Dasgupta,

"have no objection if the University of Calcutta publishes my father Professor R. K. Dasgupta's D.Phil thesis on Milton done under the auspices of Oxford University."

Sincerely,

Sarmistha Dasgupta



R. K. Dasgupta
1915-2009

By Way of Preface

Professor R K Dasgupta (1915--2009), widely regarded as a Doyen of English literature, had written his D.Phil. thesis on Milton's Theory of Poetry under the supervision of Professor Helen Gardner at the University of Oxford in 1957. He completed it in two years.

We have great pleasure in uploading his D.Phil. thesis on its 60th anniversary on the website of the University of Calcutta for the benefit of teachers, students and scholars on Professor Dasgupta's 102nd birthday.

We express our gratitude to all those who helped us to publish it, especially his daughter Ms Sarmistha Dasgupta and Dr Sarbananda Chaudhuri.

11 July 2017

About the Author

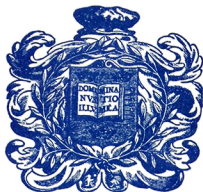
R K Dasgupta (11 July 1915—3 February 2009): Mother Suhasini, father Nalinakkha, wife Anima. He hails from Mahilara, Barishal, now in Bangladesh. He graduated from Scottish Church College and completed his M.A. (English) from the University of Calcutta. He also received the Premchand Roychand Scholarship from the same university in 1942 and was awarded D.Phil in 1950 for his dissertation on “উনিশ শতকের বাংলা সমালোচনা সাহিত্য”। He was awarded D.Phil degree for his thesis on Milton’s *Theory of Poetry* under the supervision of Helen Gardner by the University of Oxford in 1957.

He began his career as a Tutor of English in the University of Calcutta. He taught at Jadavpur University and Delhi University, where he was the Tagore Professor. He has taught Comparative literature at Alberta University, Canada. In 1977 he became the Director of National Library, Kolkata. In 1994 he became the Vivekananda Professor in the Department of Indology at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata. He was the first Indian Member of International Comparative Literature association and Fellow of *Bangiya Jatiya Sikkha Parishad* (2004). He edited *Chaturanga* for nearly a year (1984-1985).

Many consider him to be one of the last representatives of the Bengal Renaissance. His books include *East West Literary Relations, Philosophy and Philosophers, Vedanta in Bengal, ঐতিহ্য ও পরম্পরা, বাঙালী কি আয়তাজী and অলীক সংলাপ*।

He received many awards, including Regina Guha Gold Medal (1937), Mowat Gold Medal, Sarojini Gold Medal, University of Calcutta (1972), Kalidas Nag Memorial Gold Medal (1991), Rabindra Puroshkar, Government of West Bengal (1996), Tagore Memorial Gold Plaque, Asiatic Society (2001), Sarat Puroshkar (2008), D.Litt Honoris Causa, Kalyani University (2006) and *Desikottam, Visva-Bharati* (2006).

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



THIS is to certify that it appears by the Register of the Ancient House of Congregation of Doctors and Regent Masters of the University of Oxford that

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Exeter College

having submitted a thesis entitled:

'Milton's theory of poetry'

and having satisfied all the conditions prescribed in that respect by the Statutes of the University, was on the
fourteenth day of December 1957 duly
admitted to the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

As witness my hand this fourteenth day of
July 1986.



J. P. R. M.
Assistant Registrar

MILTON'S THEORY OF POETRY

ABSTRACT

by

R. K. DasGupta

MILTON'S THEORY OF POETRY

ABSTRACT

This study of Milton's conception of poetry rests on an examination of all those statements in his prose and verse which have a direct or indirect bearing on the subject. The examination of these scattered passages has been undertaken in the conviction that although Milton never wrote a whole book on poetics he had a consistent view of the source and function of poetry and that this view is clearly expressed at many places in his work, from the early Latin elegies and the Prolusiones Oratoriae to Paradise Regained. A careful study of these passages will show that throughout his literary career Milton felt the need for defining his attitude towards poetry by way of comprehending his vocation as a poet and explaining it to his readers. He felt this need because he believed that it was his mission to produce a new kind of poetry which could be understood and valued only in terms of a new conception of the poet's power and purpose. I have endeavoured to establish that in explaining his conception of poetry Milton is primarily concerned with his personal poetic creed and that he does not come to the business with any intention of building up a system of poetics as an independent

discipline. His utterances on the nature and function of poetry are therefore, more a part of an authentic spiritual autobiography than a scholarly contribution to what is known as poetics. And although he was well read in classical and Renaissance literary criticism he never sought to formulate his views on poetry in terms of any existing critical doctrines. His idea of poetry grew naturally with the growth of his poetic mind and in the process he absorbed some doctrines under the plastic stress of his own poetic genius. There is nothing in his utterances on poetry in his poems or prose works which would seem to be stylised or deliberately patterned after ready-made theories.

So far all considerations on Milton's ideas on poetry have been governed by the assumption that they are mainly based on classical criticism as re-interpreted by the critics of the Italian Renaissance. My purpose is to prove that this is a wrong assumption and that it has perverted our estimate of Milton's views on poetry and, in some cases, of his achievement as a poet and prose writer. Until 1902, when the second volume of George Saintsbury's History of Criticism was published, no critic of literary historian had taken any serious notice of Milton's observations on poetry. But even admitting the critical interest of some passages in

the Reason of Church Government, the Apology for Smectymnuus, the Tractate of Education and the Preface to Samson Agonistes Saintsbury did not see anything of special significance in them and when he said that Milton's 'Short Defence of Tragedy' was 'wholly on Italian principles adapted to Puritan understanding' he introduced a misconception which is yet to be removed from Miltonic criticism. For since then Milton's views on poetry have been considered either as a restatement of Italian doctrines or as a constrained adjustment of those doctrines to the Puritanic temper. Six years after the publication of Saintsbury's book J.E. Spingarn said in the introduction to his Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century that Milton 'remained loyal to the "sublime art" taught in the "Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others".' And about a decade earlier he had considered Milton's view of katharsis as a restatement of the similar view of Minturno (see Literary criticism in the Renaissance). Ida Langdon's Milton's Theory of Poetry (1924) which is the only elaborate and systematic study of the subject so far published repeats, in the main, the view of Saintsbury and Spingarn and discusses Milton's literary ideas in terms of Italian criticism. In fact the substance of all opinion on Milton's theory of poetry is what H.J.C. Grierson says in his

Milton and Wordsworth (1937): 'Milton's pronouncements on poetry when brought together from the prose works through which they are scattered, are just those of the Italian critics and their disciples, such as Scaliger, Sidney, Ben Jonson.' The main body of my thesis is an attempt to refute this view.

Chapter I introduces the subject with a brief survey of important critical opinions on Milton's literary ideas including the observations of Thomas Twining, H. Weil, Jacob Bernays and Ingram Bywater on the doctrine of katharsis stated in the Preface to Samson Agonistes.

Chapter II attempts to show that the governing principle of Milton's conception of poetry is his idea of inspiration which is different from the theory of inspiration of Plato or his followers. The basis of Milton's doctrine of inspiration is the Judaic-Christian conception of the Spirit and it should be studied with particular reference to the Hebraic idea of prophecy. From this I have argued that to Milton poetry was a kind of later prophecy which, though different from the prophecy of the Old Testament was nevertheless the work of the Holy Spirit. This equation of poetry with prophecy explains the fact that in speaking of poetry Milton deals more with its source and function than with the

technicalities of style and composition. And it is here that he stands aloof from the tradition of classical and Renaissance criticism. The chapter examines Milton's early writings and the tracts with a view to tracing the growth of this idea of inspiration and its association in his mind with the idea of grace which is to be earned through appropriate effort.

In Chapter III I have examined the invocations in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained to show that they are a statement of a consistent view of poetic creation and that they are not introduced merely as a convention of the classical epic. When he says in the seventh book of Paradise Lost that his Muse is 'Heav'nlie' and the Greek Muse 'an empty dream' he is deliberately countering a view of invocation and of poetic inspiration such as is expressed by Thomas Hobbes in his answer to Davenant's preface to Gondibert (1650). The view of poetic inspiration embodied in the invocations is anticipated in Milton's earlier works, particularly in the 'Elegia sexta' and the Reason of Church Government. This prophetic view of poetry has two aspects - the divine gift and the prayer and meditation which are necessary to deserve that gift. This second element of proper dedication distinguishes the poet-prophet from the prophets of the Old Testament.

I have shown that this idea of human co-operation with the Divine Will which was the cardinal principle in the Puritan conception of Grace was assimilated into a theory of prophecy by some of the Cambridge Platonists, particularly by John Smith who was greatly influenced by the medieval Jewish philosopher, Maimonides (1135-1204). I have suggested that Milton himself found in the Maimonidean conception of prophecy a satisfying basis for his idea of prophetic inspiration. In my interpretation of the Miltonic Muse I have endeavoured to show that she is a poetic image for the Judaic-Christian conception of the Spirit and that her status should be defined in terms of the angel in Christian theology.

Chapter IV is a study of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained as illustrations of the idea of prophetic poetry as defined in the previous chapter. Chapter V is an attempt to show that this Judaic-Christian view of the source and function of poetry has also determined Milton's conception of tragedy which I think cannot be understood in terms of the Italian commentators' interpretation of the Aristotelian katharsis. I have shown that all important considerations of Milton's view of tragedy, particularly those of Twining, Bernays, Butcher and Bywater, have been led astray by an attempt to find in the Preface to Samson Agonistes a restate-

ment of the pathological interpretation of Aristotles' dictum. This Procrustean method of forcing Milton's views to conform to a set theory of katharsis has not only given a wrong view of his idea of tragedy but has also consequently falsified our response to Samson Agonistes. Milton's katharsis signifies a moral process by which the mind is stabilised in faith. With this idea of katharsis in view I have given a new interpretation of the action of Samson Agonistes and in the process have questioned the validity of the argument of Sir Richard Jebb and others against Dr. Johnson's stricture that Samson Agonistes has no 'middle'

Chapter VI deals with Milton's ideas of polemical rhetoric and by an examination of his statements on the subject in the anti-prelatical tracts argues that these ideas were not typical of Renaissance theories of style. The Animadversions and An Apology propound a doctrine of vituperative writing against the enemies of true religion which is defended with appropriate citations from the Bible. Polemical fury is linked up with the idea of prophetic rage.

Chapters VII, VIII, and IX are a consideration of Milton's estimate of the poetry of the Old Testament, of classical literature, and of English literature. Here I have shown that while his literary judgments are largely influenced by

his Puritanism they are not perverted by dogma or prudery and that there is nothing in his literary opinions to suggest a laboured compromise between the spirit of the Renaissance and that of the Reformation. He made a clear distinction between two kinds of literature, secular and religious or prophetic and this distinction led to his preferring Hebrew literature to any other literature. Classical literature was acceptable to him only in so far as it anticipated the substance of Christian wisdom and could be a part of the moral inheritance of a Christian society. The view of classical and Biblical literatures expressed in the dialogue between Christ and Satan in the fourth book of Paradise Regained is only a firm restatement of what Milton says earlier in the Elegia sexta and the Reason of Church Government.

The concluding chapter sums up the main arguments of the treatise to affirm that Milton's literary ideas were shaped entirely by his Christian view of the universe and his contemplation on the nature of his own poetic impulse. This Christian view of poetry is Milton's unique contribution to the literary thought of the seventeenth century and deserves study for a reassessment of his achievement as a poet.

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by

R. K. DasGupta

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the University of Oxford

Mr Rabincha Kumar Das Gupta's D. Phil Thesis, supervised by
Dr Helen Gardner (later Dame) was dictated to his wife Anima. As a
great friend, I saw a lot of him regularly during his Oxford period.
FC Bayley Oxford 30 June 1994
(Professor Emeritus)

Exeter College
Oxford

Michaelmas Term
1957

MILTON'S THEORY OF POETRY

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R. K. DasGupta

However imbued the surface might be with classical
literature he was a Hebrew in soul.

Wordsworth

'The task of Prayer and Poetry is to establish the likeness, and the difference of kind and degree, between poetry and mysticism. In this attempt to demonstrate this relation the safeguards himself by just qualifications, and makes many penetrating remarks about the nature of poetry.'

T. S. Eliot, The Uses of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 138.

'And the last thing I would wish for would be the existence of two literatures, one for Christ's consumption and the other for the pagan world.' T. S. Eliot, Faith that Illuminates, 1935.

The mixed and muddled scepticism of the Renaissance
Eliot, Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca, 1927.

For inspiration - Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494)

Milton's conception of poetry and Plato:

'Hymns to the gods and the praises of worthy actions are the only sort of poetry to be admitted to our state.' Republic.

MILTON'S THEORY OF POETRY

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literature, he was a Hebrew in soul.

Wordsworth

Sidonian virgins paid their VOWS and songs
In Sion also not unsung, PL. i. 441-2.

The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
In amorous ditties all a Summer's day,

M's allusion to Ezekiel (viii. 14) in PL. i. 455
^{PL. i. 448-9.}

Did M imagine that there was much in the
courtly and literary life of the Renaissance and
the Restoration which resembled the 'dark idolatries'
of alienated Judah? (PL. i. 456-7)?

'A man's theory of the place of poetry is not
independent of his view of his view of life in
general? T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use
of Criticism, 1933, p. 119.

Mr. I. A. Richards maintains that the experience
of poetry is not a mystical revelation. T. S. Eliot
notes it in The Use of Poetry and the Use of
Criticism, p. 125. Abbé HENRI BRÉMOND in
Prayer and Poetry

Mr. Herbert Read: 'If a literary critic
happens to be also a poet... he is liable to
suffer from dilemmas which do not trouble the
philosophic calm of his more prosaic colleagues.
T. S. Eliot quotes it in The Use of Poetry and the
Use of Criticism.

c... the Abbé Brémond presented a modern,
equivalent for the theory of divine inspiration.
T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use
of Criticism, p. 137.

PREFACE

My interest in the theme of the present dissertation grew out of my response to Samson Agonistes which I first read twentyfive years ago as an undergraduate in Calcutta. A word on that response may explain the circumstance which led me to enquire into the critical theories of a poet who never wrote a treatise on poetics. The teacher with whom I read Samson Agonistes taught us to think that the play was Greek both in form and in spirit and that it was intended to be so by its author. But a different opinion did actually begin to take root in my mind till I came to believe, even with the extremely limited knowledge of an Indian undergraduate, that Samson Agonistes was fundamentally different from a Greek tragedy in its appeal and that Milton intended it to be so. But the critical issues involved in the study of a Christian play composed in Attic form appeared too testing for a student without a background of classical education. Yet the provision for instruction in Greek and Latin drama in translation in the post-graduate English course of Calcutta university, encouraged me to choose Samson Agonistes and a few other English plays in Attic form as the subject of my M.A. thesis. I sought to reconcile the

U. E. Powys. HOMER and the AETHER, Macdonald, 1959.

The divine Aether, 'the immortal one beyond all gods and men' p. 28. cf. Lady Eternity in Thus Spake Zarathustra and Lilith in Back to Helheim-Selch

'the everlasting Aether' p 248 as the personified agent of human inspiration

'The Aether contrasts itself, or herself, with both the Greek Οὐρανός, the upper sky, and earth's lower atmosphere, ἀήρ, which in comparison seems "a kind of mist or fog"... it is the necessary prerequisite for the enlargement of consciousness'. T.L.S. 1 May 1959

'shining Aether, 'gleaming and penetrating light' inducing in the poet a "special kind of ecstatic trance". Powys.

'It is as though, in invoking the divine Aether, a conception drawn very obviously from his own inspirational experience, Mr. Powys has himself come more powerfully than ever under its control; and it is perhaps this enigmatic deity, rather than Mr. Powys, who speaks'. T.L.S.

Candwell points out similarity between H's definition of poetry as 'simple, sensuous and passionate' and the old distinction between the effective and rational sign. Because of words studied in the Hilder Thesaurus, O'Connor, Richards & Osden. Stemata & Results p. 126

Hebraic spirit with the Hellenic form of Milton's drama by saying that it was Greek in the sense that it was very Christian, that Sophocles would have written a play like this if his mind ^{had been} ~~was~~ influenced by the Bible. But gradually this appeared to me too facile a settlement of the question and then an extreme statement of a classicist's view of Christianity convinced me that my argument was fundamentally untenable. After reading my M.A. thesis Professor Gilbert Murray said in a letter (9 August 1939) to me that 'monotheism apart, Christianity is a Greek invention'. My approach to the Christian spirit of Milton's poetry has developed from the conviction that this view of the Hellenic origin of Christianity could be an obstruction to an understanding of the seventeenth-century Christian poet. It is possible that in defining Milton's Christian view of poetry I have been indifferent to the classical elements which others have seen in it. But I think the classicists have ignored things in affirming which one may not be guilty of being too bold.

I recall with gratitude the help which the Rev. C.S. Milford, M.A. (Oxon), my teacher in the Post-graduate Department of Calcutta University, gave me in my first effort at writing on Milton. My debt to Milton scholars for the present work is much more than I have space to acknowledge

in this preface. I must specially mention Dr. E.M.W. Tillyard's Milton, Miltonic Setting, and Studies in Milton, Professor C.S. Lewis's Preface to Paradise Lost and Sir Maurice Bowra's Virgil to Milton. The four volumes of The Life Records of John Milton by Professor J.M. French have been of great help to me for their store of documentary material. The facsimile edition of Milton's Poetical Works by H.F. Fletcher was handy for examining the material several times over which I could handle but rarely in the original. Like all Milton students I have used the Columbia edition with its two volume Index and have found volume XVIII containing the uncollected writings particularly useful. My quotations from Milton's prose writings are all from this edition except in the case of the Prolusions and the Familiar Letters for translations of which I have used Mrs P.B. Tillyard's Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises. I have benefited by Professor Ruth Wohl's notes on Milton's Commonplace Book included along with her translation of it in volume I of the Complete Prose Works of John Milton edited by Don. W. Wolfe. For Milton's poetical works I have used the text in Miss Helen Darbishire's two volume edition in the Oxford Standard Authors Series. Translations of Milton's Latin poems are given from those by Professor N.G. Mccrea included in Students Milton

edited by Professor F.A. Patterson. Amongst editions of Milton's works published in the last twenty years I have found the three volumes edited by Professor Merritt Hughes, Professor F.T. Prince's edition of Samson Agonistes and Professor B.A. Wright's edition of the Shorter Poems immensely helpful.

I am grateful to Miss Helen Gardner for the very precious help she gave me as my supervisor. Her shrewd criticisms of my arguments and presentation have taught me a great deal more about the method of research and writing than I could expect from only six terms' residence at Oxford. I must thank Dr. E.M.W. Tillyard of Cambridge, Professor Nevill Coghill of Oxford, Mr. J.B. Leishman, Senior Lecturer in English in the University of Oxford and Miss Kathleen Lea, Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, for the encouragement and valuable suggestions they gave me in my conversations with them. I am indebted to Mr. P.C. Bayley, Fellow, University College, Oxford, for many valuable suggestions for the improvement of my work.

I must thank Dr. J.L. Teicher of Cambridge and Dr. C Rabin, formerly Lecturer in Hebrew in the University of Oxford and now a Professor in the University of Israel for the valuable assistance they gave me in my enquiry into the influence of Jewish thought on Milton's conception of prophecy.

v.

I am grateful to my College in Delhi for granting me study leave for two years and to my alma mater, the University of Calcutta, for awarding me the Sir R.B. Ghosh Travelling Fellowship in Arts for the year 1955-56.

18 October 1957
8 Colterne Close
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R.K. DasGupta

ABBREVIATIONS

- CM, The works of John Milton, Columbia University Press,
18 v. 1932-1938.
- ES, Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association.
- HLQ, Huntington Library Quarterly.
- JEQP, The Journal of English and Germanic Philology.
- JELH, A Journal of English Literary History.
- JP, Journal of Philology.
- MLN, Modern Language Notes.
- MLR, Modern Language Review.
- MLQ, Modern Language Quarterly.
- MP, Modern Philology.
- PBA, Proceedings of the British Academy.
- PL, Paradise Lost.
- PMLA, Publications of the Modern Language Association of
America.
- PQ, Philological Quarterly.
- PR, Paradise Regained.
- RES, Review of English Studies.
- SA, Samson Agonistes.
- SP, Studies in Philology.
- SR, Sewanée Review.
- UTQ, University of Toronto Quarterly.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

 hee who receives
Light from above, from the fountain of light,
No other doctrin needs, though granted true;
 Milton

When Dryden said about Milton that 'this man cuts us all out, and the ancients too' he suggested a critical obligation which he did not fulfil. Or it may be that when he praised Milton in such absolute terms he did not realise that the praise needed a special critical support. For when he declared Paradise Lost as 'undoubtedly one of the greatest, most noble and most sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced'¹ he certainly did not mean that Milton's poem constituted a class of poetry by itself and that it could not be judged by critical standards which applied to other great and sublime poems. And later admirers of Milton, from Addison to Macaulay, did not devise any new theory of the epic or of poetry in general to justify their admiration. Consequently the greatest tributes to Milton's greatness as an epic poet produced a critical unrest which ultimately made such tributes appear vague and untenable. There is certainly

1. Preface to The State of Innocence and Fall of Man, 1677, see Essays of John Dryden, ed. W.P. Ker, 1900, i. 179c

a disturbing contradiction in Dryden's estimate of the poet as one who combining the respective excellences of Homer and Virgil was superior to both¹ and his view that the subject of Paradise Lost 'is not that of an heroic poem, properly so called'.² It is a contradiction which later criticism did not seek to resolve. In the eighteenth century only John Dennis (1657-1734) saw that Milton's greatness as a poet was in some uniqueness of his theme and its treatment:

We shall now shew for what Reasons the choice of Milton's Subject, as it set him free from the Obligation which he lay under to the Poetical Laws, so it necessarily threw him upon new Thoughts, new Images, and an Original Spirit.³

But he too did not even outline an epic theory which would define the poetic status of this 'Original Spirit'.

1. Three poets in three distant ages born,
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.
The first in loftiness of thought surpass'd,
The next in majesty, in both the last:
The force of Nature could no farther go;
To make a third, she join'd the former two.

See Poetical Works, ed. G.R. Noyes, 1950, p.253. This epigram is engraved, without the name of the author, beneath the portrait of Milton which forms the frontispiece to Tonson's folio edition of Paradise Lost, 1688. Dryden's name is first joined to it in the second edition of the Sixth Part of Miscellany Poems, 1716.

2. 'The Original and Progress of Satire' 1693. See Essays of John Dryden, ed. W.P. Ker, ii. 29.
3. The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, 1704, see Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. F.N. Hooker, Baltimore, 1939, i. 334.

Milton knew that his poetry was inspired by an original spirit and that he had an idea of the nature and function of poetry which gave support to his original poetic intentions. He had none of the critical impulse which inspired Giovan Giorgio Trissino (1478-1550) to write his Poetica (1529) or Tasso (1544-1595) to write his Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica (composed about 1561). For he had no speculative interest in the questions which belong to poetics or aesthetics. Nor had he any wish to propound any critical doctrine and to confirm or to refute in the process any doctrines of the past. Trissino wrote his epic La Italia Liberata da Gotti (1548) according to a recipe already made in his treatise and Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata (1581) is an illustration of the poetic creed stated in his discourse. Milton did not write any criticism in defence of his poetic practice as he did not write a poem to demonstrate the validity of a literary formula. Still he knew what he wanted to achieve as a poet and he said it, his sayings being of the nature of a confession with none of the elaborations of formal criticism. He is not eager to prove anything; nor is he anxious to prescribe rules for others. He is primarily, if not entirely, concerned with himself, reflecting on his own poetic objectives and defining for himself the source and function of the powers he is to

exercise. These reflections and definitions are our materials for reconstructing Milton's theory of poetry. It is a task which is more important for a proper appreciation of Milton's poetry than for ascertaining Milton's place in the history of criticism. It will be an enquiry into the growth of a poetic mind. Such enquiry is indispensable for reading Milton. To appreciate Hamlet we need not ask what Shakespeare wanted to accomplish or show in the play. We cannot discuss his intention apart from his performance and we may suspect that if anyone had asked Shakespeare what he 'meant' by Hamlet Shakespeare would have replied 'the play's the thing'. But in reading Paradise Lost we must make some effort towards knowing what it is not, if only for the reason that it bears an apparent resemblance to something from which it is essentially different. And the same is true of Samson Agonistes which is no more a reproduction of classical tragedy than Paradise Lost is a reproduction of classical epic. A 'Reader of Milton must be Always upon Duty' said Jonathan Richardson:¹ our duty is not only to read the poem intently but also to wait on the purpose of its author as it is suggested in the poem itself and in his other works. When Milton prepared himself for his poetic task he also thought it important

1. Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton's Paradise Lost, 1734, p. cxliv. See Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.315.

that he should prepare his reader's mind for what he meant to give him. If we should think that a poem is perfect when it can be enjoyed without a lecture from its author about its purpose we should be taking a critical stand which can be only partially valid. The poems in the Lyrical Ballads can be appreciated without a reading of its Preface. But certainly a knowledge of what Wordsworth and Coleridge intended to accomplish as poets, what new things they wished to introduce and what old habits in poetic thought and language they were determined to discard will add to our understanding and appreciation of their works. In the case of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes witness from their author has a special value. For these poems do not fulfil the expectations which their apparent forms raise in their readers. The whole history of Milton criticism shows a gulf between the poet's intention and the reader's taste. If this gulf can be bridged by a careful enquiry into Milton's literary ideas it will not make his works more popular. But it may remove a good deal of critical confusion which arises from our demanding from Milton something which he did not choose to give. It may also discourage conjectures about the poet's unconscious motives thwarting his conscious purposes which have led to all manner of conclusions regarding Paradise Lost. An

instance of such confusion can be found in one of the acutest estimates of Milton ever written. 'The Paradise Lost' said Sir Walter Raleigh 'is not the less an eternal monument because it is a monument to dead ideas.' And yet he believed that the 'epic value of Paradise Lost is centred in the character and achievements of Satan'.¹ Paradise Lost may indeed appear to many a monument to dead ideas. And to many again it may be an epic with Satan as its central figure. But certainly the two impressions cannot make one unified and consistent critical judgment.

It may, however, be argued that what is important in reading a poem is not to ask what its author wanted to make it but to see what it has actually become. That is, the poetic intent is something inherent in the poetic achievement and cannot be recognized or defined as a thing existing outside the poem. We have said that it is so in Shakespeare and we may now add that there is another class of writers whom we can appreciate only by making a constant intellectual effort to understand what they are about. And the effort becomes particularly imperative when the poet concerned says a good deal about his poetic intent and asks his readers to expect from him a certain kind of poetry as distinguished from certain

1. Milton, 1922, pp.88, 133.

other kinds of poetry. And even to ascertain if Milton has promised one thing and given another we should study that promise still more closely.

Throughout his literary career Milton felt the need for defining his attitude towards poetry by way of comprehending his vocation as a poet and explaining it to his readers. He felt this need because he believed that it was his mission to produce a new kind of poetry which could be understood and valued only in terms of a new conception of the poet's power and purpose. In explaining his conception of poetry Milton is primarily concerned with his personal poetic creed and he does not come to the business with any intention of building up a system of poetics as an independent discipline, which, I think he would have considered a 'vain philosophy'. He was well-read in classical rhetoric and poetic and in Of Education he prescribes such reading for the young student:

that sublime art which in Aristotle's poeticks, in Horace and the Italian Commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true Epic Poem, what of a Dramatic, what of a Lyric, what Decorum is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe.

This is obviously a humanist recipe. But there is nothing in the tract to show that Milton was committed to the poetic represented by the literary doctrines of the men he mentions. And the passage we have quoted is much less than a defence of

neo-classic literary theory and is primarily a convenient critical base for an attack on the popular literature of his age:

This would make them soon perceive what despicable creatures our common Rimers and Playwriters be; and shew them, what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of poetry, both in divine and humane things.¹

That he was not himself a follower of the theorists he mentions is evident from the fact that his conception of poetry was sharply opposed to that of Castelvetro according to whom: 'poetry has been discovered solely to delight and to recreate'.² Again Castelvetro strongly repudiated the idea of divine inspiration which constitutes the essence of Milton's poetic theory:

Aristotle was not of the opinion that poetry was a special gift of God bestowed on one man rather than on another, as is the gift of prophecy and other similar privileges that are not natural and common to all.³

1. CM. iv. 286.

2. Literary Criticism, Plato to Dryden, ed. W.G. Gilbert, New York, 1940, p.307. Nothing could be more repugnant to Milton's conception of the higher ends of poetry than what Castelvetro says in this passage: 'la poesia sia stata trovata solamente per dilettere, e per ricreare, io dico, per dilettere e per ricreare gli animi della rozza moltitudine e del commune popalo' Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata et sposta, Basel, 1576, p.29. See H.B. Charlton, Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry, 1913, pp.60-61.

3. Literary Criticism, Plato to Dryden, ed. W.G. Gilbert, New York, 1940, p.311.

I mention these two fundamental differences between Milton and Castelvetro in support of my argument that the observation on classical and neo-classical literary theorists in Of Education cannot be taken as proof of his acceptance of Renaissance poetic doctrine.

Milton's utterances on the nature and function of poetry are more a part of an authentic spiritual biography than a scholarly contribution to what is known as poetics. And although at one or two places he refers to some treatises and terms of classical criticism the statement of his own literary ideas has very little in common with the most influential critical theories of his age. His conception of poetry grew naturally with the growth of his poetic mind and in the process he absorbed some well-known literary doctrines under the plastic stress of his own poetic genius. There is nothing in his remarks on poetry in his poems or prose works which is stylised or deliberately patterned after ready-made theories. So far all considerations ^{of} Milton's ideas on poetry have been governed by the assumption that they are mainly based on classical criticism as re-interpreted by the critics of the Italian Renaissance. I believe this to be a wrong assumption and it has perverted our estimate of Milton's views on poetry and, in some cases, of his achievement as a poet and prose

writer.

Until 1857 when Jacob Bernays published his pamphlet¹ on Aristotle's poetics no critic or literary historian had taken any serious notice of Milton's observations on poetry. In this pamphlet Bernays gives Milton the credit of having rightly interpreted Aristotle's theory of katharsis and has consequently recognized the Preface to Samson Agonistes as an important document in the history of dramatic criticism.² Since then Milton's statement on katharsis has been an important point in all discussions of Aristotle's poetics. More than thirty years after the publication of Bernays's pamphlet A.O. Pickard recognized Milton as a sound interpreter and an impressive exponent of the Greek doctrine of tragic katharsis.³ This recognition of Milton as an Aristotelian in dramatic criticism gave him an affiliation to Renaissance criticism and consequently obscured the points in which he very significantly diverged from it. For example in 1899 J.E. Spingarn observed about the Preface to Samson Agonistes that 'it need hardly be

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1. Republished in Zwei Abhandlungen über die Aristotelische Theorie des Drama, Berlin, 1880. See S.H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 1951, p.244.
 2. It must be mentioned here that Thomas Twining paid Milton the same tribute though more briefly and rather casually in his Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry, 1789, p.241.
 3. Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, 1891, pp.42-43.

said, he (Milton) was merely following the interpretation of the Italian commentators on the Poetics'.¹

Amongst the historians of criticism it was George Saintsbury who first considered Milton's ideas on literature. But even while admitting the critical interest of some passages in The Reason of Church Government, the Apology for Jmeetymnus, the Tractate of Education and the Preface to Samson Agonistes he did not see anything of special significance in them and when he said that Milton's 'Short Defence of Tragedy' was 'wholly on Italian principles adapted to Puritan understanding'² he introduced a misconception which is yet to be removed from Miltonic criticism. For since then Milton's views on poetry have been considered either as a restatement of Italian doctrines or as a constrained adjustment of those doctrines to the puritanic temper. Six years after the publication of Saintsbury's book J.E. Spingarn said in the introduction to his Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century that Milton 'remained loyal to the "sublime art" taught in the "Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others"'.³ Ida Langdon's Milton's Theory of Poetry (1924) which is the only elaborate study of the subject so far published repeats,

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1. Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, New York, 1908, p.80
 2. History of Criticism, 1902, ii. 366 fn.
 3. 1908, i. xxii-xxiii.

in the main, the view of Saintsbury and Spingarn and discusses Milton's literary ideas in terms of Italian criticism.

In recognizing [she says] that the poetical impulse is natural, and in attributing perfection in the art to care and industry in the gifted, Milton agrees with Aristotle and Horace, and with the Italian theorists who followed them.¹

More than a decade later Sir Herbert Grierson said:

Milton's pronouncements on poetry when brought together from the prose works through which they are scattered, are just those of the Italian critics and their disciples, such as Scaliger, Sidney, Ben Jonson.²

In Criticism and Creation Sir Herbert Grierson reaffirms his conviction that Milton's statement on classical criticism in Of Education is a 'confession of adherence to the critical faith as derived from Aristotle, Horace, Castelvetro'.³ Even scholars who have discussed Milton's critical ideas without any special reference to Renaissance criticism have found in Milton a follower of Italian doctrines. Thus G.M. Miller remarks, quoting the sentence from Of Education: 'This is pure neo-classicism, of the Italian, and therefore Elizabethan variety, only six years before Davenant's introduction of French influences.'⁴ And on the same sentence Leah Jonas

1. p.62.

2. Milton and Wordsworth, 1937, p.26.

3. 1949, p.18.

4. The Historical point of view in English Literary Criticism, Heidelberg, 1913, p.77.

has observed:

It is evident that Milton had studied classical and Renaissance critical authorities, in his effort to gather the full tradition concerning the three great divisions of 'lofty' poetry: the epic, the drama, and the lyric.¹

J.W.H. Atkins makes a distinction between Renaissance criticism and the neo-classic literary doctrines of the seventeenth century and affirms that Milton is an exponent of the former:

He [Milton], like Jonson, was also instrumental thus late in the day in calling attention to the best that had been thought and said on literature in antiquity. His contribution, it is true, was of a casual nature, consisting of remarks on literature and literary theory scattered here and there in pamphlets or set forth more formally in brief Pre-faces to his greater works. Nevertheless, such doctrines as he submits are of considerable interest. Now practically for the first time, certain elements of Aristotelian theory are clearly and accurately set forth; while the views expressed concerning poets and poetry are the views of a great poet drawing obviously on his own experiences. Then, too, the spirit which animates his theorising is reminiscent in part of the early Humanists, with deference paid to classical antiquity in the main, regardless of that crystallizing of ancient theory into what is known as the neo-classical system - a process that was taking place in France at the time. Of the development of neo-classical doctrine in England many of his contemporaries beginning with Davenant, were already giving signs; and meanwhile, in addition, a new aesthetic was being formulated by Hobbes. Such developments, however left Milton wholly unaffected; in his theorising, as in his creative work, his was the last voice of the Renaissance in England.²

1. The Divine Science, New York, 1940, p.177.

2. English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance, 1951, pp.335-331

Atkins has restated the view which has been current in Milton criticism since the days of Bernays and in his main conclusions he is in agreement with the conviction of Spingarn, Saintsbury and Grierson that Milton's literary ideas belong to the tradition of Renaissance literary criticism.

Milton's conception of poetry does not originate from classical and Italian criticism and does not conform to any of its major doctrines. There is nothing in his literary ideas and practice to show that he ever made an effort to work out a theory of poetry which would be consistent with either Graeco-Roman or Renaissance literary theory. The governing principle of Milton's conception of poetry is his idea of inspiration which he never sought to bring in line with the theory of inspiration of Plato or his followers. The basis of this doctrine of inspiration is the Judaic-Christian conception of the spirit and it should be studied with particular reference to the Hebraic idea of prophecy. To Milton poetry was a kind of later prophecy which, though different from the prophecy of the Old Testament, was nevertheless the work of the Holy Spirit. This equation of poetry with prophecy explains the fact that in speaking of poetry Milton deals more with its source and function than with the technicalities of style and composition. And it is here that he stands aloof

from the tradition of classical and Renaissance criticism.

It is however not easy to define Renaissance criticism as a body of literary opinion for purposes of sharply distinguishing it from the ideas which shaped Milton's conception of poetry. The literary doctrines of the English Renaissance whether formulated by theorists or stated by the poets themselves have a variety and comprehensiveness which suggest affiliation to traditions that are opposed to each other. They cover such a wide range of taste and opinion that it is not possible to bring them under a fixed label without ignoring some of their fine and significant distinctions. And a good deal of the diversity of critical opinion of the Renaissance was due to the fact that the critical impulse of the age did not grow as a whole out of its creative activity. A large part of it developed as an independent discipline representing a view of poetry which would assimilate the doctrines of classical criticism with the new intellectual attitudes of the sixteenth century. Principles were formulated and rules prescribed because they were already a part of the Graeco-Roman literary tradition. Moreover the humanist theory of education gave an additional support to literary doctrines which emerged out of Greek and Latin. Sidney's Defence of Poetry satisfied a critical demand which

had no relation to the plays of Shakespeare and there were poets in the Elizabethan period who could be popular without following the recipe of Campion and Daniel. As Basil Willey has observed the 'main mass of Renaissance criticism is pedagogic and not interpretative' and 'its formulated literary principles contribute little to the progress of true criticism or aesthetic theory'.¹ What made Renaissance criticism in large part unreal was its dependence on Greek and Latin which again were the sources of whatever strength it possesses. Saintsbury may have framed his charge-sheet against the Renaissance critics a little too harshly but his main argument is basically fair:

The Renaissance critics at first committed, and to far too great an extent handed on, a combination of the sins of their classical teachers. They assumed the stationary state of literary kinds and qualities, as both Greeks and Romans had done; they adulated classical literature, like the Romans in regard to Greek; they despised mediaeval literature, like the Greeks in relation to Latin.²

The only common ground amongst the Renaissance critics is their love of classical literature and their attempt to give it a place in the mental life of a Christian society. And one of the more important achievements of the Renaissance critical intelligence is that it resolved the medieval conflict

1. Tendencies in Renaissance Literary Theory, 1922, pp.35-36.

2. History of criticism, 1922, i. 484.

between literary taste and Christian dogma. The Renaissance man of letters could read his Virgil without the compunction of St. Jerome and could enjoy Ovid without the obligation of making him an allegorist. The other important task of the Renaissance critic was to define and stabilise the important forms of poetry and to formulate certain principles regarding their composition. There is nothing in Milton's reflection on poetry to show that he ever shared the Renaissance impulse for establishing the moral prestige of classical literature or for setting forth any formal principles of compositions. Some of his statements may seem to be echoes of some well-known Renaissance critical pronouncements. But in his general attitude towards poetry as well as in his view of the rules and principles of composition Milton was too individualistic and unorthodox to fall in line with Renaissance doctrines. Neither in his critical principles nor in his literary practice does he conform to a particular tradition. His literary beliefs emerged from the force of his creative genius: it was a force which could not be bound by the set limits of stereotyped doctrines. If he would appear a neo-classic in the choice of his epic form he would appear firmly individualistic in certain other no less important respects. E.M.W. Tillyard has observed that

Milton was in the advance-guard of his age through casting his epic in the strict neo-classic form; he was daringly individual in flouting the traditional association of the epic with rhyme; but he was medieval in going behind the Renaissance vogue of the heroic story to that of world history and the pilgrimage of the human soul.¹

Milton's theory of poetry would then represent ideas which have no affiliation to a particular critical system and even when some of these ideas resemble a few influential literary doctrines of the Renaissance their basic unorthodoxy is unquestioned. When Wordsworth said of Milton: 'Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart' he mentioned a characteristic of Milton's personality and poetry which is equally true of his literary ideas. This characteristic of Milton's critical beliefs is yet to be perceived. The observations on Milton's conception of poetry which we have already cited should be enough to show that in dealing with the subject scholars have so far failed to relate it to that 'loneliness' which, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has observed 'must be the common dominator with all of us in our conceptions of Milton and of the poetry in which he reflects himself'.² The ideas on the source and power of poetry stated in The Reason of Church Government, the estimate of Greek and Hebrew literatures in Paradise Regained and the conception of tragedy suggested in the last

1. The English Renaissance: Fact or Fiction, 1952, p.77.

2. Studies in Literature, second series, 1922, p.89.

Chorus of Samson Agonistes must be recognised as the ideas of one who in many ways 'dwelt apart', whose mind loved to repair in 'som high lonely Towr' and who in his 'adventrous Song' intended 'to soar Above th' Aonian Mount'.

In affiliating Milton's idea of prophetic poetry to the Biblical conception of prophecy we have to distinguish it from the Renaissance notion of sacer vates. The distinction is fundamental though not obvious. The Renaissance theory of poetic inspiration is a re-statement of the classical idea of inspiration made more acceptable to the religious mind through an affirmation of the sacredness of the poetic profession. The neo-classic idea of sacer vates was a pastiche of the Platonic doctrine of inspiration, the myth of the Olympic Muses and the Christian notion of sagehood. It was not rooted in any clear conception of the poetic act and was not linked with any view of the universe or of history. Whether it is Puttenham's idea of 'all maner of bewtifull visions'¹ or the idea of Pegasus that

flew up unto this starry sky,
And there abides among the heavens hye²

the conception of the poetic power does not go beyond the commonplaces of divine inspiration.

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1. Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Smith, 1904, ii. 20.
 2. Mirror for Magistrates, 1563, see ed. Lily B. Campbell, 1938, p.353.

The Renaissance idea of the poet-prophet is fully represented in Sir Philip Sidney's An Apology for Poetry (c. 1583, printed 1595):

Among the Romans a Poet was called Vates, which is as much as a Diuiner, Fore-seer, or Prophet, as by his conioyned wordes Vaticinium and Vaticinari is manifest: so heauenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this hart-rauishing knowledge.

Sidney calls 'holy Dauids Psalmes' 'a diuine Poem', 'his handling his prophecy, which is meerely poetical'. To Sidney poetic inspiration is 'the force of a diuine breath he (poet) bringeth things forth far surpassing her dooings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam'. Yet Sidney calls the poet a maker: 'Wee Englishmen haue mette with the Greekes in calling him a maker'.¹ Similarly George Puttenham in his The Arte of English Poesie (1589) speaks of the poet both as a maker and as a divinely inspired mind:

Poesie an art not only of making, but also of imitation. And this science in his perfection can not grow but by some diuine instinct - the Platonicks call it furor; or by excellencie of nature and complexion; or by great subtiltie of the spirits & wit; or by much experience and observation of the world, and course of kind; or, peradventure, by all or most part of them.

And when Puttenham says 'So also were they (poets) the first Prophetes or seears, Videntes, for so the Scripture tearmeth

1. Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Smith, 1904, i. 154-155, 157.

them in Latine after the Hebrue word'¹ he does not in reality propound a theory of poetry as prophecy but only mentions some popular notions of the sacer vates by way of establishing the prestige of poetry. For when he believes that the creative genius of the poet may lie in some divine instinct or in wit or in observation he does no more than repeat the Aristotelian statement 'Hence it is the poetry demands a man with a special gift for it or else one with a touch of madness in him.'²

Neither Sidney nor Puttenham gives a theory of inspiration presenting poetry as a form of prophecy or revelation. Milton on the other hand, gives a conception of poetry as a form of revelation and although his statements are scattered over all his works he has a far more consistent view of divine or prophetic poetry than any other poet or critic of his age. Indeed an examination of all Miltonic statements on inspiration will show that he had a firmer belief in the divine source of poetry than is indicated by the Renaissance notion of the sacredness of poetry.

The prophetic conception of poetry must necessarily be rooted in a religious view of literary art. And since the

1. *ibid.* 11. 3,7.

2. *Poetics*, 1455^a, see Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, ed. I. Bywater, 1909, pp.48-49. According to Humphry House 'in this almost incidental passage, Aristotle slips in a valuable distinction between two classes of poet'. Aristotle's Poetics, 1956, p.12. But certainly Aristotle's reference to mania is no basis for reconstructing a theory of inspiration covering poetry as a whole.

serious intellectual pursuits of the Elizabethan period were somehow influenced by Christianity the critical beliefs of the period have some links with religious ideas. 'So all important was the subject of religion' says H. Craig 'in every department of Renaissance life that those who seek to know the sources of Elizabethan thought must turn to it.'¹ In the literary criticism of ^{the} sixteenth and seventeenth centuries religion is no less powerful and influential than it is in the literary criticism of the medieval period. But neither the Middle Ages nor the Renaissance could create a philosophy of literature firmly rooted in the Christian view of the universe and formulate laws of taste which would place the classic alongside the divine poetry of the Christians. Tertullian's description of literature as 'foolishness in the eyes of God' and his question 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' indicate an intellectual unrest which the Renaissance could not remove. If the enlightened reader of the sixteenth century never asked like Tertullian 'What concern has Horace with the Psalter, Virgil with the Gospels?' it was not because he knew how they were either sharply different or very near to each other. In reality his taste for poetry ancient or modern had nothing to do with questions of faith or doctrine. When Sidney declared that the

1. The Enchanted Glass, 1936, p.49.

chiefe both in antiquitie and excellencie were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of GOD [like] Dauid in his Psalmes, Salomon in his song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Prouerbs ... and the writer of Iob¹

he was not creating a literary taste which could cover both the Bible and the Aeneid. The Renaissance mind spoke of the literary qualities of the Bible mainly in support of literature itself. Consequently the Renaissance conception of divine poetry is more an attribution of some divine power to poets than a consistent view of poetry as revelation. Thus to Francis Meres the poet was divinely inspired because without such divine inspiration he could not have been so eloquent:

As the holy Prophets and sanctified apostles could neuer have foretold nor spoken of such supernaturall matters vnlesse they had bin inspired of God: so Cicero in his Tusculane questions is of that minde, that a Poet can not expresse verses abundantly, sufficiently, and fully, neither his eloquence can flow pleasantly, or his wordes sound well and plenteously, without celestiall instruction²

Such idea of divine inspiration does not go beyond the notion which was very common throughout the Middle Ages that the poetic faculty being an extraordinary gift must be a divine gift. So when Bacon says that poetry 'was ever thought to have some participation of diuineness'³ he was repeating what,

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1. Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Smith, 1904, i. 158.
 2. Palladis Tamia, 1598. See Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Smith, 1904, ii. 313. Cf. William Webbe in A Discourse of English Poetrie, 1586, *ibid.* i. 231.
 3. The Advancement of Learning, ed. W.A. Wright, 1926, p.102.

was already an established literary belief. Skelton meant the same thing when he said 'God maketh habytacion in Poetes'.¹ There is nothing in such statements which even remotely suggests a definition of the poetic activity in terms of Christian beliefs and of poetry as a kind of divine revelation. There were, however, a few poets who were more directly influenced by the Biblical conception of prophetic inspiration and who believed that the poetic act was inspired by the Holy Spirit. And since this was Milton's belief too it is likely that their ideas gave support to his growing conception of poetry as a divine science. In William Browne's Britannia's Pastorals, for instance there is an invocation which suggests comparison with the opening passage of Paradise Lost:

And thou which through the Desart and the Deepe,
Didst lead thy Chosen like a flock of sheepe:
As sometime by a Starri thou guidst them,
Which fed vpon the plaines of Bethelam;
So by the sacred Spirit direct my quill,
When I shall sing ought of thy Holy hill,
That times to come, when they my rymes rehearse,
May wonder at me, and admire my Verse:
For who but one rapt in Coelestiall fire,
Can by his Muse to such a pitch aspire.²

Milton's marginal notes on the folio volume of Britannia's Pastorals³ should be enough to show that he read the work with

1. Works, ed. A. Dier, 1843, i. 222.
2. Works, ed. C. Hazlitt, 1868, i. 108.
3. CM, xviii. 336-340. That the marginal notes were in Milton's hand was established by S.L. Sotheby in his Ramblings in the Elucidation of the Autograph of Milton, 1864, pp.97-104. The editors of the Columbia Milton are completely satisfied that the book was Milton's and that the notes were composed by him'. See p.570.

great care and to make it appear very probable that when he mentioned the Muse and the Spirit in his first invocation he was remembering William Browne's idea of the sacred Spirit inspiring the Muse. There is no mention of Donne in Milton's works but it is very probable that the divine poems exercised some influence on the growing conception of divine poetry in the seventeenth century. The idea of Mosaic inspiration expressed in the lines

A last and lasting'st peece, a song
He spake to Moses to deliver unto all the song still in
their memory.¹

is a basis of all conceptions of divine inspiration known to the seventeenth century. In Donne's poem 'upon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countesse of Pembroke, his sister' the conception of the Holy Muse is integrated with ~~the~~ Biblical idea of prophetic inspiration:

The songs are these, which heavens high holy Muse
Whisper'd to David, David to the Jewes:
And David's Successors in holi zeale
In formes of joy and art doe rereveale
To us so sweetly and sincerely too.²

There is nothing in Donne's prose works to represent his ideas on divine poetry which are just suggested in this poem. But the idea of the Davidian Muse has an important bearing on the Miltonic conception of poetry as a revelation. For Milton's

1. 'First Anniversary', see Poems, ed. H.J.C. Grierson, 1912, 1. 245.

2. The Divine Poems, ed. H. Gardner, 1952, p. 34.

idea of inspiration is rooted in the Biblical idea of the Spirit as the inspirer of the prophet and the apostle. What has been called his Protestant aesthetics and its shift towards secularity¹ is an extremely misleading description of a literary theory according to which all sacred poetry is the work of the Spirit. The idea of poetic creation implied by the invocations of Paradise Lost and explicitly stated in The Reason of Church Government is based on the conception of the holy Spirit which is thus stated in the translators' Preface to the Authorised version of the Bible:

... the author being God, not man; the enditer, the holy spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or the Prophets; Penmen such as were sanctified from the wombe, and endowed with a principall portion of Gods spirit.²

While the root of this idea of the 'inditer' Spirit is in Milton's own piety and his Christian cosmology it was certainly very greatly influenced by his study of medieval Christian literature. And his literary ideas have a greater and more significant affinity with the more influential critical doctrines of the Middle Ages than with those of the Renaissance.

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1. Discussing the style of Lycidas M.M. Ross has remarked: 'For the movement of the specifically Christian symbol from the centre to the periphery of the work of art implies a decisive shift of value and anticipates the emergence of a dominantly secular culture.' 'Milton and Protestant Aesthetic: The Early Poems', UTQ 1948, xvii. 360.
 2. 'The Translators to the Reader', in the Holy Bible, 1611, sig. b 3 verso.

When Sir Oliver Elton said that 'Milton had a very Mediaeval side to his brain' he did not illustrate his point from Milton's literary theory and it is possible that the Renaissance colour of Milton's educational ideas has so far obscured the medieval element in his poetic doctrines. But when Sir Oliver Elton affirmed that Milton 'was not a son of the Renaissance at all',¹ he came very near to a true conception of his mental habits. It must, however, be borne in mind that this medieval strain in Milton's literary thought is not due to a deliberate choice of medieval ideas. He shared the views of the Christian Fathers and the Latin Christian poets because he shared their experience and like them he felt the need for a view of poetry which would give it the status of sacred literature.

The two major concerns of the Christian Fathers and early Christian poets in the field of literature were first, to find a truly Christian support for the pursuit of pagan literature and secondly, to establish the divineness of Christian literature by affirming its divine source. The three entries in Milton's Common place Book which deal with literary problems refer exclusively to early Christian writers. Of these two deal with the status of profane literature in a Christian society and one with the divine origin of poetry. It is particularly significant that in dealing with these questions

1. Milton and Party, 1909, p. 5.

Milton does not quote from Renaissance authorities in support of his arguments. In the first entry on literature which is entitled 'of the Knowledge of literature' Milton says:

Whether it is permissible to spend time upon profane writers. Socrates decides in the affirmative, advancing not only other sound reasons but in particular the example of the Apostle Paul and the earliest of the Church Fathers. See also Eusebius about Dionysius of Alexandria. Julian the Apostate also perceived the weapons by which the cause of his party could be weakened when he forbade the Christians to read poetry, rhetoric and philosophy; for, said he, "we are being wounded (as the proverb puts it) by our own feathers".¹

Milton's argument in support of classical literature is in line with what was said on the subject by Origen, Basil, Lactantius, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine. And in Areopagitica Milton advances the same argument and again refers to Julian the Apostate.

In his entry on the 'Spectacles' Milton deals with the early Christian opposition to the stage and while he disagrees with its extreme rigorism he is on the whole respectful towards Tertullian's opinion:

In the work entitled On Spectacles Tertullian condemns their vogue and excludes Christians from them. In fact, it is not only with arguments (which excoriate the pagan games only) that he supports his obligation to bind with religious scruples the mind of a wary and prudent Christian from venturing to witness dramatic poem, artistically composed by a poet in no wise lacking in skill. Still in the epilogue of the work he very finely with all the flowers of rhetoric directs the mind of a Christian to

1. CM, xviii. 136-137.

better spectacles, namely, those of a divine and heavenly Character, such as, in great number and grandeur, a Christian can anticipate in connection with the coming of Christ and the Last Judgment.¹

This idea of a Christian literature as a substitute for the literature of the pre-Christian world favoured by all Christian defenders of the artes in the Middle Ages is the core of the literary theory stated in The Reason of Church Government. The Preface to Samson Agonistes and the passage on classical and Hebrew literatures in Paradise Regained represent critical views which were most influential amongst the Christian Fathers. Milton's general disregard for patristic doctrines had no influence on his literary ideas.

The entry on poetry in the Commonplace Book is another instance of Milton's interest in early Christian thought on divine inspiration. And it must be noted that when Milton restates the idea in The Reason of Church Government he does not introduce any point which is inconsistent with the Latin Christian conception of sacred poetry as the word of God. Again his invocations which are certainly much more powerful than anything in Latin Christian poetry have a striking similarity in respect of basic conceptions with the invocations in Juvencus or Sedulius.

In relating Milton's literary ideas to the literary ideas

1. CM, xviii. 207.

of the Latin Middle Ages there is a danger of calling exclusively medieval what was also a part of Renaissance poetics. For the Renaissance critics like Puttenham and Sidney absorbed some of the early medieval conceptions regarding the literary status of the Bible and their ideas on poetic inspiration seem to resemble the ideas of the Christian Fathers and some of the early Christian poets. And Milton's Muse too is valid for grounds which the practices of the Latin Christian poet can make clear to the modern mind. For in considering the status and function of the Miltonic Muse we must remember two important aspects of the invocation in medieval poetry. The Latin Christian poet rejected the classical Muse and yet felt the need of a divine being as subject of prayer for a divine gift. When Prudentius (b. 348 A.D.) asks the Muse to discard ivy crown and put on mystical crowns¹ or when Paulinus of Nola (353-431 A.D.) says:

Negant Camenis nec patent Apollini
Dicata Christo pectora²

1. Sperne camena leves hederas,
cingere tempora quis solita es,
sertaque mystica dactylico
texere docta liga strophio,
laude Dei redimita comas. Cathermerinon, iii. 16-20.
(Spurn, Muse, the ivy vain
Wherein thy brows thou usest to entwine!
Weave mystic garlands of dactylic strain,
And braid thy locks in praise of things divine.)
Prudentius, tr. Francis St. John Thackeray, 1890, p.27.
2. Carmen, x. 21.

they represent a mentality which the seventeenth century Puritan poet would not find very strange. Milton's heavenly Muse is nearer the subject of invocation in Latin Christian poetry than the Muses of Dante. Boccaccio had to invent an allegory to explain Dante's invocation of the Muses in the Inferno and had to defend the use of a pagan name by citing the authority of Isidore.¹ And Boccaccio himself addressed his invocations to God and ^{the} Virgin Mary in the verses he added to the Commedia.² All this may seem much too doctrinal to be admissible in poetry. But to the medieval mind the doctrinal question was an important question and to the Latin Christian poet piety is more important than the elegant use of an old literary device. And if we are to understand the profoundly Christian sentiment of Milton's invocations and their bearing on his conception of poetry we must realize that he had not only a genuine disregard for the Muse of classical poetry but also an equally genuine need for expressing his Christian devotion. And the Christian basis of his conception of the

1. 'È adunque da sapere, secondo che i poeti fingono, che le muse son nove, e furono figliuole di Giove e della Memoria: e la ragione perchè questo sia dà poeti, fingendo, detto, è questo. Piace ad Isodoro, cristiano e santissimo uomo e pontefice, nel libro Delle etimologie, che, perciocchè il suono delle predette muse e cosa sensibile, e che nel preterito passa, e impiemasi nella memoria, però essere dà poeti delle figliuole di Giove e della Memoria.' Il Commento alla Divina Commedia, ed. D. Guerri, 1918, i. 198.

2. Opere latine minori, ed. A.F. Massèra, 1928, p.99.

Muse can be more intelligible when we bear in mind the Christian spirit in the invocations in Latin Christian poetry. E.R. Curtius has observed that 'the rejection of the Muses by Christian poets is scarcely anything but a badge of conventionally correct ecclesiastical thought' and in his view Milton's Christian Muse belongs to the same tradition. But Milton he says 'is as unsuccessful as Tasso or Prudentius in filling the Christian Urania with life'.¹ The estimate is certainly influenced by a comparison with the Greek Muse who however is not a particularly convincing figure either in Homer or in Virgil and by his notion of what he calls the 'deceptive phantom of "Christian epic"'. To Milton his heavenly Muse was no less important than his idea of Christian epic. And we shall miss a good deal of his conception of poetry if we consider his invocations as nothing more than an unsuccessful attempt at Christianizing a rhetorical practice of classical poets. All discussions on Milton's Muse have been concerned mostly with the identity of Urania and with the affiliation of her invocations to particular poetic traditions and have done little to indicate what conception of poetry they suggest. H.F. Fletcher and Denis Saurat have endeavoured to define the object of the invocations in terms of some rabbinical notions,

1. European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, 1953, pp. 240, 244.

the former identifying her with Ben Gerson's spirit of Understanding¹ and the latter with 'the third Sefhira' of the Kabbalah.² E.E. Kellett, on the other hand, suggests that Milton was influenced by the rabbinical tradition of the Bat Kol (daughter of the voice of God) in his conception of Urania.³ Although these speculations are interesting and sometimes suggestive they do not take us very far towards an understanding of what Milton actually wanted to do in his invocations. For it is not enough that we should be satisfied about the identity of the Muse and the doctrinal propriety of her invocations. We should also try to understand the impulse behind such intensely lyrical apostrophes. My study of the invocations is prompted by the conviction that Milton had a twofold purpose in composing them. He wanted to pray for the great gift he needed for accomplishing his great task and he also wanted to tell his reader that this task was a divine task. Milton's conception of the Muse was a part of his conception

1. '... the spirit invoked at the beginning of Book VII is quite clearly the Spirit of Understanding, conceived in the same sense as by Ben Gerson'. Milton's Rabbinical Readings, Urbana, 1930, p.110. In his earlier book on the subject Fletcher said that Milton 'conceived of his muse, not as a plurality, not as now one, now another, muse, but as one muse, appearing and appealing under different aspects'. Milton's Semitic Studies, Urbana, 1926, p.121.
2. Milton, Man and Thinker, 1944, p.240.
3. Reconsiderations, 1928, pp.198-199.

of poetry. It is possible that she calls her Urania because that name had already become a tradition¹ and it is equally possible that Milton uses the name as a poetic word either for the Third Person of the Trinity² or for some angel. . . But what is important is that Milton intends to convey through this conception a definite idea of the poetic process and the poetic purpose.

Whether Milton had any religious ground for disregarding the Graeco-Roman conception of inspiration we need not discuss here. It is enough for us to observe that throughout his works he associates inspiration with the Holy Spirit and the Biblical idea of divine vision. And in order to understand the significance of this influence on Milton we need to see the very important difference between the Hellenic and the Hebraic ideas of inspiration. This difference was important for

1. '... the acceptance of Urania as the muse of Christian poetry was so well established by Milton's time that he was bound by tradition to invoke her aid when he wrote the Christian story.' Lily B. Campbell, 'The Christian Muse', HLE, 1935, viii. 67-68.
2. 'I take this passage to be an invocation to the Holy Spirit in terms which seemed to be as clear and unequivocal as the poetic statement can well be, Milton is here invoking the Third Person for its beneficent functions towards a human being, for the graces of the upright and pure heart and for the illumination of his mind, the donum or grace by which the finite mind of the poet may comprehend the creationist and redemptorial powers of the First Person.' C.D. Baker, 'Certain Religious Elements in the English Doctrine of the Inspired Poet During the Renaissance', JELH, 1939, vi. 322.

Milton and we have enough evidence in his work to show that it was. In the 'Nativity Ode' the 'Oracles are dumm' and the 'pale-ey'd Priest' can no more prophesy. It is possible to read more into the poem than what Milton actually wanted to say in it. But on the whole it must be true that the stanzas on the dissolution of the pagan order represented a very significant aspect of Milton's conception of history. For what is suggested by the richly decorated passages in the Hymn is more plainly but more categorically affirmed in Paradise Regained:

Such are from God inspir'd, not such from thee.¹

In the only serious discussion on Milton's idea of inspiration this distinction that Milton made between the Hellenic and the Hebraic ideas is ignored. J.H. Hanford thinks that Milton's doctrine of inspiration represents a kind of synthesis of Renaissance Platonism and the scriptural idea of revelation:

Milton's thought regarding Moses has gone beyond the point of making him a mystical philosopher and seer. He has made him also a supernatural visitant, as he speculated that Pythagoras might have been, a representative of the spiritual world itself. As such he is not merely a Plato speaking Hebrew but a Platonic symbol of reality.²

Another scholar who has dealt with Milton in a study of the English doctrine of the inspired poet observes that in the Renaissance ideas on inspiration

1. iv. 350.

2. "That Shepherd, who first taught the Chosen seed": A note on Milton's Mosaic Inspiration', UTQ, 1939, viii. 412.

The thought and the example of the classical theorists exercise a by no means negligible influence, an influence which ... appears to have been substantiating and confirmatory.¹

It is indeed very difficult to trace the growth of ideas in their relation to particular systems of thought and still more difficult to discover how ideas belonging to different civilizations coalesce into new conceptions. And in a complex of many ideas and influences we may separate things which exist together or discover harmony between things which are in fact disparate. Still it is clear that Milton's ideas on inspiration and prophecy developed under the influence of the Christian doctrine of Grace. There is nothing in the classical or the Renaissance doctrines of inspiration which could give support to Milton's conception of poetry as a form of revelation through a mind sanctified by grace. We cannot mix up this conception with Renaissance notions of inspiration without ignoring its unique features. And when we make this confusion a misinterpretation of what Milton actually wanted to say is most likely to result. For Milton's primary concern was not to formulate a theory but to state an experience which was supported by his religious belief. Consequently if we are to interpret his ideas on poetry in terms of any doctrine we should look for it not in Renaissance literary theory but in the seventeenth century beliefs in grace and election.

1. C.D. Baker, 'Certain Religious Elements in the English Doctrine of the Inspired Poet During the Renaissance', JELH, 1939, vi. 321-322.

Whether such beliefs could ever be the basis of a sound poetic is another question. But we cannot ignore the fact that they are at the centre of Milton's views on poetry. A literary doctrine which comprehends both inspiration and self-discipline will seem inconsistent and confusing unless it is seen in its philosophic affiliation to the Christian idea of grace earned through devotion. Defending Milton's theory of inspiration B. Rajan observes that where Milton 'is wrong is not in his assertion that creative power depends upon self-discipline, but in his vague conviction that the two are some what proportional'.¹ In reality Milton did not think that the creative power, that is inspiration, depended on self-discipline. He believed that it depended on grace, the creative will of God operating in history. And there was nothing vague in his conviction that to earn that grace there was need for an initiative on the human plane.

This unique feature of Milton's theory of poetry has been ignored because so far it has been viewed in close association with the Renaissance defence of the artes. And in our attempt to exalt Milton above the Puritans we have brought him much closer to the Renaissance than his literary beliefs and practices would really justify. Thus Haller has observed that the

1. "Simple, sensuous and Passionate", RES, 1945, xxi. 299.

essence of his (Milton's) biographia literaria is that when in the cultivation of his gifts he found his way to the poetry of the ancient world and the Renaissance, he found not distraction and escape from the Puritan urge to salvation and service, but the strongest possible confirmation.¹

Milton defended poetry but he defended it on grounds that are fundamentally different from those advanced by the representative Renaissance critic whose poetic was much more comprehensive and would cover the whole range of European literature. As a classical scholar and as one who on the whole accepted the Renaissance scheme of education Milton would support the pursuit of all the liberal arts; but the view of literary history which is implied in his early work and more explicitly stated in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained shows that he did not believe in the intellectual eclecticism which would comprehend Moses, Plato and St. Paul in a conception of unified knowledge. He firmly believed that the Graeco-Roman universe was different from the Christian universe and his theory of poetry is definitely related to the latter. His theory of poetry, his conception of tragedy and his response to the literature of the past and of his own country were determined by his Christian view of the universe and his contemplation of his own poetic impulse.

1. The Rise of Puritanism, 1938, pp.306-307.

CHAPTER TWO
PROMPTED SONG

These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are
the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but
yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation.
Milton

When Milton says that his song is divinely prompted or that the poetic genius is a gift from God he may seem to repeat what has been a commonplace of literary criticism since the time of Plato. But a careful examination of all his statements on the subject will show that his idea of poetic inspiration has no affinity with the Hellenic notion of furor poeticus as it is suggested by what Hesiod and Homer say about their divine gift or what Socrates says about Ion's rhapsodic powers. Scholars who have concerned themselves with this question, have related Milton's idea of inspiration to the controversy regarding the proportion of genius and diligence in the poetic act. This relationship has been affirmed under the assumption that Milton's ideas on poetry belong to the main tradition of Renaissance criticism. Thus Ida Langdon has asked: 'What was Milton's attitude in the time-honoured dispute between art and genius? To what extent was he "Aristotelian"? To what extent "Platonic"?'¹ And

1. Milton's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, New Haven, 1924, p.60.

there are statements in Milton's prose works, particularly in his The Reason of Church Government and Of Education, which would seem to support the view that if the poet valued 'easy numbers' he also knew the importance of 'slow-endeavouring art' and that in his conception of poetry genius and effort were equally important. Commenting on Milton's reference to the rules of epic poetry in Of Education A.S. Cook has said:

That Milton would not have declined to be judged by these rules is evident from a passage of his Tractate of Education, in which he speaks of 'those organic arts, which enable men ... to discourse and write perspicuously, elegantly and according to the fittest style of lofty, mean or lowly'.¹

But in fact Milton's regard for rule or discipline does not bring his poetic within the general scheme of Graeco-Roman or Renaissance literary theory. We should not forget that all pronouncements of Milton regarding inspiration are expressions of personal experience rather than academic theorising. And the idea of poetry which this experience gave him has nothing in common with the Platonic view of inspiration.

Plato's theory of poetic inspiration can be linked up with the Greek poets' idea of the Muse as the inspirer of poetry. In many ways the analysis of inspiration in the Ion is a philosophic treatment of what the Greek poets had already said about the supernatural source of their powers. In fact

1. Addison's Criticism of Paradise Lost, Boston, 1892, p.162.

Plato made out his case against poetry with evidence with which the poets had themselves furnished him. And when Aristotle speaks of mania or ecstasy in his Poetics he takes for granted the Greek poets' idea of divine inspiration. The poets spoke of it by way of establishing their claim to divine wisdom; Plato found in it one of his grounds for denigrating them; and Aristotle accepted it as the only explanation of the poetic power. Plato was apparently led astray by his antipathy towards poetry and Aristotle recognized mania as a fact and did not think it necessary to explain its working with reference to his statement that poetry was more philosophical than history. Consequently we have nothing in the Greek idea of poetry which connects or seeks to connect the poetic act either with the religious consciousness or with the philosophical temper. After quoting Socrates' words on inspiration in the Ion Sir Maurice Bowra has remarked that the

modern idea of inspiration is not so different as we might expect from the primitive. There are of course points of divergence. The modern poet is not primarily a prophet like Amos or Hosea or even to judge by his claims, Hesiod.¹

While Sir Maurice thinks that 'Milton was carried through Paradise Lost by what he believed to be the prompting of the Holy Spirit'² he does not dwell on the important difference

1. Inspiration and Poetry, 1955, pp.2-3.

2. ibid. p.19.

between the Hellenic and the Miltonic conceptions of inspiration.

In the Apology as in the Ion Plato compares poets to 'diviners and soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them'.¹ And from what Socrates says about the divine power of 'diviners and prophets, including the whole tribe of poets'² one wonders if Castelvetro was not right when he said that Plato's words on inspiration were after all a good joke.³ For when Meno agrees with his view, Socrates says, how seriously we can only guess, 'and women too, Meno, called good men divine'.⁴ In the Laws the description of the poet is only a repetition of what is said in the Ion:

the poet according to the tradition which has ever prevailed among us, and is accepted of all men, when he sits down on the tripod of the Muse, is not in his right mind; like a fountain, he allows to flow out freely whatever comes in and his art being imitative, he is often compelled to represent men of opposite dispositions, and then to contradict himself; neither can he tell whether there is more truth in one thing

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1. The Dialogues of Plato, ed. B. Jowett, 1892, ii. 114.
 2. ibid. p.63.
 3. 'E Platone, quando ne fa mentione ne' suoi libri, senza fallo schizza', Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata et sposta, Basle, 1576, p.65. See Gilbert, Literary Criticism, Plato to Dryden, New York, 1940, p.311. The relevant passage in Castelvetro, as translated by Gilbert is 'It is wrong then to attribute to Plato the opinion of the furor infused into the poets because, as I said, it originated with the people and the poets agreed to it for the sake of their own interests. Plato, when he mentions it in his books, surely is jesting.'
 4. The Dialogues, ii. 63.

that he has said than in another.¹

The meaning of the passage may be strained to discover in it some anticipation of Keats's idea that the poet 'has no identity', and that 'he is continually in for - and filling some other body'.² It is true that, as Professor F.M. Cornford has said in another connection, 'owing to Plato's dramatic method, we cannot fix the extent of Socrates's reservation'.³ But this is certain that the psychology of poetic creation as explained in the Ion or elsewhere in Plato's Dialogues bearing on poetic inspiration has nothing in common with Milton's idea of poetry. And the fact that Milton was influenced by Plato in respect of other ideas or that he had a deep regard for his philosophy does not necessarily disprove the view that he could never accept his idea of inspiration. It is significant that although Milton refers to Plato directly or indirectly more than seventy times and calls him divine in 'Ad Patrem' and at several places cites from his Dialogues in support of his arguments, he never mentions his idea of inspiration anywhere in his works. On the other hand there are two passages in his works which would suggest that although in many ways Plato was, as Coleridge said, 'Milton's darling',⁴

1. v. 102.

2. Letters, ed. M.B. Forman, 1952, p.227.

3. Plato's Theory of Knowledge, 1935, p.3.

4. Collected Letters, ed. E.L. Griggs, 1951, ii. 459.

his views of poets and poetry were not acceptable to him. The concluding lines of 'De Idea Platonica quemadmodum Aristoteles intellexit' (1628) show that in his Cambridge period Milton was acquainted with Plato's ideas on poetry. And when he asks Plato to call back the poets from their exile or to go into exile with them¹ he is certainly expressing his disapproval of the denunciation of poetry in the Republic. Seventeen years later Milton expresses his disagreement with the Platonic view of poetry in Areopagitica (1644) in stronger language. Commenting on Plato's banishment of poets he says:

But that Plato meant this law peculiarly to that Commonwealth which he had imagin'd, and to no other, is evident. Why was he not else a lawgiver to himself, but a transgressor, and to be expell'd by his own Magistrats.²

And when in 'Ad Patrem' he puts up a defence of poetry he is certainly recalling Plato's strictures on it though he does not

1. At tu perenne ruris Academi decus
 (Haec monstra si tu primus inducti scholis)
 Jam jam pōetas urbis exules tuae
 Revocabis, ipse fabulator maximus,
 Aut institutor ipse migrabis foras.
 David Masson found in this poem 'an evident admiration of Plato'. Milton's Poetical Works, 1910, i. 101. H. Agar too thinks that the poem is a lighthearted criticism of Aristotle. Milton and Plato, Princeton, 1928, p.3. Irene Samuel however has observed that the concluding lines of the poem show 'that from the first Milton recognized in Plato's words on poetry a paradox'. Plato and Milton, New York, 1947, p.45.
2. CM, iv. 316.

specifically rebut any of his charges. At least he does not mention the Platonic idea of divine inspiration as an argument in support of the divinity of poetry. He speaks of the divine origin of poetry which is valued because it retains the 'sacred traces of the Promethean fire'. Nor is there any reference to the Platonic idea of poetic inspiration in 'Manus' (1639). And the two passages in his early work which deal with inspiration suggest an idea of the source of poetic power which has nothing in common with the ideas of the Ion. On the contrary they show that Milton wanted to propound a theory of inspiration which would give the poet a status denied him by Plato.

In Proclusion III (1628) the poetic power is a gift from Heaven:

Now surely divine poetry, by that power with which it is by heavenly grace indued, raises aloft the soul smothered by the dust of earth and sets it among the mansions of heaven, and breathing over it the scent of nectar and bedewing it with ambrosia instils into it heavenly felicity and whispers to it everlasting joy.¹

While in this passage there is nothing to suggest that Milton was thinking of the 'possessed' poets of the Ion, in 'Elegia sexta' (1629) there is a view of inspiration which is specifically different from Plato's. In this poem Milton speaks

1. Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p.69.

of two kinds of inspiration, Bacchic, which comes to the poet of love, and the truly divine which works in poets of a superior kind. About the latter he says:

But the poet who sings of war and of heaven subject now to mature Jove, and of pious heroes and leaders half-divine, who sings now of the sacred conferences of the high gods, now of the abysmal realms where barks a savage dog, that poet should live sparingly as did the Samian teacher and should find in herbs his simple food. Let the crystal water stand beside him in a beechen cup, and let him drink only sober draughts from a pure spring. Let him have, in addition, a youth chaste and free from evil, uncompromising standards and stainless hands.¹

It appears that the full significance of this passage as an expression of Milton's idea of poetry is yet to be recognized. This is indeed the first statement of a conception of the poetic act which Milton explains in greater detail in his later works. And the conception is fundamentally different from Plato's. Great poets, he says, speak the word of God through grace earned by their self-dedication. The idea of

1. At qui bella refert, & adulto sub Jove caelum,
 Heroesque pios, semidecsque duces,
 Et nunc sancta canit superum consulta deorum,
 Nunc latrata fero regna profunda cane,
 Ille quidem parcè Samii pro more magistri
 Vivat, & innocuos praebat herba cibos;
 Stet prope fagineo pellucida lympha catillo,
 Sobriaque è puro pocula fonte bibat.
 Additur huic scelerisque vacans, & casta juvenus,
 Et rigidi mores, & sine labe manus.
 Commenting on these lines David Masson remarks that they 'are about Milton's noblest in Latin, and deserve to be learnt by heart, or to be written under his portrait'. Poetical Works, 1910, i. 93. To an enquirer into Milton's poetic they are extremely important.

inspiration becomes the idea of divine grace which descends only on souls made holy by austerity. And the difference between the Platonic inspiration and the Miltonic is important. While to Plato inspiration is an accidental visitation to Milton it is Heaven's response to prayer. In 'Elegia sexta' the poetical activity is the activity of a regenerate soul and the regeneration takes place through a moral initiative on the part of the poet. Since this power comes through effort the poet is in full possession of the faculties of his mind including reason which is exalted by the gift of grace. In the Ion, on the other hand the poet is lost in an ecstasy which is not caused by any spiritual preparation.

Scholars who have endeavoured to present Milton as a Platonist in his theory of Poetry have given an interpretation of Plato's statements on poetry which is not supported by what Plato plainly says in the Ion. And Greek scholars too sometimes present Plato's conception of poetry in two independent aspects, thus creating a notion that it represents such a diversity of opinion that it can lend support to any system of poetic based on the idea of inspiration.¹ When Irene Samuel says that to 'Milton fresh from reading the Phaedrus,

1. Cf. J.W.H. Atkins's observation on the difference between the idea of inspiration in the Ion and that in the Phaedrus in Literary Criticism in Antiquity, 1952, 1. 53.

the language of divine inspiration was highly acceptable',¹ she forgets two important propositions of Plato regarding the origin and effect of the poetic power, that the poet is a mindless and possessed man, and that his influence on society is bad. 'Elegia sexta' is an implicit repudiation of both these propositions. And the similarity which Irene Samuel discovers between Milton's idea of inspiration and Plato's reminds one of Coleridge's regret that scholars studying the influence of the Greek philosopher on the English poet 'only hunt out verbal parallelisms'.² Herbert Agar too has said of Plato and Milton that 'both agree that poetry should not be written merely to give pleasure and insist that it should have a high moral purpose', and on this assumption he concludes that the 'same agreement will be found in the two men's esthetic theories'.³ Both Herbert Agar and Irene Samuel have ignored the very important fact that unlike Plato, Milton considers inspiration as a divine gift which is to be earned through effort. And to Milton this effort is both intellectual and moral. In a letter to Charles Diodati (1637) he speaks of 'growing my wings and learning to fly'.⁴ But this is not all. The exercise

1. Plato and Milton, New York, 1947, p.48.

2. Collected Letters, ed. E.L. Griggs, 1951, ii. 459.

3. Milton and Plato, Princeton, 1928, p.3.

4. Private Correspondence, p.14.

of the intellect must be combined with a spiritual and moral self-preparation. The essence of this poetic doctrine is stated in The Reason of Church Government urged Against Prelaty (1641) where the poetic power is a divine grace which is to be obtained

by devout prayer to that eternall Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim, with the hallow'd fire of his Altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affaires.¹

The inspiration occurs through God's will but it will occur only to those who are intellectually and spiritually prepared to receive it.

In his early poems this idea of inspiration is associated with the idea of prophetic vision which God alone can give. In 'At a vacation Exercise' (1628) which is the first poem containing any reference to inspiration the 'fit sound' of poetry is

Such where the deep transported mind may soare
Above the wheeling poles, and at Heav'ns dore
Look in

In the 'Nativity Ode' (1629) the gift of song comes from God:

From out his secret Altar toucht with hallow'd fire.

The imagery of 'hallow'd fire' which is obviously borrowed

1. CM, iii. 241.

from the sixth chapter of Isaiah is used more elaborately in The Reason of Church Government. In 'The Passion' (1630) the poet's 'holy vision' of Jerusalem is compared to Ezekiel's vision on the Chebar:

See see the Chariot, and those rushing wheels,
That whirl'd the Prophet up at Chebar flood,
My spirit som transporting Cherub feels,
To bear me where the Towers of Salen stood,
Once glorious Towers, now sunk in guiltless blood;
There doth my soul in holy vision sit,
In pensive trance, and anguish, ecstasick fit.¹

In 'Il Penseroso' (1631-32) the imagery of the wheel of fire reappears in lines which are no less significant as expression of Milton's idea of inspiration:

But first, and chiefest, with thee bring,
Him that yon soars on golden wing,
Guiding the fiery-wheeled throne,
The Cherub Contemplation

At the end of the poem ecstasy and 'old experience' are mentioned as two elements that inspire the prophetic strain:

There let the pealing Organ blow,
To the full voic'd Quire below,
In Service high, and Anthems cleer,
As may with sweetnes, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into extasies,
And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes
.....
Till old experience do attain
To something like a Prophetic strain.

Since the Commonplace Book was begun by Milton in July 1632 it is probable that the entry in it on Caedmon's poetic inspiration

1. Ezek. 1. 16.

was made as a confirmation, from the known experience of a poet, of what had already been said about it in 'Elegia sexta'. The entry refers to a 'marvelous and very pleasing anecdote [is] told in Bede's History about an Englishman who suddenly by act of God became a poet'.¹

The poetic inspiration described in 'Elegia quinta' (April, 1629) is also Milton's own experience. But it was an inspiration very different from the inspiration which is described as the higher poetical impulse eight months later in 'Elegia sexta'. The inspiration of the earlier poem may be compared to the Bacchic inspiration which Milton appreciates in Diodati in the later elegy. It is sheer ecstasy, an expansiveness of mood which is caused by the coming of spring. But even here there is something of the higher poetic urge which is more intensely felt and more clearly defined in 'Elegia sexta'.

Now my mind is swept away into the heights of the clear sky and through the wandering clouds I move released from the body; through the shadows I am

1. de Poetâ Anglo subito divinitus facto mira, et perplacida historiola narratur apud Bedam. Hist. I. 4. C. 24. CM, xviii. 139. This entry which is in Milton's own hand, is ninth in order and has been placed by Ruth Mohl between 1639-1641. ed. Don.M. Wolfe, Complete Prose Works of John Milton, New Haven, 1953, i. 381. Jerome Cornelin's Rerum Britannicarum, Heidelberg, 1587, which contains Bedaes Anglosaxonis Historiae Ecclesiasticae Gentis Anglorum Libri V, has been mentioned by Ruth Mohl as the probable source of Milton's quotation.

borne on and through caverns, those sanctuaries of poets, and the inner shrines of the gods lie open to me. My mind beholds all that is done on Olympus and dark Tartarus does not elude my vision. To what lofty strain does my spirit give utterance with parted lips? To what does this madness, this divine frenzy, give birth? The spring, which has brought me inspiration, shall by that inspiration be sung. In this way she shall gain through the return of her own gift.¹

But considering the atmosphere of the poem as a whole its inspiration can be compared to what Milton calls, in The Reason of Church Government, 'the heat of youth', and although in 'Elegia sexta' he does not censure Diodati's Bacchic frenzy as either 'vapours of wine' or 'the trencher fury of riming parasite'² the inspiration which he values as a precious gift and would strive to obtain is certainly of a different order. The points of difference between the two inspirations described in the two poems are important. The inspiration of the fifth elegy though a divine gift is specifically the result of the spring. Secondly this inspiration comes without any special effort on the part of the poet. In 'Elegia sexta' the in-

1. Jam mihi mens liquidum raptatur in ardua coeli,
 Perque vagas nubes corpore liber eo.
 Perque umbras, perque antra feror penetralia vatum,
 Et mihi fana patent interiora Deum.
 Intuiturque animus toto quid agatur Olympo,
 Nec fugiunt oculos Tartara caeca meos.
 Quid tam grande sonat distento spiritus ore?
 Quid parit haec rabies, quid sacer iste furor?
 Ver mihi, quod dedit ingenium, cantabitur illo;
 Profuerint isto reddita dona modo.

2. CM, iii. 241.

piration is more clearly recognised as a divine gift: 'For the poet is sacred to the gods and is their priest. His inmost soul and lips breathe Jove.'¹ And this inspiration is to be obtained through self-discipline and chaste life. But what is still more significant is that this elegy defines the nature and the theme of the poetry which this inspiration will create. In the entry on Bede in the Commonplace Book there is a quotation from Basil which relates to the theme and use of poetry:

Basil tells us that poetry was given by God to raise in human souls the love of virtue. 'For when the Holy Spirit saw that mankind could be led with difficulty to virtue and was careless about upright living because of its inclination toward pleasure, what did it do? It mixed with the dogmas the pleasure of poetry in order that through the charm and smoothness of the sounds we might unconsciously receive the benefit of the words'.²

The entry on Caedmon's poetry in the Commonplace Book is thus important as an indication of Milton's ideas regarding the source and use of poetry. The poetic inspiration is a divine gift³ and it works to a moral purpose. It is also significant

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1. Dis etenim sacer est vates, divûmque sacerdos, Spirat & occultum pectus, & ora Jovem.
 2. CM, xviii. 139. The Greek quotation from Basil is from the first of his seventeen homilies on the Psalms, Homilia in Psalmum I which is called 'On the Beginning of the First Psalm'. See opera, Paris, 1618, i. 125-26.
 3. The relevant chapter in Bede's History of the English Church and People is entitled 'A Brother of the Monastery is found to possess Gods Gift of Poetry' also suggests the proper theme of a divinely inspired poet: 'For he (Caedmon) (contd. on next page)

that in 'Elegia sexta' the description of divine inspiration is followed by a reference to a poem which Milton has recently composed.¹ And we can assume that while this elegy refers to 'The Nativity Ode' the atmosphere of 'Elegia quinta' suggests compositions like 'Song on May Morning' (1628 May), the six Italian poems (1630), the sonnet 'On the Nightingale' (1629) and the translation of the fifth ode of Horace. To the idea of inspiration adumbrated in 'Elegia sexta' we relate poems like, apart from the 'Nativity Ode', 'The Passion' (1630), 'Upon the Circumcision'² (1632-1633), 'At a Solemn Musick' (1632) and the Sonnet VII. ('On His Being Arrived to the Age of Twentythree' 1631, December 9).

We can, therefore, assume that Milton developed a clear idea of poetic inspiration by the end of 1629. The inspiration which is described in 'Elegia quinta' composed earlier in the

received this gift of poetry as a gift from God and did not acquire it through any human teacher. For this reason he could never compose any frivolous or profane verses, but only such as had a religious theme fell fittingly from his devout lips.' tr. Leo Sherley-Price, 1955, p.255.

1. F.W. Bateson's view that the last two lines of 'Elegia sexta' refer to 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' and not to the 'Nativity Ode', English Poetry, A Critical Introduction, 1950, pp.155-56, has been disproved by J.B. Leishman, 'L'Allegro and Il Penseroso in their Relation to Seventeenth-century Poetry,' Essays and Studies, 1951, pp.2-
2. In the Trinity manuscript this poem follows 'At a Solemn Musick' (1632) and 'On Time' (1632-33) and the three poems are grouped together after 'The Passion' in Milton's edition.

same year has no bearing on this idea of the poet's divine power. On the other hand we can assume that 'Elegia sexta' is a conscious attempt on the part of Milton to define for himself the nature and purpose of poetry. This demanded deep reflection on his own capabilities and a chastening of impulses. Milton is not here concerned with any known theory of inspiration, classical or neo-classical. He is only concerned with himself and in 'Elegia sexta' which contains his first clear statement on poetic inspiration, he brings his own sense of 'madness' or 'divine frenzy' as he describes it in 'Elegia quinta' under the chastening influence of a high purpose. He does not repudiate the less chaste urges of Diodati, because he has himself felt their power. 'Elegia prima' (1626 May) and 'Elegia septima' (1628 May) and the Italian poems are an expression of the kind of feeling which is described in 'Elegia quinta'. But the six months that passed between the composition of 'Elegia quinta' and of 'Elegia sexta' must have been an important period in the inner history of Milton's intellectual development. This is shown by the element of close reasoning on the nature of poetic inspiration in 'Elegia sexta'. And the fact that Milton speaks in that poem of two kinds of poetic inspiration calling one of them the higher shows that he felt the power of both and though

that both were valid. When he tells his friend Diodati: 'Your Massic Cups foam with a fertile vein of song and from the jar itself you pour the verses stored therein,'¹ he is not making a generous concession to things which are either alien or repugnant to his own tastes: he is admiring something he has found in his own nature and only six months earlier has celebrated in 'Elegia quinta' and in the ten line song 'On May Morning' which was presumably composed in the spring of 1629 (i.e. within a few weeks of the composition of 'Elegia quinta').² So even at the moment when Milton is opting for the 'The sober drafts from a pure spring'³ by way of preparing himself for the higher task of an epic poet, he has yet no settled disrespect for the inspiration kindled by a 'laden table with its noble provision'⁴ or by 'Massic cups' yet about Milton's own choice there is no doubt. And he makes his choice in full knowledge of his powers and purposes; nor is the choice unconnected with the stage of his mental development which

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1. *Massica foecundam despumant pocula venam,
Fundis & ex ipso condita metra cado.*
 2. J.H. Hanford has aptly called this song 'purified lyric comment on the theme of Elegy V'. 'The youth of Milton' in Studies in Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton, 1925. p.119. May 1, 1629 may therefore be taken as the probable date of this poem. See Shorter Poems of John Milton, ed. B.A. Wright, 1952, p.107.
 3. *sobriaque e puro pocula fonte*
 4. *lauta tibi generoso mensa paratu*

precedes the spring of 1629. About a year earlier he had expressed his conception of a great poetic theme and of the deep transport that is required for dealing with it in 'At a vacation Exercise':

Yet I had rather, if I were to chuse,
Thy service in some graver subject use,
.....
Then sing of secret things that came to pass
When Beldam Nature in her cradle was;
And last of Kings and Queens and Hero's old,
Such as the wise Demodocus once told
In solemn Songs at King Alcinous feast,
While sad Ulysses soul and all the rest
Are held with his melodious harmonie
In willing chains and sweet captivitie.¹

Yet the poetic temper of which 'At a vacation Exercise' is a record has none of that clear perception of powers and of the ends to which they are to be used which marks 'Elegia sexta'. In the former poem there is yet some vagueness or even purposelessness about his poetical endeavours. When he exclaims: 'But fie my wandring Muse how thou dost stray!' he, of course, regrets his digression from the theme in hand: but the line can also be taken as an expression of some lack of poetic purpose which he must have experienced at this stage. The 'naked thoughts that rove about' are yet to be recognised as the result of an unquestioned inspiration. So 'the deep transported

1. For comments on the significance of this passage see Paradise Regained etc., ed. T. Newton, 1752, p.316; Poems upon several occasions, ed. T. Warton, 1791, p.309; Shorte Poems, ed. B.A. Wright, 1951, p.105.

mind' mentioned in 'At a vacation Exercise' should mean an inspiration which is still inchoate in its nature. It will take the poet's mind soaring 'above the wheeling poles, and at Heav'ns dore', it will give sight of 'each blissful Deitie', and will 'sing of secret things'. But both its power and purpose are only indistinctly felt. This was in July, 1628, when the poet was yet to complete his twentieth year. Still 'At a vacation Exercise' is important as the earliest surviving piece of Milton's composition, Latin or English, where he speaks of poetical inspiration and suggests the theme of the poetry which that inspiration would produce. And it is significant that here he is concerned with his own feeling and literary ideas which are expressed in a sincere apostrophe to his native language. Here for the first time he expresses his feeling that great poetry dealing with divine themes is a matter of inspiration. It is not something cleverly made and trimmed like 'new fangled toys'. The poems which he has already composed in Latin, 'Elegia prima' (1626 May), 'Elegia tertia' (1626 September), 'In Obitum Praesulis Eliensis' (1626 October), 'In Obitum Procancellarii medici' (1626 October), 'Elegia secunda' (1626 November), 'In quintum Novembris' (1626 November), 'Elegia quarta' (1627) and perhaps also 'De Idea Platonica' (1628) have been but a game. He does not set much

store by them for he has 'thither packt the worst' and 'the daintiest dishes shall be serv'd up last'.

In Prolusion VI of which 'At a vacation Exercise' is a part he speaks of 'The great minds of Athens and Rome' as 'celestially bedewed'.¹ In Prolusion III composed in the same year he speaks of 'divine poetry' 'raising aloft the soul' 'by that power with which it is by heavenly grace indued'.² But neither in the two Prolusions (III & VI, both belonging to 1628) nor in 'At a vacation Exercise' is there anything about the moral self-discipline which is mentioned in 'Elegia sexta' as a necessary condition for inspiration. The idea of self-discipline resulted from a sense of poetic dedication of which 'Elegia sexta' is a record. In 'Song on May Morning',³ 'Elegia septima' and Sonnet I there is a youthful exuberance of feeling of which the ascetic resolution of 'Elegia sexta' is a deliberate corrective. The kind of inspiration recorded in lines like

Hail bounteous May that dost inspire
Mirth and youth, and warm desire,

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1. Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p.88.
 2. *ibid.* p.69.
 3. Tillyard and Grierson date the sonnet in 1630 (Milton, 1946 pp.45 and 372-3, and Poems of Milton, i. xvii-xxi. I agree with Hanford's dating of it before the 'Nativity Ode', see A Milton Handbook, 1946, p.45 and MP, xviii, 1921, pp.475-8 See also W.R. Parker, 'Some Problems in the Chronology of Milton's Early Poems', RES, xi. 1935.

or

Whether the Muse, or Love call thee his mate
Both them I serve, and of their train am I,

is subjected to some moral scrutiny round about the time when the 'Nativity Ode' was composed. In Sonnet I there is an attempt at discovering a moral sanction for the poetry of love such as is represented in the six Italian poems:

O if Jove's will
Have linkt that amorous power to thy soft lay,
Now timely Sing.

And in the Italian poems themselves there is spiritualization of love in the manner of Dante and Petrarch: 'Would that my insensible heart and stony breast were fruitful soil for him who sows from Heaven.'¹ They indicate a division in Milton's soul which he had to strive to dissolve. The severe austerity which he chooses for himself in 'Elegia sexta', is a result of this inner striving. The self-criticism of Sonnet VII too is a reflection on some deficiency in mental life, a lack of emotional maturity which he must have perceived as an unhappy consequence of some duality in his emotional nature.² It is

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- Deh! foss' il mio cuor lento e'l duro seno
A chi pianta dal ciel sì buon terreno. Sonnet iii.
William Cowper's verse translation of the two lines may be more satisfactory:
oh that this hard and sterile breast might be
To Him, who plants from heaven, a soil as free.
See The Sonnets of John Milton, ed. Mark Pattison, 1883, p.111.
 - W.R. Parker assigns the sonnet to December 1632, one of his grounds being, as he says, that 1631 was for Milton a poetically fruitful year. But Milton's regret in the sonnet is not that he has not written any poetry but that he has not written the poetry he intended to write.

possible that Milton felt some compunction for having written some amatory verse in Italian even after he had declared his poetic vow in *Elegia sexta*. His inability to complete the poem on 'The Passion' and his dissatisfaction with its quality must have also created in him a disturbing sense of emotional immaturity when he regrets that

Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arriv'd so near
And inward ripenes doth much less appear,
That som more timely-happy spirits indu'th.

he is aware of some failure of talent which he knew he possessed. His main concern at this stage was not how much poetry but what kind of poetry he would produce. And this demanded serious reflection on the nature of poetic power and on its source. Sonnet VII which is the last poem composed in the Cambridge period is an expression of the belief that the poetic fulfilment could be ordained only by the will of Heaven which, so far as the poet himself is concerned, must be gracefully obeyed. In the letter¹ in which Milton mentions this sonnet intellectual power is considered as a trust from Heaven and literary activity

1. This letter, written in English, was not published in the 1674 volume. It is preserved in two drafts in the Trinity College Manuscript from where it was transcribed in W.A. Wright's Facsimile of the Manuscript of Milton's Minor Poems, 1899, pp.6-7. W.R. Parker believes that it was written in 1633 and was addressed to Thomas Young; see his 'Milton's Unknown Friend', The Times Literary Supplement, May 16, 1936, p.420 and 'Some Problems in the Chronology of Milton's Early Poems', RES, 1935, xi. 276-83.

as fulfilment of some divine mission:

You are often to me, & were yesterday especially, as a good watchman to admonish that the howres of the night passe (for so I call my life as yet obscure, & unserviceable to mankind) & that the day with me is at hand wherin Christ commands all to labour while there is light. Which because I am persuaded you doe to no other purpose then out of a true desire that God should be honourd in every one;...

The whole letter is a plea for intellectual perseverance for 'due & tymely obedience to that comand in the gospell set out by the terrible seasoning of him that hid the talent'.¹ The 'holy vision', or 'the transported mind' of the early poems will come only after the poet has toiled hard to deserve such heavenly visitation. In the last three lines of the sonnet we have, as Mark Pattison has put it, a 'solemn record of self-dedication, without specification of the nature of the performance'.²

So the group of poems which include the 'The Passion', 'On Time', 'Upon the Circumcision', 'At a Solemn Musick' all composed after 'Elegia sexta', and the 'Nativity Ode', embodies a kind of poetic feeling and suggests an idea of poetic inspiration in which the sheer ecstasy of 'Elegia quinta' or 'The Song on May Morning' is replaced by a more chastened and

1. *CM* xii. 322-323.

2. *Milton's Sonnets*, 1883, p.98. The allusion to the parable of the talent (Matt. xv. 14-30) significantly reappears in the sonnet 'On His Blindness'.

sober mood which desires a joy that

shall overtake us as a flood,
When every thing that is sincerely good
And perfectly divine,
With Truth, and Peace, and Love shall ever shine
About the supreme Throne
Of him, t'whose happy-making sight alone,
When once our heav'nly-guided soul shall clime,
Then all this Earthy grosnes quit,
Attir'd with stars, we shall for ever sit,
Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee o Time.¹

It is significant that the poems are put together in the 1645 edition in the order in which we have mentioned them. In tone and temper as in diction and imagery they are close to the 'Nativity Ode', the first fruit of Milton's early maturity. But what is particularly important in them in their bearings on Milton's idea of poetic inspiration is what they say on purity and holiness as a source of song or vision. In the 'Nativity Ode' human song is only a joining of the human voice 'unto the Angel Quire'. In 'The Passion' the Ode is mentioned as a song which 'my muse with Angels did divide to sing', and 'upon the Circumcision' alludes to it as a 'triumphant song' sung by the 'flaming powers, and winged warriours bright'. In 'At a Solemn Musick', 'Voice and verse' are 'pledges of Heav'ns joy' which present 'To our high-rais'd Phantasie'

That undisturbed song of pure concent,
Ay sung before the Saphire-colour'd throne
To him that sits thereon

1. On Time.

With Saintly shout and solemn Jubily,
 Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
 Their loud uplifted Angel trumpets blow,
 And the Cherubick host in thousand quires
 Touch their immortal Harps of golden wires,
 With those just spirits that wear victorious Palms,
 Hymns devout and holy Psalms
 Singing everlastingly.

These five poems, which, along with the paraphrases of Psalms CXIV and CXXXVI placed just after the 'Nativity Ode', are the first seven pieces of the 1645 edition, suggest a view of divine poetry which proceeds from an intensely religious emotion. The images used in them for suggesting holiness are significantly Biblical images. We have noticed the allusion to the 'secret Altar toucht with hallowd fire' in the 'Nativity Ode', and the 'transporting Cherub' giving a 'holy vision' in 'The Passion'. The idea of poetic vocation and of poetic power represented in these poems is certainly related to the idea of higher inspiration stated in the second part of 'Elegia sexta'. And it is significant that 'At a vacation Exercise' which is not included in ^{the} 1645 edition was intended by Milton to be placed between the 'Fair Infant' elegy and 'The Passion'. For as a poem which declared his poetic intent it would appropriately be placed before the four poems constituting along with the 'Nativity Ode' the serious poetry of his early phase.¹

1. In the errata the 1673 edition of the minor poems there is a note on the misplacing of the poem which shows that the poet was concerned about the position of this poem in the history of his poetic development.

At about the time when 'The Passion' and 'Upon the Circumcision' were composed, Milton addressed a letter to his tutor Alexander Gill in which the poetic genius is called a divine frenzy and a sacred fire:

I knew well enough how impossible it would prove for one gifted with your genius to renounce poetry and banish from his inmost heart that heaven-sent inspiration and that sacred and celestial fire.¹

So in the four years between the summer of 1628 and the summer of 1632, that is, the second half of the Cambridge period, Milton reflected on the nature of his poetic power and recognized it as a divine gift which gave a vision of secret things. The conception of poetry, of its source and use, which Milton embodied in the Reason of Church Government is rooted in the ideas already expressed in the Cambridge period.

We have seen that in 'Il Penseroso' the 'rapt soul', 'Cherab Contemplation', and 'Prophetic strain' signify a view of the poetic mind which had been already suggested in some of the early poems. In fact if we are to connect 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' with the history of Milton's poetic development instead of treating them as casual poetical pastimes we will see that they refer to the psychology of 'Elegia sexta'. They represent the two poetic moods described in the Latin elegy and while the first depicts felicities which are quite legiti-

1. Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p.6.
Eugenia Chifos has with good reason assigned it to 1630.
See MLN, 1947, xli. 37-39.

mate the second is certainly a more authentic expression of Milton's own nature. The poems were written at a time when the sharp dichotomy of poetic moods of which 'Elegia sexta' is a record is not yet resolved but has certainly become much less sharp. 'L'Allegro' presents a life of sober cheer where youthful jollity is not repugnant to the poet's moral nature, because it is 'unreproved pleasures free'. The desire of 'Elegia prima', 'Elegia quinta' and 'Elegia septima' is replaced by a love of the simpler delights of life. Yet the world of 'Il Penseroso' is more truly the world of Milton himself. And the ending of the poem has a more direct relation to Milton's poetic life than anything in 'L'Allegro'. The poet wants to be dissolved into ecstasies which may 'bring all heav'n before mine eyes', but ecstasy is not all that he desires. 'The Prophetic strain' can only result from old experience. These ideas are not casually introduced. They are expressive of the poet's mood and represent his ideas of the poet's vocation.

The idea of moral purity and holiness as the quality of a divine singer is stated several times in Comus. Hearing the Ladies song to Sweet Echo, Comus says:

Can any mortal mixture of Earths mould
Breath such Divine enchanting ravishment?
Sure something holy lodges in that brest,
And with these raptures moves the vocal air
To testifie his hidd'n residence.¹

1. 243-47.

And that which is not good, is not delicious
To a well-govern'd and wise appetite¹

we have an ethos which is to be more elaborately stated in An Apology for Smectymnuus. In Comus the theme of feminine chastity is linked up, under the stress of Milton's personal necessity with the cognate theme of study and contemplation. That Comus was an occasional piece written on request is evident from all that we know from the history of its composition. The motto on its title-page shows that Milton was half reluctant to publish it.² But when the occasion for writing it came he not only made it the kind of morality that most suited his temper but also included in it with little violence to the unity of its theme, ideas related to his own mental growth. When the Lady speaks of

the uncontroled worth
Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
To such a flame of sacred vehemence,³

we recall what Milton has already said in his earlier poems about 'the transported mind' and the power of the purified soul

1. 702-705.
2. It may plausibly be conjectured that the motto was chosen by Milton himself, although its exclusion from the editions of 1645 and 1673 may suggest that it was inserted by the editor. The quotation is from Virgil's second *Eclogue*:
Eheu quid volui misero mihi! floribus Austrum
Perditus -
The opening lines of *Lycidas* leave no doubt that in the Horton period Milton was too absorbed in a self-preparation for a poetic career to be inclined towards any premature exercise of his powers.
3. 793-95.

In 'Lycidas' the idea of poetic inspiration is expressed through the conventional pastoral addresses to the Muses. But here too there are certain inventions of Milton's own which are suggestive. The 'sacred well' is certainly the fountain Aganippe on Mt Helicon and the words are obviously reminiscent of the opening lines of Hesiod's Theogony where too there is mention of the altar of Zeus. In Prolusion II Milton had already introduced this idea when he alluded to the story 'which has prevailed since the earliest times of how the Muses dance before Jove's altar day and night'.¹ But the idea that the waters of Aganippe have their source beneath the seat of Jove is Milton's own invention, obviously intended for emphasising the sanctity of poetic inspiration. In conception it is nearer 'Siloa's brook that flowed fast by the oracle of God'. In 'Il Penseroso' too 'the Muses in a ring round about Jove's altar sing'. But closely following the allusion to classical Muses we have 'Cherub Contemplation' introduced in a Biblical imagery. In 'Lycidas' the 'sisters' are introduced as an appropriate pastoral convention, but it shows no respect for 'the Muse her self that Orpheus bore', because she could not save the life of her son. But it is not merely as an anticipation of Milton's rejection of the classical Muse in Paradise Lost that Milton's allusion to the poet's fate is

1. Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p.66.

important. The idea of poetic fame stated in the poem is rooted in the belief that the poet was ever in his great task-master's eye. The 'unceasing care' with which Milton pursued his studies at Horton and the sense of high purpose that spurred him to his labours taught him to believe that

Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove.¹

The sentiment is that of Sonnet VII. The poet will achieve as much as is ordained for him, for his work is God's work.

In the Cambridge period there is a more direct reflection on poetic inspiration and even an element of analysis of the poetic temper, such as we notice in 'Elegia sexta'. And it is a study of the inspiration which the poet himself experiences. There is also an earnest effort made at this period to discard one kind of inspiration in favour of another. The young poet is intently watching his spiritual growth and directing and controlling his impulses to a well-defined poetic end. He is introspective even in his creative moments for he believes that in creating poetry he is also creating himself. In the Horton period poetic inspiration is not directly discussed or defined. For now the poet is too immersed in the toil of self-preparation to feel the need for any declaration of

1. 78-82.

literary objectives. The two important poems of this period, Comus and 'Lycidas' were not given as fruits of this toil. They were rather half-reluctant poetical exercises in which Milton put something about his own spiritual development. Comus is a worship of virtue and in 'Lycidas' there is waiting for a great morrow, a feeling that while the poet has till now 'touch'd the tender stops of various Quills' and has been 'warbling his Dorick lay' 'with eager thought' he must now proceed to 'fresh Woods and Pastures new'.¹ He has his high intent but now his 'Pegasus can only rise on tender pinions as yet, so let my new wisdom be humble'.² But when there was an occasion for defining the source of poetry, as there was in 'Ad Patrem' he reaffirmed his faith in divine inspiration:

Do not look down upon divine song, the poet's function, than which there is nothing that more commands his ethereal birth and heavenly ancestry, that more commends the mind of man because of its origin. For song retains the sacred traces of the Promethean fire.³

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1. The suggestion that the last line of Lycidus is an allusion to Milton's intended Italian tour is unacceptable on the ground that there is mention of a different plan in the two letters which Milton addressed to Charles Diodati in November 1637: the Cambridge draft of Lycidus is dated November, 1637. For the dating of the two letters see Complete Prose Works of John Milton, ed. D.M. Wolfe, New Haven, 1953, i. 325.
 2. Letter to Charles Diodati dated November (?) 23, 1637. Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p.14. 'tender pinions' may be an allusion to the 'tender stops' of 'Lycidas'.
 3. Nec tu vatis opus divinum despice carmen,
Quo nihil aethereos ortus, & semina caeli,
Nil magis humanam commendat origine mentem,
Sancta Promethæae retinens vestigis flammae.

In the pamphlet period which commences within about two years of his return from Italy in 1639 this idea of poetic inspiration is intenser owing to a feeling that in upholding true religion and true liberty he is fulfilling a divine commission. In The Reason of Church Government he compares himself to Jeremiah saying that 'When God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast it lies not in mans will what he shall say or what he shall conceal'.¹ What Sir Herbert Grierson has called the 'lofty prophetic and apocalyptic flights'² of Milton's tracts would explain the psychology of his well-known statement on poetic inspiration in The Reason of Church Government. During and immediately after the Italian tour Milton's reflections on his poetic ambition are not very significant as statements on inspiration. The Latin poem 'Mansus' composed in Italy associates epic poetry with inspiration only casually:

If I shall sing of the high-souled heroes of the
Table invincible through their comradeship, and
(oh! that the inspiration may be mine!) if I shall
break the Saxon Phalanxes under the war God of the
Britons.³

As a poem composed in the Hellenistic atmosphere of Italian

1. CM, 111. 231.

2. Milton and Wordsworth, 1937, p.38.

3. Aut dicam invictae sociali foedere mensae,
Magnanimos Heroes, & (O modo spiritus adsit)
Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub Marte phalanges.

literary society 'Mansus' is naturally full of classical images and allusions. There is nothing in the poem to suggest that Milton wanted this inspiration to mean anything more than what is commonly conveyed by the word in Renaissance criticism. There is no Biblical imagery suggestive of a Judaic-Christian idea of special vision which we have noticed in the 'Nativity Ode' and in 'The Passion'. On the contrary Apollo is recognised as a deity once worshipped by the Britons.¹ But the reference to the Druids and the explanatory verse on their function have some significance. As a class of priestly reciters of heroic songs the Druids must have appealed to the fancy of a young poet aspiring to produce an epic poem on a British theme. While the spirit of the poems of the Cambridge period like the 'Nativity Ode', 'The Passion', 'The Circumcision' and even of the Horton poem 'Lycidas' is Christian, the spirit of 'Mansus' and of 'Epitaphium Damonis' is patriotic. So what is important for Milton to say in these two later poems is not that the future English epic poet must needs have the inspiration of a Hebrew prophet but that he is in a direct line of descent from ancient rhapsodists of Britain who too were

1. As Warton has suggested Milton here 'avails himself of a notion supported by Selden on Polyolbion, that Apollo was worshipped in Britain'. Poems upon several occasions, 1791, p.540. Selden also supposes that the British Druids invoked Apollo. Milton's allusion to Druids in this poem and in Lycidas is obviously an expression of his literary patriotism.

votaries of Phoebus. The concluding lines of 'Mansus' however are suggestive of the idea of purity as a poetic virtue which is first stated in 'Elegia sexta':

Then, too, if there is any loyalty, if there are definite rewards for the righteous, I myself, remove to the ethereal regions of the gods on high, whither toil and a pure mind and an aspiring virtue carry men, shall (in so far as destiny permits) from some part of that distant universe behold these things, and with a soul filled with smiling serenity, my face shall be suffused with rosy light and with joy I shall applaud myself on high Olympus.¹

The idea of holiness as a qualification of the divinely gifted poet comes in all Milton's reflections on poetry.

In 'Epitaphium Damonis' particularly the reflections on the poet's own literary plans are stimulated more by patriotic than religious sentiment:

Oh, if then life shall still be mine, you, my reed-pipe, will hang on an aged pine far away, quite forgotten by me, or else, all changed you shall stridently emit a British note for my native Muses.²

But towards the end of the poem there are certain images which suggest that Milton's mind was still working on the divine gift of holy souls;

And from this point he does not attack trivial souls and the ignoble hearts of the crowd; but, turning

-
1. Tum quoque, si qua fides, si praemia certa bonorum,
Ipse ego caelicolum semotus in aethera divum,
Quò labor & mens pura vehunt, atque ignea virtus,
Secreti haec aliquà mundi de parte videbo
(Quantum fata sinunt) & totâ mente serenum
Ridens purpureo suffundar lumine vultus
Et simul aethereo plaudam mihi laetus Olympo.
2. O mihi tum si vita supersit,
Tu procul annosa pendebis fistula pinu
Multum oblita mihi, aut patriis mutata camoenis
Brittonicum strides, quid enim?

hither and thither his shining eyes, he ever shoots his arrows upwards toward the stars, and never tires nor looks aside to make a downward stroke. In this way the minds of the elect are inflamed and the shapes of the gods.¹

What Masson has called the 'very daring'² close of 'Epitaphium Damonis' - 'Festa Sionaeo bacchantur & orgia Thyrsae'³ has no direct bearing on Milton's idea of poetic inspiration. But the expression 'thyrsus of Sion' is certainly suggestive of a view of heavenly felicity which is Christian. In a poem which partly deals with Milton's literary project this is significant.

The idea of inspiration suggested in some of the minor poems and clearly stated in 'Elegia sexta' becomes a well-defined doctrine in the pamphlet period. It is a doctrine which arises out of the intensity of a personal experience. Milton felt that pursuit of truth was participation in a divine process, that 'the doctrine of the gospel' was 'planted by teachers divinely inspired', and could be purified 'by the/affections of the regenerate soul'.⁴ And inspiration was not for the poet alone. All work for the cause of truth is accomplished through 'gifts from God'.⁵ So even in a prose tract Milton invokes 'the

1. Nec tenues animas, pectusque ignobile vulgi
Hinc ferit, at circum flammantia lumina torquens
Semper in erectum spargit sua tela per orbem
Impiger, & pronos nunquam collimat ad ictus,
Hinc mentes ardere sacrae, formaeque deorum.

2. Life of Milton, II. 93 n.

3. 219.

4. Of Reformation in England, CM, III. 1.

5. ibid. CM, III. 12.

Immortal Deitie, Reveler and Judge of Secrets'.¹ Here the idea of inspiration is growing out of the Judaic-Christian idea of the Spirit or the Wisdom of God. In Of Reformation this idea is first propounded as a definite theory of divine knowledge. When Milton speaks of 'the Wisdom of God' as the creator of human understanding and as the 'sovraign eyesalve' which is to purge 'that intellectual ray which God hath planted in us',² he means that holy light which he invokes in the third book of Paradise Lost. This idea of divine illumination is linked up, towards the end of the tract, with the hallowed atmosphere in which the new bard will pour forth his lofty measures:

Then amidst the Hymns, and Halleluiahs of Saints,
 some one may perhaps bee hard offering at high strains
 in the new and lofty Measures to sing and Celebrate
 thy divine Mercies and marvelous Judgments in this
 Land throughout all Ages.³

In the pamphlets the idea of inspiration becomes a more comprehensive doctrine of the divine reason working through the regenerate soul. Wisdom is not merely a body of acquired learning, it is the Spirit working through the fit soul. To Milton the distinction between reason as a normal intellectual faculty and divine wisdom is important. When he speaks of

1. Of Reformation in England, CM, iii. 10.

2. ibid. CM, iii. 33.

3. ibid. CM, iii. 78.

Aristotle's doctrines as things laid down 'from the principles of reason',¹ he is making the distinction between divinely inspired wisdom and natural reason which is finally stated in

Paradise Regained;

Such are from God inspir'd, not such from thee;
Unless where moral vertue is exprest
By light of Nature not in all quite lost.²

In Of Prelatical Episcopacy the truly illuminated minds are 'subdu'd by the excellencie of their heavenly gifts'³ and in Animadversions Milton invokes the 'Ever-begotten Light'⁴ to 'powre out the consecrated oyle into the holy and ever burning lamps'.⁵ Learning itself is a 'divine gift'⁶ and the honourable employment of a great spirit is to be the 'messenger, and Herald of heavenly truth from God to man'.⁷

In The Reason of Church Government inspired men and prophets are called divine because they work with 'divine intimation'. And the distinction between inspiration and reason suggested in the reference to Aristotle's principles of reason in Of Reformation is more explicitly made when Milton speaks of

1. Of Reformation in England, CM, iii. 38.

2. iv. 350-52.

3. CM, iii. 92.

4. CM, iii. 146.

5. CM, iii. 147.

6. CM, iii. 161.

7. CM, iii. 164.

those 'principles which either art or inspiration hath written'.¹ Throughout The Reason of Church Government divine wisdom is sharply distinguished from 'fleshly wisdom not counseling with God'.² The well-known passage on poetic inspiration in the second book of this work is an implicit recognition of the same distinction. And this doctrine of the 'regenerate reason' is integral with the doctrine of inspiration. In An Apology For Smectymnuus the idea of regeneration of the human intelligence into an instrument of the divine will is more clearly explained. While in The Reason of Church Government the gift of inspiration is to be earned by devout prayer, in An Apology for Smectymnuus great importance is attached to moral worthiness and from this point of view the latter work is more important as a statement of Milton's theory of art as an expression of nature:

For doubtlesse that indeed according to art is most eloquent, which returnes and approaches nearest to nature from whence it came; and they expresse nature best, who in their lives least wander from her safe leading, which may be call'd regenerate reason. So that how he should be truly eloquent who is not withall a good man, I see not.³

The argument through which Milton establishes this proposition has nothing in it to suggest that Milton here is only repeating

1. CM. iii. 197.

2. The Reason of Church Government, CM, iii. 211.

3. CM. iii. 287.

the well-known dictum of Longinus.¹ For Longinus brings in the moral quality as a condition of the quality of writing. To Milton its importance is teleological. He regards it not as quality but substance of true eloquence. Good writing could result only from good life:

And long it was not after, when I was confirm'd in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to be a true poëm; that is a composition and patterne of the best and honorablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroick men, or famous cities, unlesse he have in himselfe the experience and the practice of all that which is praise-worthy.²

It is a proposition that he makes in answering aspersions on his character, but that does not make it less important as an

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1. Longinus (A.D. 213-272) observed in On the Sublime: 'It is not possible that men with mean and servile ideas and aims prevailing throughout their lives should produce anything that is admirable and worthy of immortality. Great accents we expect to fall from the lips of those, whose thoughts are deep and grave. Thus it is that stately speech comes naturally to the proudest spirits.' See W.R. Roberts, Longinus, on the Sublime, 1899, p.61. The first appearance of this idea in European criticism is in Strabo (60 B.C. - A.D. 20), see The Geography of Strabo, tr. H.L. Jones, 1917, i. 63. It is curious that there is no mention of Strabo in George Saintsbury's A History of Criticism and no reference to his remark on the poet's character in J.W.H. Atkins's Literary Criticism in Antiquity. Spingarn quotes the passage in Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, p.54. Minturno makes the same point in his De Poeta, Basle, 1559, p.79. In Elizabethan criticism we meet with this idea in Ben Jonson's 'Dedication to Volpone' and George Puttenham's The Arte of English Poesie, 1589, ch. XIX.
 2. CM, iii. 303-304.

aspect of his idea of poetry or of eloquence. For, as Milton explains later in the tract, it is the intensity of moral feeling which inspires the supporters of truth. To Milton inspiration then is, in its effect in the human breast, a superior moral zeal:

This coole unpassionate mildnesse of positive wisdome is not enough to damp and astonish the proud resistance of carnall and false doctors, then (that I may have leave to soare a while as the Poet's use) ther zeale whose substance is ethereal, arming in compleat diamond ascends his fiery Chariot drawn with two blazing meteors, figur'd like beasts, but of a higher breed then any the zodiack yields, resembling too of those four which Ezechiel and St John saw.¹

The apotheosis of a good book as God's image in Areopagitica proceeds from this conception of the human zeal as an ethereal substance. For true zeal is the outbreak of divine power in the affairs of man:

if there be found in his book one sentence of a ventrous edge, utter'd in the height of zeal, and who knows whether it might not be the dictat of a divine Spirit?²

Areopagitica is a great deal more than a defence of freedom of thought: it is a reasoned statement of a belief in the chosen thinker in the chosen race. England was the

Nation chos'n before any other, that out of her, as out of Sion should be proclaim'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all Europ.³

1. CM, lii. 313-314.
2. CM, iv. 326.
3. CM, iv. 340.

And 'wise and faithfull labourers' will make 'a knowing people, a Nation of Prophets, of Sages, and of Worthies.'¹ More important than liberty itself was righteousness, the wisdom which the builders of 'spiritual architecture', must possess:

For now the time seems come, wherein Moses, the great Prophet may sit in heav'n, rejoycing to see that memorable and glorious wish of his fulfill'd, when not only our sev'nty Elders, but all the Lord's people are become Prophets.²

Areopagitica contains too many references to pagan writers to appear as anything other than a humanistic document, and an eloquent plea for intellectual liberty.³ But the prophetic ardour of the book and the conception of the regenerate reason which it embodies bring it in line with the spirit of the anti-episcopal tracts. To Milton intellectual liberty was a condition of intellectual regeneration, a laying aside of 'outward dictates' so that the affections may be guided by the 'sanctifying Spirit'. In Eikonoklastes (October 1649) he speaks of 'our access with freedom of speech to the Throne of Grace'.⁴

In the later tracts the idea of inspiration is consistently explained as 'the illumination of the Holy Spirit'.⁵ In Means

1. CM, iv. 341.

2. CM, iv. 342-343.

3. A.E. Barker in his Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, 1955, says about Areopagitica: 'it had not yet occurred to Milton to separate the Renaissance from the Reformation.' p.81.

4. CM, v. 222.

5. A Treatise of Civil Power, CM, vi. 6.

to Remove Hirelings Out of the Church (1659) the 'guidance of his holy spirit'¹ can only come to a liberated mind. And in A Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth (March 1660) the 'libertie to serve God' is to be exercised 'according to the best light which God hath planted in him to that purpose, by the reading of his reveal'd will, and the guidance of his holy Spirit'.²

In Defensio secunda (1654) the doctrine of divine inspiration is stated with the zeal of one who, when bereft of eyesight, is reassuringly conscious of an inward light. What is asserted in The Reason of Church Government as a principle essential to piety is now reasserted as an expression of a sense of power, as the 'rousing motions' of 'a man separate to God':

And, in truth, we who are blind, are not the last regarded by the providence of God; who, as we are the less able to discuss anything but himself, beholds us with the greater clemency and benignity . . . The divine law, the divine favour, has made us not merely secure, but, as it were, sacred, from the injuries of men; nor would seem to have brought this darkness upon us so much by inducing a dimness of the eyes, as by the overshadowing of heavenly wings; and not unfrequently is wont to illumine it again, when produced, by an inward and far surpassing light.³

1. CM, vi. 78.

2. CM, vi. 141.

3. CM, viii. 73.

This sense of inner power is as genuine as his conviction that he was not really diminutive in stature or that he knew how to use his broad sword like a strong man. He is not simply repudiating the calumny that his blindness is a scourge from God: he is reaffirming a faith which he has already stated in his anti-prelatical tracts.

There is a passage in one of his last pamphlets, Of True Religion, Schism, Toleration (1673), which will be the best gloss to the invocations in Paradise Lost and in Paradise Regained. It is also a resumé of what has been said on inspiration in The Reason of Church Government:

But so long as all these profess to set the Word of God only before them as the Rule of faith and obedience; and use all diligence and sincerity of heart, by reading, by learning, by study, by prayer for Illumination of the holy Spirit, to understand the Rule and obey it, they have done what man can do.¹

In Doctrina Christiana 'constant diligence' and 'an unwearied search after truth' need 'God's assistance' as 'a precious aid for my faith'. True understanding comes from 'divine revelation' in the study of which one should neglect 'nothing which depended on my own industry'.² Both in The Reason of Church Government and De Doctrina Christiana the divine illumination is to be earned by study and prayer.

1. CM, vi. 168.

2. CM, xiv. 5,9.

Milton's theory of poetic inspiration is thus integral with his theory of divine knowledge. There is prayer to the Deity in a prose tract; the invocation of the holy Light in Paradise Lost mentions the blind poet's studies as an effort that deserves a divine reward.¹

Milton does not explain inspiration either from a psychological or from an aesthetic point of view. Nor does he present inspiration as an indeterminate source of special power which the Renaissance apologists for poetry claimed for poets in their defensive theses. Milton does not call the poetic power a divine power by way of upholding the poet and his profession. His poetic is a part of his Cosmology and is rooted in his deeper religious convictions. It grew with the growth of his mind and whether it is suggested in his verse or formulated in his prose it proceeds from close introspection and is independent of classical or neo-classical doctrines. The Renaissance theory of inspiration was little more than an argument in support of the moral prestige of poetry. In Thomas Lodge, in George Puttenham or in Sir Philip Sidney it is introduced as a form of special pleading:

1. Yet not the more
 Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
 Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunnie Hill,
 Smit with the Love Sacred Song; but chief
 Thee Sion and the flowrie Brooks beneath
 That wash thy hallowd feet, and warbling flow,
 Nightly I visit PL, iii. 26-32.

where as the poets were sayde to call for the Muses helpe, [says Lodge] ther mening was no other, as Iodocus Badius reporteth, but to call for heauenly inspiration from aboue to direct theyr endeuors.¹

To Puttenham the poetic power is 'some diuine instinct the Platonicks call it furor'. But it can also come from

excellencie of nature and complexion; or by great subtiltie of the spirits & wit; or by much experience and observation of the world, and course of kinde; or, per aduenture, by all or most part of them.²

Here inspiration is only one of the sources of poetic power while in The Reason of Church Government study and observation are only ancillary to divine illumination. In Sidney's An Apology for Poetry (c. 1583, printed in 1595), 'the force of diuine breath'³ is mentioned along with other things as an elaborately devised argument in defence of poetry. Milton's theory of poetry is no part of any defensive argument; it is an affirmation, in terms of a general theory of divine knowledge. It therefore concerns itself not only with the source of poetry but also with its nature and function. The Renaissance poetic developed mostly as a pedagogic discipline and it was based on texts of almost canonical authority. It elaborated old conventions and reformulated old rules. Consequently

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1. Defence of Poetry, 1579. See G. Smith, Elizabethan Critical Essays, 1904, 1. 72.
 2. The Arte of English Poesie, 1589. See G. Smith, Elizabethan Critical Essays, 11. 3-4.
 3. *ibid.* 1. 157.

Renaissance criticism had little direct bearing on Renaissance literature.¹ Milton's theory of inspiration relates to a poetic process which he experienced as his own and to the poetry which he produced. While it has no link with Bacon's theory of imagination it is clearly a repudiation of Hobbes's theory of judgement and fancy. Nor is it a rationale for poetry as expression of personal intuition. For Milton's idea 'inward prompting' does not suggest any autonomy of the individual intuition. For 'the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect' mentioned in Areopagitica, 'the precious lifeblood of a master-spirit' is not just human intelligence ('fleshly wisdom, not counselling with God') operating in a human way but 'that ethereall and fifth essence,² the breath of reason it selfe'.³ The regenerate reason inspired by the Spirit speaks God's word. The conception of poetic power embodied in the invocation in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained gives the poet a status which is similar to that given by Adam to Raphael:

Divine
 Historian, who thus largely hast allayed
 The thirst I had of knowledge, and voutsaf't
 This friendly condescension to relate
 Things else by me unsearchable, now heard

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1. cf. Basil Willey's remark on Renaissance criticism quoted on page 16.
 2. cf. 'Ethereal quintessence of Heav'n', PL, iii. 716.
 3. CM, iv. 298.

With wonder, but delight, and, as is due,
With glorie attributed to the high
Creator¹

The poet can see and tell of things invisible to mortal sight
only when his upright and pure heart is instructed by God.
In virtue and in power he is a prophet who utters divine
wisdom under divine inspiration.

1. FL, viii. 6-13.

CHAPTER THREE
PROPHETIC STRAIN

My spirit some transporting Cherub feels.
Milton

The idea of inspiration which emerges from Milton's early poems and his prose tracts does not relate to poetry alone: it is a metaphysic of divine wisdom working in human affairs. Milton's poetic which is a part of this metaphysic has nothing in common with the classical or Renaissance literary doctrines. Its root is in the Judaic-Christian conception of prophecy as it was defined in the seventeenth century. To Milton's religious mind it offered a satisfactory explanation of the poetic act. He developed it into a doctrine of poetry in terms of the inner demands of his creative mind. To him a poet was a prophet because he himself, in his poetic act, felt like a prophet. And this sense of a prophetic impulse at once created and supported the conviction that the poet's office was the same as the prophet's. To see how remote Milton's literary mind was from the Hellenic view of poetry and how close it was to the Hebraic idea of prophecy would require a more careful study of the invocations and other relevant parts of Paradise Lost than has so far been made

These passages embody a consistent view of poetry and there is ground for believing that Milton intended them to do so. The idea of prophetic poetry which is suggested in the early poems and is a little more elaborately adumbrated in prose works like The Reason of Church Government, the Tractate of Education and Areopagitica finds its most eloquent expression in the invocations and a few other passages in Paradise Lost. They constitute the locus classicus of Milton's theory of poetry. And an analysis of the arguments of the three invocations justifies Wordsworth's assertion about Milton that however 'imbued the surface might be with classical literature, he was a Hebrew in soul'.¹

That by poetic inspiration Milton meant prophetic inspiration is clear from the opening lines of Paradise Lost.
His 'Heav'nly Muse

on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos:²

and the lyrical intensity of the apostrophe as a whole, its devotion and moral earnestness, show that it is not just a Christian adaptation of the classical invocation. But it is

1. Preface to Poems, 1815.

2. PL, 1. 6-10.

not, however, a prayer only: it is also a declaration of purpose. The two other invocations and several passages besides, of the poem are equally important as statements of a personal faith. Milton wishes to declare what he is going to perform as a poet and what power would qualify him to perform it. He will 'assert Eternal Providence', will 'see and tell of things invisible to mortal sight', and will sing of the 'better fortitude of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom'. Of such expression of personal faith there is nothing in the classical epic.

But it is not in the invocations alone that Milton affirms the divine inspiration of the poet and the divine things which he reveals. The design of Books V to VIII, and of XI and XII has offered the poet occasion for emphasising the prophetic nature of his inspiration and theme. The story of creation and of the fight in heaven is told by Raphael and the future of man is foretold by Michael. So in putting half the matter of the whole fable in the mouth of two Angels Milton had scope for presenting the poem as a revelation. We cannot assume that Milton adopted this technique for this purpose. But there is much in the conversation between Raphael and Adam to show that Milton desired to indicate through it his own ideas on the nature and scope of his theme. And the argument of this

conversation has close affinity with the argument of the invocations.

In Book V Raphael tells Adam that reason can be either discursive or intuitive and although the latter being more spiritual is the proper faculty of angels the difference is mostly one of degree:

Whence the Soule
Reason receives, and reason is her being,
Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
Differing but in degree, of kind the same.¹

Coming as a prologue to Raphael's narrations the statement is probably meant to suggest that the faculty of the narrator is a divine faculty and that the human mind was capable of obtaining it. When Adam calls Raphael a 'Divine instructor' he says about the Angel's office what the Angel himself has already explained. It was the office of a revealer of divine mysteries:

The full relation, which must needs be strange,
Worthy of sacred silence to be heard;²

and Raphael's reply to this can be read as Milton's own reflection on the grave responsibility of a prophetic office:

High matter thou injoinst me, O prime of men,
Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate
To human sense th'invisible exploits

1. PL, v. 486-490.

2. PL, v. 556-557.

Of warring Spirits; how without remorse
 The ruin of so many glorious once
 And perfet while they stood; how last unfould
 The secrets of another World, perhaps
 Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good
 This is dispenc't, and what surmounts the reach
 Of human sense, I shall delineat so,
 By lik'ning spiritual to corporeal forms,
 As may express them best: though what if Earth
 Be but the shaddow of Heav'n, and things therein
 Each to other like, more then on Earth is thought?¹

In Book VII the prophetic character of the poem is again emphasised through these words of Adam:

But since thou hast voutsaf't
 Gently for our instruction to impart
 Things above Earthly thought, which yet concernd
 Our knowing, as to highest wisdom seemd,
 Deign to descend now lower, and relate
 What may no less perhaps availe us known,
 How first began this Heav'n which we behold
 Distant so high,²

and the Angel in reply speaks of

such Commission from above
 I have receav'd, to answer thy desire
 Of knowledge within bounds³

Still more significant is Adam's estimate of what the Angel has revealed:

Great things, and full of wonder in our eares,
 Farr differing from this World, thou hast reveald
 Divine Interpreter, by favour sent
 Down from the Emyrean to forewarne
 Us timely of what might else have bin our loss,
 Unknown, which human knowledg could not reach:⁴

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1. PL, v. 563-576.
 2. PL, vii. 80-86.
 3. PL, vii. 118-120.
 4. PL. vii. 70-75.

and as a 'Divine Historian' Raphael has already wondered

to recount Almightye works
What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice,
Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?¹

If Raphael has revealed 'what might have else to human
Race bin hid'² Michael is 'Heav'nly instructor' who 'future
things canst represent / As present'.³ He brings 'great
tidings' to 'impose / New Laws to be observ'd'.⁴ After he
has spoken of 'great Messiah' Adam exclaims:

O sent from Heav'n,
Enlightner of my darkness, gracious things
Thou hast reveal'd, those chiefly which concerne
Just Abraham and his Seed:⁵

he is 'Prophet of glad tidings',⁶ 'Seer blest'⁷ through whose
words Adam has 'attain'd the summe / Of wisdom'.⁸

The matter of these six books of Paradise Lost (V-VIII and
XI-XII) is a divine revelation spoken by two Angels. And
Milton makes it clear that an angel is endowed with powers of
intuition or of special vision.⁹ Speaking of good angels
Milton says in the De Doctrina Christiana that 'some things

1. PL, vii. 112-114.

2. PL, vi, 896.

3. PL, xi. 870-871.

4. PL, xi, 226-228.

5. PL, xii. 270-273.

6. PL, xii. 375.

7. PL, xii. 553.

8. PL, xii. 575-576.

9. PL, v. 488.

indeed they know by revelation, and others by means of the excellent intelligence with which they are gifted'.¹ Milton accepts the idea common to both the Testaments that prophecy is God's word spoken by an angel. The office of Michael in the last two books of Paradise Lost resembles that of the angel in the Revelation: 'and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophet, sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass'.² But the superior intelligence of the angel is not denied to man, for 'time may come when men / With Angels may participate'.³ And Raphael says that both discursive and intuitive faculties proceed from reason to which man may aspire.⁴ The angel himself is pure 'Intelligence of Heav'n'.⁵ The three invocations of the poem are, in essence, prayers for a gift of this divine intelligence. In fact Milton's reflections on his task as poet are, in many points, identical with those of the Angels on their task as divine instructors. In book V Raphael says that he is called upon to deal with 'high matter' and that it is a 'sad task and hard'.⁶ In book IX Milton speaks of his 'sad task' and of his heroic argument.⁷ What Milton calls 'things invisible to

1. CM, xv. 107.

2. xxii. 6.

3. PL, v. 493-494.

4. PL, v. 485-493.

5. PL, viii. 180-181.

6. 563-564.

7. 13-14.

mortal sight' in his invocation in Book III¹ are what Michael calls 'objects divine' that 'must needs impaire and wearie human sense'.²

So as material bearing on Milton's ideas on divine poetry the 'ceslestial Colloquie sublime' between Adam and his Angel guests is no less important than the three invocations and the opening of the Ninth Book. And together they represent Milton's conception of the nature and function of great poetry. The importance of the invocations as statements of Milton's own convictions on the source of his poetic power and on the purpose for which that power is to be used has been ignored owing to the assumption that they are nothing more than imitations or adaptations of the invocations in the classical epic. In fact they can no more be compared to the brief and casual apostrophes to the Muses in Homer and Virgil than the collects of the English Liturgy can be compared to the verses of the Greek Anthology. For one thing, Milton's invocations are much longer and more intensely lyrical than the invocations in the Iliad or the Aeneid and they are more revealing of the theme and purpose of the poem. Milton introduced them in his epic because he wanted an occasion for expressing his deeper feelings regarding his vocation as a poet. If the Homeric invocation is

1. PL, 111. 55.

2. PL, xii. 9-10.

to be read as Homer's own idea of poetry its main proposition would be that the poetic faculty is a mystery. The proposition that emerges out of Milton's invocation is that the poetic faculty is God's wisdom operating in history through the elect. Of such idea there is no anticipation in the classical epic. It is a part of the Miltonic poetics. The three invocations are a restatement, in the language of earnest prayer, the view of the poetic act which Milton had already expressed in the 'Elegia sexta' and the Reason of Church Government. And they constitute a theory of poetry which proceeds directly out of the poetic experience.

The poetic that emerges out of the three invocations is rooted in the Hebraic idea of prophecy: it gives a psychology of inspiration which has more affinity with the Book of Jeremiah or the Book of Isaiah. Milton's prayers to the Heavenly Muse, the Spirit, or the holy Light, are prayers for prophetic endowment which only the devout soul would deserve. Since his poem would reveal divine justice it must be the result of divine inspiration.

If we were to build up a Hebrew theory of poetry the only relevant material we would find in the Old Testament would be the oft-repeated statement - ko amar Yahweh (thus saith the Lord). This oracular preamble of the speakers of God's Word

said all that the Hebrews knew or wanted to know about the source and substance of their prophecies which were also their poetry. Their piety would resent a larger poetics. At least it made further enquiry seem irrelevant. The Israelites had no need for an Aristotle to define poetry for in their view all poetry was the word of God. For the Hebrew prophet was not a maker but a mouthpiece. Milton too had the same belief regarding his function as a poet. As a revealer of divine wisdom he is only an instrument in the hand of God. The poet's inspiration, therefore, is God's grace descending upon the elect. And this idea of divine grace is as different from the Platonic idea of inspiration as the spirit of the invocation in Paradise Lost is different from that of the invocation of the Iliad or the Aeneid. Its only parallel is to found in the prophetic literature of the Hebrews. What Milton understood by God's benediction on the poet is what Amos believed to be the source of all revelation: 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets unto his servants the prophets'.¹ The Miltonic invocation is nothing less than a prayer for a gift of prophetic utterance.

But this divine gift is not indiscriminately bestowed. It has to be earned by an act of the will. And it is here

1. iii. 7.

that Milton develops the Old Testament idea of prophetic power into a more consistent philosophy of divine wisdom. In the Old Testament the prophetic urge is a fact of experience and is taken for granted. The prophet feels that he is speaking the word of God at God's command:

Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth: and the Lord said unto me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth.¹

There is nothing in this conception of prophecy to suggest that the prophet has an active will of his own through which he achieves his prophetic power. The moral personality of the prophet in here unimportant and the will of God is supreme. In Milton, on the other hand, the poet is a conscious agent in his poetic act for which he has to prepare himself. That is, poetry is the revelation of divine truth through 'a chosen vessel' who becomes its inspired spokesman by virtue of devout toils.

About the moral earnestness of the prophet, his zeal for that which is good, there was some suggestion in the Bible, particularly in Isaiah and in the Epistles of St. Paul. To Isaiah's initiation as a prophet there is a reference in The Reason of Church Government: the spirit of the invocations is essentially this Hebrew spirit of meekness before the Lord and

1. Jeremiah, 1. 9.

of trust that he can enrich the regenerate soul with all utterance and knowledge. To St. Paul man's 'sufficiency is from God'¹ through whose grace 'my power is made perfect in weakness'.² The Spirit addressed in the first invocation in Paradise Lost can endow the poet with the powers which will enable him to accomplish his task: the sufficiency is to come from Heaven:

What in mee is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support;³

and the belief which inspires all the invocations in the poem is that the 'great argument' can be spoken only when God pours forth of his Spirit. In the invocation of the holy Light in Book III of Paradise Lost, the Celestial light will make good the frailties of the body and will

Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.⁴

The poetic power is equated with prophetic power which comes from God and fulfils a divine purpose. It is a conception which is very different from the Renaissance idea of sacer vates which was little more than a stock phrase used in defence

1. II. Corinthians, iii. 5.

2. ibid. xii. 9. These words of St. Paul are quoted in Greek above Milton's autographs in the albums of Christopher Arnold and of John Zollikofer. CM, xviii. 271, 553.

3. PL, i. 22-23.

4. PL, iii. 52-55.

of poetry. With the Greek notion of the Muse as a divine inspirer of poetry it has nothing in common. Milton created a poetic in which the genius of the poet is the working of the Spirit in the human soul and poetry itself is the word of God. This was the core of his literary faith which was a part of his religious belief. The Spirit prefers the upright and pure heart before all temples. The power which created the universe will now inspire the poet who intends to declare its law. The great poet must himself be a great poem for participating in a great event. He is pursuing 'Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rime' in the faith that he is acting under a divine commission. This faith was with Milton a prophetic experience, an intense feeling of a great mission which he saw in the prophetic books of the Bible and which he himself shared in the pamphlet period. The invocations are an expression of this experience. They constitute a prelude to the poetry that he was going to produce.

Sir Herbert Grierson thinks that while Milton's pamphlets present him as a writer inspired with the true prophetic zeal neither Paradise Lost nor Paradise Regained has anything of that zeal.¹ We are not here concerned with the question whether Paradise Lost is a prophetic poem. Our enquiry is whether Milton intended it to be a prophetic poem and how far

1. Milton and Wordsworth, 1937, pp.38, 115.

that intention is indicated by anything that he says in the poem itself. If as Professor Grierson has observed there is expression of a prophetic temper in the anti-episcopal tracts we maintain that there is the same temper in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes although it is expressed in a quieter diction. What in the Reason of Church Government is an irksome burden and an awful command from Heaven which must be obeyed at any cost is in Paradise Lost a more tranquil faith in a calling that demands powers which he knows he can earn by devout prayer. Yet there is in Paradise Lost a sense of moral anxiety born of an intense moral earnestness 'instruct me, for Thou know'st'. There is an eager waiting in this brief entreaty, a sense of high intent that is waiting on some preventient grace which marks all that Milton says about his poetic endeavour in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. In the prophetic mood, such as of Isaiah, Jeremiah or Amos we discover a tension between a sense of divine mission and of personal unworthiness. 'I am a man of unclean lips' says Isaiah¹ but his mouth is touched with the live coal from the altar and his sin is purged. Jeremiah tells the Lord that he cannot speak for he is a child and the Lord puts his words in his mouth.² Amos declares that he was no prophet but a herds-

1. vi. 5.

2. i. 6, 9.

man and that the Lord commanded him to prophesy unto the people of Israel.¹ Here there is no prayer for the gift of prophecy, no invocation of the Lord for sufficiency. But there is the faith that the prophetic power is a gift from the Lord and that the gift has to be earned through holiness. The central theme of the invocations in Paradise Lost is the sanctity of the poetic speech. But there is a sense of insufficiency too, a depressing awareness of incompetence which God alone can remove:

But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the chearful waies of men
Cut off, and for the Book of Knowledge fair
Presented with a Universal blanc
Of Natures works to mee expung'd and ras'd
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.²

This is something deeper than regret over blindness although it is blindness which occasioned this feeling. It is an expression of a prophetic mood in which the sense of incapacity is soon removed by an assurance of divine gift. In the invocation of Urania in Book VII there is an unrest which Milton experienced in the days of the anti-episcopal controversy:

With like safetie guided down
Return me to my Native Element:
Least from this Flying Steed unreind, (as once
Bellerophon, though from a lower Clime)
Dismounted, on th' Aleian Field I fall,³
Erroneous there to wander and forlorne.³

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1. vii. 14-15.
 2. PL, iii. 45-50.
 3. PL, vii. 15-20.

The anxiety is that of one who is conscious of his great powers and yet knows that they are not his powers and may not remain with him for long. If Milton wanted to express any feeling of his in this intensely lyrical passage it was that in describing the battle in heaven he was not in his native element and that the terrible event of the first half of the poem was seen by eyes that were neither his nor any man's.

I fall,
Erroneous there to wander and forlorn.

The nervousness comes from the recollection of some awful intellectual act, a flow of divine energy which may ebb without the poet's knowing it. But are we then to imagine that the rest of the poem describing the creation of the world (Books VII-VIII), the temptation and the fall (Books IX-X), the intercession of the Son and the promise of redemption (Books XI-XII), is not intended to be prophetic in its origin and substance? Milton himself says: 'More safe I sing with mortal voice'.¹ The conversation between Adam and his two Angel guests presents the narrative as a revelation and there is nothing in the invocation that introduces the second half of the poem to suggest that it was not divinely inspired. The Muse who had led him up into the "'Heav'n of Heav'ns' will still govern his song. The thought of mortal voice comes from a self-consciousness

1. PL, vii. 24.

that interrupts the prophetic mood with a sense of mortal woe. In Jeremiah it is an unbearable agony: 'For my people is foolish, they know me not; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding'.¹ Milton's fear comes from his self-pity, a sense of loneliness and frustration which seized him after the Restoration:

though fall'n on evil dayes
On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compost round,
And solitude;²

and here the sense of personal misery becomes an incentive to the high intent to which he is called. In Milton's poetry the poet's personal condition is a part of the world it creates. The tremendous power of the words 'though fall'n on evil dayes, On evil dayes though fall'n', where great force is achieved through repetition of words signifying a quiet triumph over adversity relates more to what the poet is to accomplish than to what he has suffered. For in Milton suffering is only a condition of accomplishment. When others have deserted the poet he will be

Yet not alone, while thou
Visitst my slumber Nightly, or when Morn
Purples the East: still govern thou my Song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few:³

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1. iv. 22.
 2. PL. vii. 25-28.
 3. PL, vii. 28-31.

so what the poet will now recount will also be divinely prompted the poet's human suffering giving him still greater claim on celestial aid. In the invocation of holy Light Milton complained of his blindness and then made that complaint into a hope of inner sight. In Book VII he can face disrepute and neglect if his heavenly guide does not desert him. For then she will

drive farr off the barbarous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his Revellers,¹

and give his poetry the distinction of a divine song. The allusion to the Race of that wilde Rout has no other significance. It recalls what Milton had said in the Reason of Church Government about the 'invocation of dame memory', 'the vapors of wine' or 'the pen of some vulgar amatorist'. And although the allusion is to classical mythology the mood that it is intended to express is such as Jeremiah had when he denounced the folly of the prophets of Samaria who prophesied by Baal. And the fear that the 'Earthlie Guest' may 'fall erroneous' from heaven is not pretended for the sake of a few decorative lines. Milton believes in artistry but he will not make a pattern of words for things he has never felt. And when he speaks of himself he speaks with an intense and eager truthfulness. He wanted to express a genuine mood by his

1. PL, vii. 32-33.

allusion to Bellerophon and the Thracian bard. The descent into hell was a task hard and rare; but he could reascend and 'revisit safe' the sphere of light and feel the 'vital lamp'. But the ascent to heaven was an awful bliss and the safe return to the 'narrower bound / Within the visible Diurnal Spheare' demanded still greater powers of imagination. For the mind is now full of high matter concerning the entire universe, hell, heaven, and earth. And such fulness is a burden of pain. 'Mine heart within me is broken, all my bones shake':¹ said Jeremiah. The Hebrew prophet was full of the fury of the Lord. Of that there is little in Paradise Lost. But Milton felt that he had a 'sad task' before him and that it could be accomplished only with divine assistance.

The accounts of Milton's habit of composition given in the early biographies would show that the words on inspiration in Paradise Lost are an expression of a personal experience. In the earliest biography of Milton the author says:

And hee waking early (as is the use of temperate men) had commonly a good stock of Verses ready against his Amanuensis came; which if it happend to bee later than ordinary, hee would complain, saying hee wanted to bee milkd.

Edward Phillips refers to the same habit of composition when he says:

1. xxiii. 9.

There is another very remarkable Passage in the Composure of this Poem, which I have a particular occasion to remember; for whereas I had the perusal of it from the very beginning; for some years, as I went from time to time, to visit him, in a Parcel of Ten, Twenty, or Thirty Verses at a Time

Four years later John Toland recorded it in his life of the poet that

in his latter years, to speak nothing of a decaying Fancy, nor of his personal Troubles, he was by reason of his Blindness oblig'd to write by whatsoever hand came next, ten, or twenty or thirty Verses at a time

Jonathan Richardson's account of Milton's manner of composition published thirtyfive years after Toland's is largely based on earlier biographies; but he puts in some details which he must have obtained from other sources. They are interesting for their bearing on what is suggested by the exordium to Book IX of Paradise Lost about inspired writing:

he frequently Compos'd lying in Bed in a Morning
('twas Winter Sure Then) I have been Well inform'd,
that when he could not Sleep, but lay Awake whole Nights,
he Try'd; not One Verse could he make; at Other times
flow'd Easy his Unpremeditated Verse, with a certain
Impetus and AEstro, as Himself seem'd to Believe. Then,
at what Hour soever, he rung for his Daughter to Secure
what Came. I have been also told he would Dictate many,
perhaps 40 Lines as it were in a Breath, and then reduce
to half the Number.

Milton's third wife is recorded to have said that

her husband used to compose his poetry chiefly in winter,
and on his waking in a morning would make her write down
sometimes twenty or thirty verses.¹

1. Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, pp.33,73,178,291;
Paradise Lost, ed. Thomas Newton, 1749, i. lvi.

In Book IX the high argument which is more heroic than anything in ancient poetry can be made

If answerable stile I can obtaine
Of my celestial Patroness, who deignes
Her nightly visitation unimplored,
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
Easie my unpremeditated Verse:¹

The poet is here very expressive on the relation between inspiration and language. And since he gives two different accounts of the sources of his diction he is obviously concerned with his own experience. He speaks both of verbal dictation and of inspired language. In Book III he has spoken of thoughts 'that voluntarie move / harmonious numbers' and the 'unpremeditated verse' of Book IX is poetry inspired but not actually dictated by the 'celestial patroness'. But when Milton speaks of 'visitation unimplor'd' and of 'dictation heard in slumber' he means a different kind of inspired writing. In Book III Milton speaks of his meditation on the Old Testament in the night:

but chief

Thee Sion and the flowrie Brooks beneath
That wash thy hallowd feet, and warbling flow,
Nightly I visit:²

and then he compares himself to the 'wakeful Bird' who 'sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid / tunes her nocturnal

1. PL, ix. 20-24.
2. PL, iii. 29-32.

Note'.¹ In Book VII Urania visits the poet in his slumbers and in Book IX it is again 'nighty visitation unimplor'd'. We need not conjecture that Milton had a definite theory of verbal inspiration but it is clear from his repeated mention of night and sleep in all important references to inspiration that he was stating a fact of experience. And it would be legitimate to infer that large blocks of verse came to him in sleep and that when he uttered them for his amanuensis he had only to recall what he had already spoken within. This experience gave him the feeling that his composition was dictated from above.

We must remember that this sense of supernal dictation is not peculiar to Milton. Referring to his poem Milton Blake said in a letter to Thomas Butts:

I have written this poem from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time without premeditation, and even against my will.²

And other poets have also reported dictation in sleep. 'Kubla-Khan' came to Coleridge in a deep sleep. With Milton, however this dictation was a divine communication which he received in a state of slumber.

But this is only one of the two kinds of inspired writing

1. PL, lli. 38-40.

2. The Letters of William Blake, ed. A.G.B. Russell, 1906, p.115.

suggested in Paradise Lost. The thoughts that 'voluntarie move harmonious numbers' or the 'unpremeditated Verse' signify inspiration that has no suggestion of verbal dictation. It is significant that Milton does not fashion a characteristically Biblical theory of inspiration with which he was well acquainted. Nowhere in the invocations is there any allusion to the Lord appearing to a prophet in a vision and speaking unto him in a dream such as is recorded in Numbers.¹ The only allusion to the Old Testament idea of prophecy is in the first invocation which mentions Moses and the Spirit. The invocation of holy Light in Book III refers to the conception of wisdom as it emerges from The Proverbs and the Wisdom of Solomon but does not specifically relate poetic inspiration to any process of prophetic communication described in the Old Testament. Milton was not careful about making his statement on inspiration reminiscent of what the Hebrew prophets said about theirs. He stated what he felt and used whatever words came naturally to him and seemed appropriate. But he nevertheless believed that his thoughts and his ideas were divinely inspired and came to him in sleep or in waking through his 'Celestial Patroness'. And whether he calls her the Heavenly Muse or Urania she is only an intermediary through whom the

1. Numbers, xii. 6.

Spirit illuminates his soul.

But when Milton speaks in his invocation about his Muse he is not merely concerned with the psychology of the creative process. His purpose is to realise for himself and express to his reader the divine origin of his creative impulse and the divine substance of his poem. It is significant that whenever Milton speaks of his inspiration he also speaks of what that inspiration would create. In the first invocation the Spirit would aid him in asserting eternal Providence: in the second invocation the celestial light would give him a vision of things invisible to mortal sight. The divine voice of Urania in Book VII would take the poet above the Olympian hill and in the opening passage of Book IX his theme is the better fortitude of patience and heroic martyrdom which is yet unsung. In Paradise Regained the Spirit is to inspire the poet

to tell of deeds
Above Heroic, though in secret done,
And unrecorded left through many an Age,
Worthy t'have not remaind so long unsung.¹

So when Milton declared that he was writing on a theme which had not been attempted before he meant that both in inspiration and in content his poems would be a form of divine revelation. The four invocations in the two poems and the lyrical passage

1. FR, i. 14-17.

in Book IX have nothing else to say. They have an important bearing on Milton's intention as a poet.

We have missed the whole significance of the invocations owing to our assumption that they are modelled on the Greek practice. We seemed to imagine that the Greek spirit was as strong in seventeenth century England as it was in Rome when Virgil could listen to the Cumaean carmen and Augustus built the temple of Apollo on the Palatine. Consequently when we think of the Muse of Milton we believe that she is there because she is in Hesiod and Homer and that she could be none other than the Greek goddess coming into Christian poetry along with a Greek literary convention. It does not occur to us to consider that the Muse of the English poet could be ^{the} creation of a new feeling, of a spiritual urgency and religious belief unknown to the Greek poet. Nor do we enquire if in the invocation of the Muse Milton wanted to say something about his poetic task which no invocation in classical poetry has ever suggested.

Thus Professor Gilbert Murray has said that it 'is worth realizing that Milton was quite serious in his prayer to the Muse' and that 'he appeals to her in language taken partly from the ancient Stoics, partly from Theocritus (XXII, 116)'. And while he sees that 'the prayer has passed imperceptibly from the throne of the Muse to that of the Holy Ghost' he says that

Milton speaks of the secret top of Oreb or of Sinai because 'of a tradition dating from the time when Hesiod's Muses walked Mount Olympus hidden from mortal eyes in deep mist (Theogony, 8)'. And commenting on Milton's mention of the different holy places as Oreb, Sinai, or Sion's hill, as the possible abode of the Muse Professor Murray says that these choices are there because 'the Old Greek gods, since each of them was normally an amalgamation of beings worshipped in different tribes or cities, are regularly invoked in that way'. 'You cannot be sure' he says 'at which of his seats of worship your god will be, and you may be crying to an empty throne'.¹ The comparison is impressive and a classical scholar will find a special delight in discovering such reminiscences. But the delight is a hindrance to a proper appreciation of the whole purport of Milton's invocations. We have no difficulty in appreciating the Christian style of Tertullian because he took care not to write according to Quintilian's recipe and we readily recognise that the Christian feeling of St. Augustine could not have been expressed so powerfully in Ciceronian periods. But we have a different situation at the Renaissance. Then the classical diction and classical manner had become natural to the Christian mind. 'It was now possible to touch

1. The Classical Tradition in Poetry, 1927, pp.9-10.

and study paganism almost without danger' says Jacob Burckhardt quoting Boccaccio, about the literary temper of the Italian Renaissance.¹ In the same way a devout Christian of Renaissance or Reformation would never dream that the devil was whipping him for reading Cicero and would never have the zeal of an Appollinarius for building up the seven liberal arts on the basis of the Bible. But we may miss his Christian temper and the whole quality of his emotion owing to a disproportionate attention to his classical manner. In the case of Milton the risk is grave.

For one thing if Milton is 'quite serious in his prayer' he is certainly not praying in borrowed words. When the invocations are what Milton has called a 'devout prayer to that eternal spirit' they must not be considered as conscious or unconscious adaptation of classical practices. And how intensely opposed Milton was to the whole idea of appropriating the language of a heathen prayer in Christian devotion is clear from his comments on King Charles's adaptation of a prayer from Sir Phillip Sidney's Arcadia:

This King ... hath as it were unhallowed and unchristened the very duty of prayer itself, by Borrowing to a Christian use prayers offered to a heathen god.²

It is possible that Milton laboured the point to add to the

1. The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, 1955, p.123.

2. CM, v. 85.

royal guilt. But a prayer fashioned out of some antique fancy was certainly repugnant to Milton's religious temper.

If Professor Murray has admired the invocation for its Greek quality Professor Curtius has censured it as an unhappy imitation of its Greek model:

Thus Milton goes back to the rigorism of an Aldhelm. But he is as unsuccessful as Tasso or Prudentius in filling the Christian Urania with life. She remains the product of an embarrassing predicament.¹

To Professor Gilbert Murray the invocation is powerful because it is very Hellenic: to Professor Curtius it is weak because it is very Christian. Both have considered the Miltonic invocation in terms of invocation in classical poetry and have consequently missed the spiritual quality which gives the invocations in Paradise Lost their unique power. That power has an important bearing on Milton's conception of poetry. The identity and the status of the Miltonic Muse have to be determined only in so far as she relates to the operation of the Spirit in the making of divine poetry. For Milton's conception of poetry is a part of his cosmology, his poetic activity is related to the Christian universe which it reveals.

The Heavenly Muse in Paradise Lost is an image or a metaphorical expression for the active power of God which illuminat

1. E.R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, 1953, p.244.

the poetic soul and makes it a revealer of divine wisdom.

She is a person only in so far as she has a will and can act and is no more a personal being than the Wisdom of the Old Testament or the Word of the fourth Gospel before it was incarnate in Christ. Of such personification Milton says in the De Doctrina Christiana:

As to the eighth Chapter of Proverbs, it appears to me that it is not the Son of God who is there introduced as the speaker, but a poetical personification of Wisdom.¹

And when the Spirit is not a person and he is only mentioned through 'poetical personification' it can be given any name that would be appropriate in particular context. For the name is not to signify a personal deity but the power or the spirit of God operating in history. It is what Raphael calls in Paradise Lost 'lik'ning spiritual to corporeal forms'.² It is significant that the object of the invocations has no physical lineaments and exists as only a functional reality. The Muse therefore is either a poetic name for the Spirit or is suggestive of an angel working in aid of the Spirit. Her status and function therefore are to be understood in terms of the spirit of God or the ruach (breath) in the Old Testament, Wisdom of the Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Holy Ghost of

1. CM, xv. 13.

2. PL, v. 573.

the synoptic Gospels, the Johannine Word and the Spirit of the Apocalypse and the Pauline epistles. For the Heavenly Muse can exist for a Christian poet and inspire his tongue only as a power whose status is definable in Christian theology and tradition. It is not enough that she is not pagan: it is equally important that she should be a power acceptable to the Christian religious imagination. And the whole question here is not one of doctrinal propriety but one of the truth and consistency of imagination.

The Spirit which is the wisdom of God is a person in the female sex in the Proverbs and in the Wisdom of Solomon, the Word of the fourth Gospel is a person as the Spirit in St. Paul too is a person. The Heavenly Muse of Milton emerges out of these two conceptions of the Holy Spirit, and the Christian conception of the assisting angel. She is divine only in the sense that she is an intermediary through which divine influence works. And the conception is Hellenic only in so far as the conception of wisdom in the Proverbs itself may be the result of Hellenic influence. For while the Spirit of the Pentateuch is impersonal, the Wisdom of the Proverbs and of the Apocrypha is a person.¹ In Milton, however, the conception of

1. For Hellenic influence on the conception of wisdom see H.W. Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament, 1946, pp.260-261 and G.V. Jones, Christology and Myth in the New Testament, 1956, p.83.

the Muse has no anthropomorphic suggestion. And in the advanced Protestant theology of the seventeenth century this distinction between anthropomorphism and the conception of the Divinity or of his power as a person is important. And while Milton is resigned to the unavoidable imperfection of man's idea of God and of his power he nevertheless regards an anthropomorphism as impious fancy:

There is no need then that theologians should have recourse here to what they call anthropopathy - a figure invented by the grammarians to excuse the absurdities of the poets on the subject of the heathen divinities.¹

The heavenly Muse could not therefore be to Milton anything more than an image for a conceptual reality. That she was not the Greek Muse the poet himself affirms.² And in the seventeenth century, particularly amongst the Cambridge Platonists there was a tendency to 'substitute rational conceptions for anthropomorphic imaginings'.³ The Muse, the Spirit, the holy Light and Urania refer to the same divine power. And this is important in Milton's conception of prophetic or divine poetry. The classical invocation of the Muse has nothing of this suggestion. Milton's prophetic poetry is inspired by the Muse who taught Moses, by the Spirit which gave form and meaning to the universe, by the holy Light which gives knowledge

1. De Doctrina Christiana, CM, xiv. 33.

2. PL, vii. 5-6.

3. Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, p.143.

of things invisible to mortal sight and Urania who existed before there were the hills and the fountains and who 'with Eternal wisdom didst converse'. Milton could not have been more explicit in stating his conception of prophetic poetry in the text of his poem. When poetry was a form of revelation it could be produced only when the Spirit was active through the cooperating mind of the poet. For this idea of poetry there is only a bare suggestion in the Old Testament. Milton developed it into a consistent theory of the higher kind of poetic activity mostly in terms of his own experience and aspiration. But he was also considerably influenced by some important seventeenth century notions regarding the operation of the Spirit in prophecy. And this idea of prophetic poetry explains not only the inspiration but also the function of the poet.

The poet fulfils his prophetic function when he celebrates in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's Almightyness and what he works and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his Church; to sing the victorious agonies of Martyrs and Saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious Nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of Kingdoms and States from justice and God's true worship.

This is Milton's most important statement on the matter of poetry and he has said nothing else about it at other places in his works. And it is significant that while defining the

spiritual and moral business of poetry he speaks of the

songs through out the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the critical art of composition, may be easily made appear over all the kinds of Lyrick poesy to be incomparable.¹

The ability, Milton says in the same passage is the inspired gift of God which is rarely bestowed. The whole argument regarding the origin and function of poetry is strongly influenced by the idea of prophecy. And the end of learning stated in Of Education is certainly the end of all great poetry as Milton saw it;

The end then of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the neerest by possessing our souls of true vertue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection.²

Poetry gives divine knowledge and is produced by minds divinely endowed. But this is only one aspect of the prophetic activity. There is another aspect which relates to the human plane, to the initiative and effort of the individual which are necessary for deserving the divine illumination. The most important and original feature of Milton's conception of the poetic act is that it involves a cooperation between man's active will and the assisting divine power. In The Reason of

1. The Reason of Church Government, CM, iii. 238.

2. CM, iv. 277.

Church Government he speaks of his 'labour and intense study', and industrious and select reading. In An Apology for Smectym nuus the 'regenerate reason' is produced by moral goodness. 'God shall give apparently the will, the spirit, and the utterance'.¹ It is clearly the Pauline doctrine that 'there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit'.² The divines of the Puritan pulpit too believed that true preaching required a gift from heaven. The whole conception of spiritual eloquence was that 'if any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth'.³ But to Milton the divine gift has to be earned through special endeavour. He would agree with Peter that 'no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost'.⁴ But he would add that God speaks through souls which have been made holy by effort.

This idea of the union of the human will with the divine in the prophetic act has a great deal in common with the seventeenth century idea of divine knowledge, particularly with the ethics and psychology of prophecy developed by the Cambridge

1. CM, iii. 287, 289.

2. I Corinthians, xii. 4. cf. Romans, xii. 6-8, Ephesians, iv. 11.

3. I Peter, iv. 11.

4. II Peter, i. 21.

Platonists. To give the poet the status of a prophet and to find in poetry the spiritual and moral value of revelation it was important for Milton to discover a rationale of prophecy which would establish three principal propositions. First, it must be believed that there was need and possibility of prophecy in the post-apostolic age. Secondly, the power of prophecy must be believed to be attainable through appropriate spiritual and intellectual effort. Thirdly, the conjunction between the divine will and the human involved in the prophetic process must be confirmed by a vivid sense of some supernal power.

For this philosophy of prophecy Milton found some basis in the Cambridge Platonists' doctrine of reason as the candle of the Lord. But except for John Smith (1616-1652) who built up a theory of prophecy under the influence of the medieval Jewish philosopher Moses ben Maimonides (1135-1204) no seventeenth century divine said anything on the human role in revelation which would support Milton's idea of prophetic poetry. And since Smith's essay on prophecy was not published till eight years after his death¹ and since there is evidence in support of Milton's acquaintance with the works of Maimonides it can be plausibly conjectured that he was directly influenced by the Jewish philosopher.

1. The essay was included in Select Discourses published in 1660.

Like Thomas Aquinas Maimonides built up his theology in terms of Aristotelian metaphysic and there are passages in his The Guide for the Perplexed which may create an impression that in asserting the claims of the reason he went too far and almost nullified the truth of revelation. But this would be a superficial view of his teachings. Throughout his writings he is a Jew and a pious Jew who never twists his faith to make it fit into the strait-jacket of Aristotelian philosophy. He worshipped reason only as an instrument through which the truth of revelation could be comprehended. And the task of a Maimonidean scholar is to discover the logic which unites the pursuit of reason and faith in revelation in an integrated philosophy of religion. Since Milton's spiritual history was mainly a search for a point of harmony between reason and revelation it is possible that he was attracted by Maimonides's rational interpretation of prophecy and revelation.

Milton's acquaintance with Maimonides's The Guide for the Perplexed through John Buxtorf's Latin translation of the Arabic original is shown by his quotation of a passage from it in The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.¹ Milton was also

1. Moreh Nebhukhim written in Arabic in 1190. For English translation see M. Friedlander, The Guide for the Perplexed 1951. For an abridged version with a critical account of the work see Julius Guttman and Chaim Rabin, The Guide of the Perplexed, 1952. The more important recent works on Maimonides are Solomon Zeitlin, Maimonides, 1955, Ben Zion
(contd. on next page)

acquainted with Maimonides's Mishne Torah, also known as Yad Ha-Hasekh (strong hand), a digest of Biblical and other laws and customs written in Mishnaic Hebrew and completed in 1180. Milton alludes to this work in his Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio (1650).¹ These two references to Maimonides are enough to show that he was well acquainted with his works and that he had read Buxtorf's Latin translation of the Moreh Nebhukhim (The Guide for the Perplexed) early in his pamphlet period. And considering the nature of the theological speculation in Moreh Nebhukhim and its influence on European thought it is very probable that it exercised some influence on the seventeenth century effort for a synthesis of reason and revelation. With such synthesis Milton was deeply concerned as an upholder of intellectual liberty and as a believer in the Bible as revelation. It was also important for him as a rational basis for prophetic poetry. And since Milton could

Bokser, The Legacy of Maimonides, New York, 1950. The reference to Maimonides in The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce: '... hence it is that the Rabbins and Maimonides famous among the rest, in the Book of his set forth by Buxtorfius, tells us that divorce was permitted by Moses to preserve peace in marriage, and quiet in the family.' CM, iii, 402-403. Milton is here referring to Moreh Nebhukhim translated into Latin by John Buxtorf as Doctor Perplexorum in 1629, III. xlix. 499.

1. 'For here against you is Maimonides who makes this difference betwixt the Kings of Israel and those of Judah: that the kings of the posterity of David judge and are judged but the kings of Israel do neither.' CM, vii. 103. For English translation of the Mishne Torah see A.M. Hershman, The code of Maimonides: The Book of Judges, New Haven, 1949 iii. 8.

neither share Luther's contempt for reason nor find the hazy compromise of the Calvinist formula of sensus divinitatis very acceptable he might have found in the Maimonidean balance of reason and revelation a more satisfying ground for a rational theology. For in following the light of reason and in explaining it as a divine aid to man's understanding of the revealed Word Milton was ever watchful against any drift towards scholasticism for which he had a strong antipathy. Such drift was not uncommon in the advanced theology of the Reformation and as John Baillie has observed quoting Albert Ritschl, 'Calvin himself, in beginning his Institutes with a discussion of natural religion and proceeding from that to the consideration of Christian revelation, betrays a certain lapse from Luther's principle into something more like the old scholasticism.'¹ The Maimonidean system had much to offer to minds which would countenance rationalism and yet resist the hide-bound logic of the medieval scholastics. Milton had a consistent disregard for scholasticism from his Cambridge days.²

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1. The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought, 1956, p.9. cf. Ritschl, Theologie und Metaphysik, Bonn, 1887, p.64.
 2. In Prolusion III Milton speaks of the 'monstrous tomes' of the 'subtle doctors'. In the Tractate of Education he regrets that universities have 'not yet recover'd from the Scholastick grossness of barbarous ages'. CM, iv. 278. In the De Doctrina Christiana there is a fling at the 'treacherous aid of Sophisms and verbal distinctions, borrowed from the barbarous ignorance of the Schools'. CM, xiv. 209. For other references in Milton's prose works showing his disrespect for scholasticism see Of Reformation, CM, iii. 65; (contd. on next page)

In the religious thought of the Cambridge Platonists reason is the operation of the divine will in the human mind. John Smith declared: 'Truth need not any time flie from reason, there being an eternal amitie between them'.¹ And Whichcote (1609-1683) thought that 'to go against Reason is to go against God'.² To Henry More (1614-1687) reason 'is participation in that divine reason in God'.³ Nathaniel Culverwe (1618?-1651) held the same view when he said: 'to blaspheme reason is to reproach Heaven itself'.⁴ Although, as Cassirer has observed, 'the Cambridge conception of religious reason cannot be derived from the power of thinking alone'⁵ thought was an important value in the religious life of the Cambridge Platonists. Milton had a metaphysic of the human reason and the human will which, at some important points was different from the leading doctrines of seventeenth century rational theology. And what is specifically Miltonic in this regard has much in common with some of the basic ideas of Maimonides.

The Maimonidean theory of prophecy is based on whatever

The Reason of Church Government, CM, iii. 273; An Apology, CM, iii. 332, 336, 348; The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, CM, iii. 376, 505; Of True Religion, CM, vi. 169; Eikonoklastes, CM, v. 94.

1. Select Discourses, 1859, p.14.
2. Moral and Religious Aphorisms of Whichcote, ed. Salter, 1753, Century I, No. 76.
3. Conjectura Cabbalistica, 1653, Preface.
4. A Discourse of the Light of Nature, ed. J. Brown, 1857, p.1
5. The Platonic Renaissance in England, 1953, p.30.

material is available in the Old Testament about the belief and the behaviour of the prophets themselves. Two passages in the Old Testament¹ which Maimonides considers in particular support two clear ideas about prophecy, first, that it is the word of God spoken by man, and secondly, that the man by whom it is to be spoken must be an extraordinary man, that is, he can be God's chosen mouthpiece only when his 'iniquity is taken away and his sin is purged'. This view represents a theory of sacra sophia which is peculiarly Hebraic in character and is different from the general principles of seventeenth century rational theology. The most important point of difference between the Cambridge theologians (excepting, of course, John Smith who was directly influenced by Maimonides and who quotes from his The Guide for the Perplexed some sixty times in his discourse on prophecy) and Maimonides in respect of their attitude towards the human reason is that while the former sanctify it by recognising it as a divine gift the latter relates it, in terms of his general principles of cosmology, to a divine process in which man can participate under certain specific conditions. Maimonides's theory of prophecy therefore, has a definite cosmological and ethical bearing and is at bottom a Hebraic conception.

1. Numbers, xii. 6, and Isaiah, vi. 5-7.

According to Maimonides prophecy results from man's efficient cooperation with the divine will: 'prophecy is impossible without study and training; when these have erected the possibility, then it depends on the will of God whether the possibility is to be turned into a reality'. He thinks that 'the laws of Nature demand that everyone should be a prophet, who has a proper physical constitution, and has been duly prepared as regards education and training'. This view he says is supported both by the Bible and the general Jewish tradition 'as for the principle which I had laid down, that the preparation and perfection of moral and rational faculties are the sine qua non our sages say exactly the same: "The spirit of prophecy only rests upon persons who are wise, strong and rich".' But there is no prophecy without God's will:

There are, however, numerous passages in Scripture as well as in the writings of our sages, which support the principle that it depends chiefly on the will of God who is to prophesy, and at what time: and that He only selects the best and the wisest.

So human cooperation with divine will is the most important thing in the Maimonidean doctrine of prophecy. As Dr. Guillaume has summed it up the theory of Maimonides 'was that a prophet was a person whose mind and thought had been disciplined by a prayer and meditation, and whom God had chosen'.

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1. The Guide for the Perplexed, tr. M. Friedlander, 1951, p.220; A. Guillaume, Prophecy and Divination, 1938, p.187.

The prophet can receive God's message only when he is truly receptive and this receptivity has to be cultivated.

Explaining the psychological process through which the prophetic spirit works Maimonides says:

Prophecy is, in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man's rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty; it is the highest degree and greatest perfection man can attain; it consists in the most perfect development of the imaginative faculty. Prophecy is a faculty that cannot in any way be found in a person, or acquired by man, through a culture of his mental and moral faculties; for even if these latter were as good and perfect as possible, they would be of no avail, unless they are combined with the highest natural excellence of the imaginative faculty.

And this imagination from which the prophetic act results works at its best 'when the senses are at rest and pause in their actions for then it receives, through some extent, divine inspiration in the measure as it is predisposed for this influence'. The idea of imagination then leads to a comparison between the prophetic vision and vision seen in a dream: 'the action of the imaginative faculty during sleep is the same as at the time when it receives a prophecy'. Then quoting a verse from Numbers he says:

Here the Lord tells us what the real essence of prophecy is, that it is a perfection acquired in a dream or in a vision ... the imaginative faculty acquires such an efficacy in its action that it sees the thing as if it came from without, and perceives it as if through the medium of bodily senses.¹

1. The Guide for the Perplexed, pp.225-226.

The psychology of this imaginative vision is thus explained
by John Smith:

it seems most agreeable to the nature of all these prophetic visions and dreams we have discoursed of, wherein the nature of the enthusiasm consisted in a symbolical and hieroglyphical shaping forth of intelligible things in their imaginations, and enlightening the understanding the prophets to discern the scope and meaning of these visa or phantasmata.¹

The idea of the angel through whom the divine influence enters into the mind of the prophet is a development from this idea of vision:

When prophets speak of the fact that they received a prophecy, they say that they received it from an angel, or from God; but even in the latter case it was likewise received through an angel. Our sages therefore explain the words 'And the Lord saith unto her' that he spake through an angel. You must know that whenever Scripture relates that the Lord or an angel spoke to a person, this took place in a dream or prophetic vision.²

Since God is invisible and incomprehensible in Jewish theology his word could come to man only through some intermediary. And Maimonides refers to the appearance of the angel in Judges,³ Numbers⁴ and Haggai⁵ in support of this view. He does not

1. Select Discourses, pp.284-285.
2. The Guide for the Perplexed, p.235.
3. ii. 1. Charles Gore giving his Christian interpretation of inspiration said: '... because his special attribute is holiness, it is in rational natures, which alone are capable of holiness, that he exerts his special influence'. 'The Holy Spirit and Inspiration' in Lux Mundi, 1891, p.232.
4. xx. 16.
5. i. 13.

expressly state that the angel is only a personification of the Spirit or the Active Intellect or the Aristotelian Intelligences. It would still be a fair conclusion to make that while he need not connect the angels with the Intelligences of Aristotle or of Philo they certainly represent some power seen in a state of vivid imagination. That this was his view is suggested by one of his statements on the role of the angel in the act of prophecy: 'the appearance or speech of an angel mentioned in Scripture took place in a vision or dream; it makes no difference whether they are stated or not.'¹ And reading the chapters on prophecy in The Guide for the Perplexed one cannot doubt that this conception of the angel as a medium of communication between God and man brings together the divine and the human wills which must work simultaneously in prophetic inspiration. For in the Maimonidean psychology of prophecy the prophet is partly a conscious agent and partly an unconscious recipient, a view which was favoured by some rationalist divines of the nineteenth century.² John Smith, too, following Maimonides, considers the angel and all supernatural associations of prophecy as the result of strong imagination:

1. The Guide for the Perplexed, p.236.

2. Cf. 'The prophet was in part the conscious organ of the Divine Will, and it would seem that he was also in part an unconscious organ of the same Will.' W. Sanday, The Oracles of God, 1891, p.64.

the prophetic scene or stage upon which all apparitions were made to the prophet was his imagination; and that there were all those things which God would have revealed unto him were acted over symbolically, as in a masque, in which divers persons are brought in, amongst which the prophet himself bears a part: and therefore he, according to the exigency of the dramatical apparatus must, as other actors, perform a part.¹

Like Maimonides John Smith lays stress on the rational element which must operate in true prophecy and like him again he values the factor of imagination. As Tulloch (who curiously enough does not mention Maimonides) has said 'to John Smith the degree of prophetic illumination was in proportion to the predominance of the rational over the imaginative element'.²

Since prophecy requires the assent of the human mind to the higher plane of the spirit from where the message of the Lord can be received the prophet must live a holy life. Speaking on the education and discipline of the prophet Maimonides says: 'The best test is the rejection, abstention, and contempt of bodily pleasures'.³ The prophet can teach others because he has first taught himself and he can actively participate in God's work in history only as a holy man.

As the prophetic power was a divine gift which man must deserve through self-discipline Maimonides distinguishes between different degrees of prophecy: 'The first degree of

1. Select Discourses, p.229.
2. Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century, 1872, ii. 176.
3. The Guide for the Perplexed, p.234.

prophecy consists in the divine assistance which is given to a person, and induces and encourages him to do something good and grand.¹ This is the highest degree of prophecy and since Moses had this divine assistance throughout his life he was the greatest prophet and must be distinguished from all other prophets. Smith, too, speaks of the gradus mosaicus as the highest degree of prophetic power.² The second class prophet is

a person who feels as if something came upon him, and as if he has received new power that encourages him to speak. He treats of science, or composes hymns, exhorts his fellow-men, discusses political and theological problems; all this he does while awake, and in the full possession of his senses. Such a person is said to speak by the holy spirit. David composed the Psalms, and Solomon the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon by this Spirit, also Daniel, Job, Chronicles, and the rest of the Magiographa were written in this holy spirit.³

This class of prophets, then, consists mainly of scientists, philosophers and poets who are all moved by the 'Spiritus Sanctus'. In the third and the lowest degree of prophecy 'the prophet sees an allegory in a dream ... and in the prophetic dream itself the allegory is interpreted'.⁴

So according to Maimonides prophecy is an act of intuition which involves a moral process. Like Spinoza's scientia

1. ibid. p.241.
2. Select Discourses, p.179.
3. The Guide for the Perplexed, p.242.
4. ibid. p.244.

intuitiva it is the source of a priori knowledge and does not depend on ordinary logical thought. But the moral element in this acquisition of prophetic knowledge is of great importance in Maimonidean epistemology. As Dr. Roth has said: 'the growth into knowledge is not a phenomenon in vacuo. It involves for the knower an ascent in the scale of humanity. By knowing more and better, man becomes more characteristically man'.¹ We are not here concerned with how far Spinoza was influenced by Maimonides in his rejection of Cartesianism. Nevertheless we may just point out in passing, and here we agree with Dr. Roth, that the Maimonidean elements in Spinoza are much more significant than what Principal Caird has described as 'occasional coincidences'.²

We have seen that Milton recognised all work for the cause of truth as inspired by the Spirit. When on his return from Italy he suspended his poetic activity and joined the anti-

1. Spinoza, Descartes and Maimonides, 1924, p.234.

2. Spinoza, 1910, p.60. In a recent work on Spinoza it has been said that he 'carried with him, not only suggestions and Biblical criticism of Maimonides and from a great line of Jewish scholars and theologians, but also the prophetic conception of philosophy as a search for salvation'. Stuart Hampshire, Spinoza, 1956, p.23. For detailed discussion on the Maimonidean influence on Spinoza see Richard Mackeon, The Philosophy of Spinoza, 1928, i. 416-417, 435-436, ii. 119-123, 327-329. There is point in Sir Frederick Pollock's remark that the 'sharpness of his (Spinoza's) criticism of Maimonides' artificial system of interpretation has probably distracted attention from that which they really have in common'. Spinoza, His Life and Philosophy, 1899, p.88.

prelatical controversy he felt that he was called to the task by the will of God. He was then resolved to do through the printed word what he might have done from the pulpit if the situation had not prevented him from entering the Church. But he did not make any distinction between poetic work and work as a controversialist so far as the right use of his intellect was concerned. 'For publick preaching' as he said in The Reason of Church Government 'indeed is the gift of the Spirit, working as best seems to his secret will'.¹ This created in him the belief that all intellectual endeavour for the establishment of a righteous society was a form of prophecy, the activity of man's regenerate reason for fulfilment of a divine purpose. He was himself a prophet as the evangelist of a moral Utopia which too he conceived as a nation of prophets. The prophetic vision of a spiritually reborn England in the Areopagitica shows that Milton believed in the continuity of prophecy as witness of grace operating in history through the elect. This idea of prophetic duty might have been stimulated in Milton by St. Paul's words in The Romans: 'And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith.'² But the conception of later

1. CM, iii. 189.

2. xii. 6.

prophecy as a conscious intellectual endeavour guided by the divine will and fulfilling a divine purpose is established by Maimonides through arguments which would appeal to a poet-prophet.

The second point in the Maimonidean theory of prophecy, the belief that the prophetic power can be obtained through austerity and appropriate mental discipline very closely resembles all that Milton says about the spiritual and moral self-preparation of a great poet in 'Elegia sexta', The Reason of Church Government and An Apology. The third factor in the Maimonidean conception of prophecy relates to the role of some intermediary being through which the divine power is donated to the prophetic mind. According to Maimonides the Deity is the ultimate source of the higher intelligence the angel being only a symbol of the divine communication. And whether the angel has a material existence or not is unimportant for him. Here we have some basis for a satisfactory interpretation of the Miltonic Muse.

As Dr. J.L. Teicher has observed the Maimonidean theory of prophecy

amounts to a description of a prophecy as a product of the creative imagination and of the prophet as an original poetic genius. His creations, 'prophetic visions or dreams', have an artistic though not historical truth and reality, and the mention of an angel in connection

with them serves only to indicate their 'phantastical nature'.¹

The angel then is only a part of the intellectual furniture of the prophetic mind when that mind is in a state of vivid imagination. To Maimonides the angel associated with prophecy in the Bible signifies that the conjunction of the prophetic mind with the divine has occurred and that what the prophet is going to utter will not be the wisdom of the empirical world. It is 'a sign that the prophetic experience is not an event relating to the reality outside the prophet's mind, but an event of his imagination produced by God's creative power'.²

The Muse in Paradise Lost can exist only in imagination acting as the transmitter of divine wisdom to the poet's mind. Milton does not give her a fixed habitation and addresses her in different names. She may be on the 'secret top / of Oreb' or 'of Sinai' or on 'Sion Hill' or in 'Silva's Brook'. And it is significant that in the three invocations in Paradise Lost the Heavenly Muse appears or works in conjunction with some power which can be identified with the Holy Spirit, or the Wisdom of the Old Testament or the Word of St. John. In Book I the address to the Heavenly Muse turns into an address to the Spirit. In Book III the Heavenly Muse is mentioned in an invocation of

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1. 'Christian Theology and the Jewish Opposition to Maimonides' The Journal of Theological Studies 1942, xliii. 74.
 2. J.L. Teicher, 'The Medieval Mind', The Journal of Jewish Studies 1955, vi. 9.

holy Light. The Urania of Book VII is sister of Wisdom. The status of the Muse therefore can only be a psychological status and if we are to identify her with anything in Christian mythology we must identify her with some angel which can act as an ethereal medium for the transmission of divine power to the prophetic or the poetic mind.

To Thomas Aquinas prophecy 'requires an intellectual light surpassing the light of natural reason'. But there is nothing in his theory of prophecy to suggest that the prophetic power could ever be attained through proper effort. Like Maimonides he believes that 'when soul is withdrawn from corporeal things it becomes more adapted to receive the influence of spiritual substances'. He does not however consider prophecy as the result of a cooperation between the divine will and the human. Consequently the angel is a concrete supernatural being in his conception of the prophetic process: 'Now prophetic knowledge is bestowed by divine enlightenment and revelation. Therefore it is evident that it is conveyed by the angels.'¹ Milton's idea of the Muse is more akin to Maimonides's conception of the angel than to Aquinas's. The Muse of Paradise Lost is an angelic presence that comes in the wake of a vivid imagination. The seraphim mentioned in The Reason of Church Government and

1. Summa Theologica, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1922, Part II (Second Part), pp.6, 20, 27.

the Heavenly Muse of Paradise Lost are both images embodying a kind of spiritual experience in which the mind ascends to a higher level to acquire its divine intelligence. To both Maimonides and Milton it is a state of inspiration which results from the cooperation of the human will with the active power of God and in neither is it a self-annihilating ecstasy.

It was therefore Milton's prophetic imagination which created the Heavenly Muse. And the poet wanted this to be understood by his readers. The invocations are not only an expression of moods: they are still more important as a declaration of purpose. Milton wanted to tell his readers about what he felt regarding the substance of his poem and the power which would enable him to compose it.

the The Maimonidean view of prophecy as the work of ^{the} rational faculty has close affinity with the seventeenth century worship of reason. And Milton's idea of poetic imagination as far as it can be inferred from his statements that have any bearing on the subject is rooted in a conception of intuition which involves the rational process. His psychology of the poetic faculty does not present any sharp dichotomy between the discursive and the intuitive. Reason says Raphael can be either discursive or intuitive and the two differ only in degree. Milton does not enunciate this doctrine on the basis of any

critical analysis of the intellectual process. Its foundation is in his idea of divine wisdom coming through the regenerate reason. One who believed that his prose pamphlets were inspired by the Spirit could not consider the discourse as the work of an inferior faculty. When he says 'For Eloquence the Soul, Song charms the Sense', he states the most important dictum of his theory of rhetoric and poetry although he does it in a parenthesis and in connection with the intellectual occupations of the fallen angels. When he speaks of 'graceful and ornate rhetoric' and 'poetry ... less subtile and fine, but more simple, sensuous, and passionate' he does not know which should be given precedence in an ideal system of instruction. It is not so much a critical indecision as unconscious statement of a belief that there was no distinction between prose and poetry in respect of substance ^{and that} ~~both~~ both were vehicles of wisdom. Indeed in Of Education the moral works of Plato are as important as heroic poems and there are as much spirit and vigour in Demosthenes and Cicero as in Euripides and Sophocles. The core of literature was its argument, 'thought following thought' and the poetic speech was as much an appropriate medium of literary expression as prose. Poetry was inspired writing because the high thought which it expressed was itself a thing of inspiration. Milton's theory of poetic speech so far as it

is suggested by some of his scattered statements on the subject does not make any distinction between thought and feeling as separate provinces. This notion of the unity of reason proceeds from the conviction that man's rational nature could be stimulated only by the Spirit, that one could be inspired to feel as well as to think. He believed with Henry More that 'to be inspired is to be moved in an extraordinary manner by the power or the Spirit of God to act, to speak, or think what is holy, just and true'.¹ In a conception of prophetic poetry the distinction that Bacon makes between reason and imagination is not valid. Milton's idea of imagination is nearer Wordsworth's idea of the 'feeling intellect', and 'reason in her most exalted mood'. It is significant that Wordsworth's view of poetry as prophecy implies the Miltonic conception of the unity of the rational faculty. Both believed that the higher intellectual power was divinely inspired and both had an identical view of the rational process:

Such minds are truly from the Deity,
 For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss
 That can be known is theirs, the consciousness
 Of whom they are habitually infused
 Through every image, and through every thought,
 And all impressions; hence religion, faith,
 And endless occupation for the soul
 Whether discursive or intuitive.²

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1. Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, 1712, p.2.
 2. The Prelude (version of 1805), xiii. 106-113. That Wordsworth made no fundamental distinction between reason and
 (contd. on next page)

But what was then Milton's view of the special power of poetic speech? He said a few things on the appeal of verse which give some clues for an answer to this question. Although he did not make a generic distinction between the discursive and the intuitive faculties Milton certainly made a specific distinction between them and ascribed to them different modes of expression. Prose and verse could be equally inspired writing and both required feeling and art. At the beginning of the pamphlet period, at least by the time of The Reason of Church Government, Milton had defined both the distinction and the relationship between poetry and prose. As a prose writer with a prophetic fire he had a regard for the language of discourse which he preserved when he was producing his greatest poetical work. This was not because he loved to imagine that his work as a pamphleteer was creative work. Prose and poetry were both inspired because both could have a prophetic substance. Sacred matter has its appropriate style in prose or in verse. Milton makes an occasion for stating this idea in Paradise Lost when describing the prayers of Adam and Eve

the higher feeling is clear from another significant passage in The Prelude:

Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth,
 By reason built, or passion, which itself
 Is highest reason in a soul sublime;
 The consecrated works of Bard and Sage,
 Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,
 Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes.

he says:

Thir Orisons, each Morning duly paid
 In various stile, for neither various stile
 Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
 Thir Maker, in fit strains pronounc't or sung
 Unmeditated, such prompt eloquence
 Flowd from thir lips, in Prose or numerous verse,
 More tuneable then needed Lute or Harp
 To add more sweetness[†]

Obviously unmeditated and prompt eloquence is the result of holy rapture. But style signifying an element of conscious artistry is not unimportant in inspired speech. The 'frequent songs through out the law and prophets' are incomparable 'not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition'. On the face of it this admiration for the critical art of composition in the Old Testament is inconsistent with the idea of prophetic inspiration. And this may well create the impression that Milton's critical statements are made to suit special occasions and do not constitute a consistent literary theory. But a closer analysis will show that the inconsistency is only apparent and that he has well-defined ideas on poetic expression.

de) In the note on ^{the} verse in Paradise Lost the 'true musical delight' consists 'only in apt Numbers, fit quantity of Syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse

1. PL, v. 145-152.

into another'. This idea of the 'immortal verse' producing 'lincked sweetnes long drawn out' is stated at the beginning of the Eighth Book of Paradise Lost:

The Angel ended, and in Adams Eare
So charming left his voice, that he a while
Thought him still speaking, still stood fixt to hear.¹

This charm of verse was essential for poetry. For wisdom will be taught only when it was powerfully expressed. In The Reason of Church Government this was Milton's whole argument for elegance of style 'Teaching over the whole book of sanctity and vértue, through all the instances of example, with such delight to those especially of soft and delicious temper, who will not so much as look upon Truth herself, unlesse they see her elegantly drest'.² It is a theory of poetic speech which is more concerned with the moral function of poetry than with its aesthetic appeal. It is nearer to the Pauline idea of efficient preaching: 'Even things without life, giving a voice, whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice who shall prepare himself for war?'³ It would however be an error to imagine that to Milton beauty of style was only an adventitious element

1. viii. 1-3.

2. CM, iii. 239.

3. I. Corinthians, xiv. 7.

in poetry, a concession to vulgar minds which can be drawn to wisdom in pleasing words. The statement in The Reason of Church Government seems to be in line with the argument of Castelvetro that poetry 'has been discovered solely to delight and to recreate ... the minds of the crude multitude and of the common people'.¹ It is possible that Milton was particularly remembering the similar argument in Tasso's invocation of the sacred Muse in the Gerusalemme Liberata:

Thou know'st, the world with eager transport throng
Where sweet Parnassus breathes the tuneful song;
That truth can oft, in pleasing strains convey'd,
Allure the fancy, and the mind persuade.²

But if Milton imagined that truth would attract the common mind only when it is elegantly presented there is nothing in his writings to suggest that style was only an external decoration. A prophet or a poet speaks great words because he speaks great thoughts. The power of the language comes from the power of the idea. This is all that Milton intends to say about inspired language in his invocation of the holy Light in Paradise Lost:

Then feed on thoughts, that voluntarie move
Harmonious numbers

Evidently Milton made a distinction between 'harmonious numbers' and what he calls the 'cool element of prose' which too

1. A.H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism, Plato to Dryden, New York, 1940, p.307.

2. tr. John Hoole, 1764, i. 17-20.

by prompted song Milton could not have meant a poem actually dictated by some power outside the poet's mind. Such idea would be inconsistent with Milton's theory of poetic inspiration in which the poetic mind is an active agent in the creative process. When he says the verse is unpremeditated he is only describing a personal experience of words rushing in 'linked sweetness' and ascribing it to divine endowment. But he certainly believed that such flow of words demanded a conscious discipline of the affections and a proper ordering of the intellectual life. When Wordsworth says about Milton's unpremeditated verse that it 'would be harsh, untrue, and odious to say that there is anything like cant in this, but it is not true to the letter, and tends to mislead'¹ he makes an important point. It is not indeed true to the letter and is only apparently misleading. For when Milton believed that inspiration itself was the result of self-discipline he could not have imagined that the poet's pen was moved by some occult power. To Milton poetic expression was the native idiom of the regenerate and illumined reason, it was a prophetic strain because it came from 'old experience', 'devout prayer' and 'labour and intense study'.

1. Letter to a Friend, see Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, ed. N.C. Smith, 1905, p.243.

CHAPTER FOUR
 ABOVE THE AONIAN MOUNT

Mee of these
 Nor skilled nor studious, higher Argument
 Remaines, sufficient of it self to raise
 That name.

Milton

Milton's idea of prophetic poetry naturally led him to a new idea of the epic. He did not however devise a theory of heroic poetry which would explain all its manifestations in European literature since Homer. There is nothing in his writings to suggest that he had ever such critical intention. His only concern was to settle his mind as to what he was going to produce as a poet and tell his readers about it. In fact we can talk of a Miltonic theory of epic only in a loose sort of a way. As a classical scholar he had certainly a measure of academic interest in the classical epic theory a knowledge of which was to him important for an educated mind. In Of Education he prescribes the study of Aristotle's Poetics, Horace's Ars Poetica and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni and others which would teach 'what the laws are of a true Epic Poem'.¹ But Milton has nothing to say about the 'true epic poem'. The idea of epic poetry

1. GM, iv. 286.

which emerges from whatever he says about it in the Second Book of The Reason of Church Government and the personal passages in Paradise Lost refers to his own work as a poet: it has little or no critical bearing on epic poetry in general.

The reputation of Paradise Lost as an epic poem has been something of a hindrance to an appreciation of what its author wanted it to be. Milton's poetic intention has been found less important than his poetic achievement. Consequently Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained have been judged or even enjoyed as poems belonging to a class of poetry from which Milton wanted to keep them separate. And a great deal of critical confusion regarding Milton is due to some cleavage which has existed since the seventeenth century between his poetic purpose and his readers' taste. Dryden admired him because 'no man has so happily copied the manner of Homer'.¹ To John Toland Milton was 'no less the Ornament and Glory of England than Homer is own'd to be that of Greece, and Virgil of Italy'.² In the eighteenth century Addison agreed that there was sense in the opinion that Paradise Lost was not a heroic poem but a divine poem and yet himself chose 'to examine it by the rules of epic poetry, and see whether it falls short of the Iliad or Aeneid, in the beauties which are essential to that kind of

1. 'Original and Progress of Satire', Essays of John Dryden, ed. W.P. Ker, 1900, ii. 29.

2. Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.87.

writing'.¹ Jonathan Richardson had an intense appreciation of the uniqueness of Paradise Lost as a poem and in drawing his readers' attention to it he made a remark which is in a sense the most significant and instructive comment on Milton made in his age.

If a good writer is not understood, 'tis because his reader is unacquainted with or incapable of the subject or will not submit to do the duty of a reader, which is to attend carefully to what he reads.

Still his judgement on Paradise Lost is stated through a quotation from Macrobius on Virgil: 'he keeps his eye fixed and intent upon Homer and emulates alike his greatness and simplicity, his readiness of speech and silent majesty'.² Dr. Johnson knew what Paradise Lost was about when he spoke of the 'light of Revelation' and said that in 'Milton every line breathes sanctity of thought'.³ But his criticism of Paradise Lost does not proceed from a conviction that it must not be judged with the standards of classical poetry. And since Paradise Lost has the structure of the classical epic and resembles it in several details of literary excellence any other critical approach would seem untenable. Moreover the postulates of Renaissance criticism have been too influential and.

1. The Spectator, January 5, 1712.
2. Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton's Paradise Lost, 1734, p.cxiv; see Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, p.316.
3. The Lives of the English Poets, ed. G.B. Hill, 1905, 1. 179.

in a way too comprehensive in their scope to make any other postulates possible. So when E.M.W. Tillyard says that 'Milton did indeed inherit, accept, and try to put in practice all those Renaissance commonplaces about the epic which I have had to refer to over and over again'¹ he affiliates his approach to Milton to the most powerful trend of European criticism.

My main argument in this chapter is that the resemblance of Paradise Lost to the classical epic is not relevant to its appreciation which needs an understanding of Milton's own conception of the poem he intended to produce. This conception which is stated clearly at several places in his works is not only independent of classical and neo-classical epic theories but is, at least by implication, contrary to their most important principles. And the whole difference between the Miltonic idea of the epic and the classical and the neo-classical lies in the fact that while the one concerns itself with the function of great poetry the other concerns itself with its subject matter and treatment. The difference is fundamental and cannot be ignored without loss to our comprehension of Milton's poetic purpose. When Professor C.S. Lewis says that the 'first question he (Milton) asked himself was not "What do I want to say?" but "What kind of poem do I want to make?"' he

1. The English Epic and its Background, 1954, p.431.

not only disregards the important fact that Milton was never concerned with questions of literary genre or technique but is also indifferent to the equally important fact that his main concern was really what he was going to say in his poem. The personal passage in The Reason of Church Government deals primarily with the function of poetry, with what Milton wanted to do through his poem. His ambition is 'to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things among mine own Citizens'. He had the patriotic ambition of adorning his native tongue. He had also the personal ambition to 'leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die'. But as a declaration of poetic purpose the whole passage deals more with the content of poetry and its influence on society than with questions of form and technique. And the sentence about epic which Professor C.S. Lewis calls 'a short history of epic poetry' is in its essence expression of a disregard for the norms of Renaissance criticism:

whether that Epick form whereof the two poems of Homer, and those other two of Virgil and Tasso, are a diffuse, and the book of Job a brief model: or whether the rules of Aristotle herein are strictly to be kept, or nature to be follow'd, which in them that know art, and use judgement, is no transgression, but an enriching of art. And lastly what K. or Knight before the conquest might be chosen in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian Heroe.¹

1. CM, 111. 236-237.

Here is a conception of epic which covers both the Iliad and the Book of Job and which can follow rules or nature and which, moreover can deal with king or knight in a Christian theme. And what he intended to do through one or the other type of epic might as well be accomplished through 'those dramatic constitutions where in Sophocles and Euripides reign' or 'those magnificent odes and hymns, wherein Pindarus and Callimachus are in most things worthy'. The 'frequent songs throughout the law and prophets' would be an equally suitable vehicle for what he wanted to say. His choice of form is dictated not by such notions as Dryden's¹ that the heroic poem is the nobles' work of man or that tragedy is the greatest of all forms of poetry but by the question how far his poetry can

embreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune.

Whether Milton associated a particular kind of theme with a particular literary genre we have no means of knowing from any of his statements. But this is clear from The Reason of Church Government that his approach to poetry was not governed by a consideration of forms bearing on different tastes but by the purely moral question of how far a poem will be 'doctrinal

1. An Essay of Dramatick Poesie, 1668, see Essays of John Dryden, i. 101.

and exemplary to a nation'.

Milton had a clear theory of tragedy and he stated it in his preface to Samson Agonistes. His epic doctrine has to be reconstructed from his casual but significant statements which are a commentary on his epic practice. And as in tragedy so in epic Milton's critical attention is concerned more with ends than technique. In his early phase all that he says about epic or heroic poetry relates exclusively to its theme, to the magnitude of its fable comprehending heaven, earth and hell and the fate of kings and queens. The tale

quilt ... Of Kings and Queens, Hero's old,
Such as the wise Demodocus once told
In solemn Songs at King Alcinous feast,
While sad Ulysses soul and all the rest
Are held with his melodious harmonie.¹

This represents Milton's idea of the epic theme in the Cambridge period. The song of 'Heroasque pios, semideosque duces' of the 'Elegia sexta' does not carry the idea of heroic poetry beyond the commonplaces of Renaissance epic theory. Till the beginning of the pamphlet period (1641) Milton's idea of the epic is extremely inchoate for it was yet to be integrated with his idea of poetic inspiration. His conception of poetry is influenced more by a sense of the poet's high calling: it does not concern itself with the specific purposes of the

1. 'At a Vacation Exercise', 47-51.

specific forms of poetry. About the special qualities of the epic or its superiority to other forms of literature Milton says nothing anywhere in his works. The reading list of Il Penseroso includes tragedies and romances, and in 'Ad Patrem' the tale of 'Heroumque Actus, imitandaque gesta' is not distinguished from other kinds of poetry either in substance or in technique.

After his return from Italy he speaks of heroic poetry with more directness because it is now a part of his literary plans. But even now he speaks of the theme of the epic rather than of its special attributes as a poem. In 'Mansus' he hopes to 'call back into the realms of song our native kings and Arthur who was even beneath the earth' or to sing 'of the high-souled heroes of the Table invincible through their comradeship' or to 'break the Saxon phalanxes under the war god of the Britons'.¹ The inspiration is obviously patriotic and the idea of the epic theme is still different from what is stated in the Ninth Book of Paradise Lost. And the same patriotic sentiment is at work when he mentions the Arthurian Legend as a possible subject of his poetry in 'Epitaphium

1. 80-84. Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,
 Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem;
 Aut dicam invictae sociali foedere mensae,
 Magnanimes Heroas, & (o modo spiritus adist)
 Frangam Saxonibus Britonum sub Marte Phalanges.

Damonis'.¹

The first suggestion of a new conception of epic poetry, though still only in respect of its theme and moral influence, is in his first tract, Of Reformation in England. Here Milton gives an idea of great poetry which has a national and heroic theme and yet can be distinguished from other poems of this kind:

Then amidst the Hymns, and Halleluiahs of Saints some one may perhaps bee heard offering at high strains in new and lofty Measures to sing and celebrate thy divine Mercies, and marvelous Judgements in this Land throughout all Ages; whereby this great and Warlike Nation, instructed and inur'd to the fervent and continuall practice of Truth and Righteousnesse, and casting farre from her the rags of her old vices, may presse hard to that high and happy emulation to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian People.²

Here for the first time Milton speaks of a poem in which the heroic theme assumes the proportions of a revelation of 'divine mercy and marvellous judgments' and whose moral influence is deeper and more intimate with its matter than what the Renaissance critic would claim for all heroic poetry. It is Milton's first statement of his idea of the Christian epic. What he later says about it in The Reason of Church Government is only an elaboration of this idea of great poetry as a morality and a revelation. Yet, as we have already observed, The Reason of

1. 166-171.

2. CM, iii. 78.

Church Government does not present a complete epic doctrine and all that it says about the epic form is manifestly unorthodox. Nor does Milton express a preference for the epic over the drama. What is important for him is that his work should be a 'book of sanctity and virtue'.

Still more significant is the fact that in the autobiographical passages in the tracts from Of Reformation to the Defensio Secunda there is nothing to show that Milton has a special enthusiasm for the classical epic as a model for his own compositions. In An Apology for Smectymnuus he recalls his early reading in heroic poetry by referring to 'those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knight hood founded by our victorious Kings and from hence had in renown over all Christendom'. While there is this genuine interest in poets like Ariosto and Spenser there is nothing about Homer or Virgil except that the former is subjected to the Platonic stricture that he has 'written undecent things about the gods'.¹ In Of Education there is mention of the moral works of Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, Plutarch, of tragedies 'that treat of household matters, as Trachiniae, Alcestis and the like', and of Moses and Solon but no direct reference either to the Iliad or the Aeneid. That epic poetry is also included

1. CM, iii. 304.

in the model syllabus is to be inferred from the inclusion of 'heroic poems' among subjects like 'choice histories', 'Attic tragedies' and 'famous political orations'. The passage at the end of the Defensio Secunda, however, shows Milton's interest in the design of the classical epic and the treatment of the heroic theme by Homer and Virgil:

But as the poet, who is styled epic, if he adhere strictly to established rules, undertakes to embellish not the whole life of the hero whom he proposes to celebrate in song, but, usually, one particular action of his life, as for example, that of Achilles at Troy, or the return of Ulysses, or the arrival of Aeneas in Italy, and leaves alone the rest; so likewise will it suffice for my duty and excuse, that I have embellished at least one of the heroic actions of my countrymen. The rest I pass by for who could do justice to all the great actions of an entire people?

But this statement made confessedly 'for my justification or apology' has no bearing on Milton's conception of the epic he would himself produce. The passage refers to what has already been accomplished:² it has no suggestion of what is yet to come. If Paradise Lost was begun at this period, as E.M.W. Tillyard suggests it was, the reference to the epic in the Defensio Secunda could not have been altogether silent about it. While Milton was eager to establish that his tracts were a fulfilment of his promise of an epic on a British theme

1. CM, viii. 253.

2. For a discussion of the opinion that Milton's 'prose writings, especially his two Latin defenses of the English people, represent a commutation of his plans, a substitute for his intended epic' see L.A. Sasek, 'Milton's Patriotic Epic', The Huntington Library Quarterly 1956, xx.

he was not contemplating an epic on a greater theme. For the epic is still associated with the conventional heroic matter and with the fortune of an individual in some particular action of his life. With the conception and design of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained such dictum has no relation unless we use 'epic' as a blanket word for any poem with a fable. In fact the passage on the epic in The Reason of Church Government has more bearing on what Milton wanted to accomplish in Paradise Lost and in Paradise Regained than the passage in the Defensio Secunda. In the former he deals with the high moral intent of the epic poem yet believing that other forms of poetry like the drama or the ode could have the same power. In the latter the epic is described in terms of the traditional notion about the theme and construction of a heroic poem, the critical stuff which D'avenant had made familiar in his Preface to Gondibert about four years earlier. Milton found it useful for raising his prose works to the dignity of a national epic.

The idea of the Christian epic suggested in Of Reformation is elaborately stated in The Reason of Church Government. It must, however, be admitted that in The Reason of Church Government too Milton's plan is to produce a national and historical epic and that he is yet to link up the epic form with the matter he has selected about this time for his future dramatic

compositions. For the literary project here declared is, so far as its theme is concerned, to sing the glories of England:

if the Athenians, as some say, made their small deeds great and renowned by their eloquent writers, England hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskillfull handling of monks and mechanicks.

And it is possible that at this stage of his literary development he was influenced by Tasso's conception of the historical and the Christian epic as stated in his Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica (composed in 1561). But what is original in this idea of the epic and what anticipates the kind of epic he was to write is his belief that the highest poetry is a product of the moral universe which it also preserves. This belief is necessarily linked up with the idea of literary evolution which cannot be arrested if 'there be nothing adverse in our climate or the fate of this age'. It was a philosophy of literary history which would support the idea of both continuity and of change in poetic tradition. And this was all that he meant when he declared that

what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome or modern Italy, and of those Hebrews of old did for their country, I, in my proportion, with this over and above, of being a Christian, might do for mine.¹

So the Christian theme was not simply a matter of choice: it was the only theme which could produce great poetry for a

1. CM, iii. 236-237.

Christian society. He mentions the four universes he knew, the Graeco-Roman, the Renaissance, the Hebraic and the Christian. He does not repudiate classical and neo-classical poetry as Christ repudiates Greek literature and philosophy in Paradise Regained. But in one important respect the literary ideas of The Reason of Church Government anticipate those of Paradise Regained. In both Biblical literature is given the status of great poetry. In the tract the Book of Job is a kind of epic, the Song of Solomon is a divine pastoral drama and 'the Apocalypse of St. John is the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy'. The modification of the traditional idea of the literary form implied in this estimate of certain books of the Bible has been due to a conception of poetry which is determined entirely by its ends. The list of subjects for plays in the Cambridge Manuscript indicates a similar approach to poetry. And here too the content of a poem is more important than its form. There is nothing in the more detailed synopses of the dramatic plots to show any special concern for the formal principles of composition. Milton was severely meticulous in matters of structure and style but these matters are not important in his theory of poetry. The Cambridge Manuscript plans do not make a sharp distinction between a play and a heroic poem in respect of themes. While the

subjects are all meant for plays there is reason for believing that Milton might as well consider them suitable for the epic form. In The Reason of Church Government his field of choice covers the three important forms of poetry, the epic, the dramatic, and the lyric. In item 24 of the list of subjects from British history the gist of a dramatic plot based on Alfred's life is followed by a note that a 'Heroicall Poem may be founded somewhere in Alfreds reigne, especially at his issuing out of Edelingsey on the Danes; whose actions are wel like those of Ulyses'.¹ It is therefore extremely unlikely that Milton prepared a separate list of epic themes² or that he thought that what could be said in one form of poetry could not be said in another. And Milton's view of the epic is entirely governed by what it should say or reveal. The section of literature in The Reason of Church Government deals mainly with the theme of poetry: it sets in clear outline the spiritual and moral purpose which poetry is to fulfil. The Cambridge Manuscript only mentions what is called in the tract 'our own ancient stories' and other subjects which would represent

the victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valliantly through faith against the enemies of

1. CM, xviii. 243.

2. J.H. Hanford says that 'it is possible that there was similar list of epic themes which has not been preserved'. See A Milton Handbook, 1946, pp.181-182.

Christ: to deplore the general relapses of Kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship.

About style and technique there is nothing more in the whole section than the mention of 'a solid and treatable smoothness to paint out and describe', of presenting the material in an elegant manner. So if the personal passage in The Reason of Church Government contains the core of Milton's epic theory it relates entirely to the moral function of high poetry, to its efficacy in 'instructing and bettering the nation at all opportunities, that the call of wisdom and virtue may be heard everywhere'. There is nothing in this discourse on the theme and power of poetry to suggest that Milton was only repeating the Horatian doctrine of mirth and instruction which was the commonplace of Renaissance literary theory. When he speaks of the way which 'may win most upon the people to receive at once both recreation and instruction' he refers to public entertainments which he wants to be more edifying and not to the poetry he intends to produce. In Milton's poetic there is no room for the Renaissance critical formula of profitable amusement. To him the moral power of poetry is inherent in its material and he has no idea of its aesthetic appeal as something apart from this moral power. The 'critical art of composition' is important in so far as it presents the 'divine argument'. For there may be poets who are 'in their frame

judicious, in their matter most an end faulty'.¹ And what Milton says about the epic in the tract or in the two poems is more concerned with its matter than its 'frame'. Milton had no theory of the form of poetry in which technical or stylistic excellence could be separable from the matter of the poem.

The declaration of theme in the first invocation in Paradise Lost should be considered in terms of this primacy of the argument in poetry. For when he declares that his ambition is to

assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the wayes of God to men

he makes a compact with his reader about what he can give him. He is aware that his fable is not such as would satisfy the usual appetite for an extremely interesting story. He knows that his heroic matter is of different order and that his poem is not in line with the classical epic. When he intends to soar above the Aonian Mount he contemplates a new kind of heroic poetry which must replace the old by a natural law of poetic evolution. He is only reasserting what he has said in The Reason of Church Government about poetry to be produced by a Christian for a Christian society. At several places in Paradise Lost Milton makes occasions for telling his reader

1. The Reason of Church Government, CM, iii. 238.

about this distinction of his theme. The description of the fallen angels' intellectual pastimes in hell which may seem irrelevant and even unnatural must have been intended for bringing out the distinction between traditional heroic poetry and the new kind of heroic poetry to be represented in Paradise Lost:

Others more milde,
Retreated in a silent valley, sing
With notes Angelical to many a Harp
Thir own Heroic deeds and hapless fall
By doom of Battel; and complain that Fate
Free Vertue should enthrall to Force or Chance.
Thir Song was partial, but the harmony
(What could it less when Spirits immortal Sing?)
Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
The thronging audience.¹

The copious matter of his own song will have other arguments and narrate other deeds. We have already observed that the conversation between Adam and Raphael expresses Milton's idea on the nature of his epic theme. The personal passage in the Ninth Book of Paradise Lost contains a full statement of Milton's conception of heroic poetry as he wanted to practise it. His theme is not heroic in the traditional sense but he believed that he is dealing with the heroic spirit of a higher kind:

sad task, yet argument
Not less but more Heroic then the Wrauth
Of stern Achilles on his Foe persu'd
Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage

1. PL, 11. 546-555.

Of Turnus for Lavinia disespous'd,
 Or Neptun's ire or Juno's, that so long
 Perplex'd the Greek and Cytherea's Son ...¹

Sir Maurice Bowra says that Milton 'indicates that he has his own idea of a heroic poem, but he does not say what it is; he leaves us to find it out from his story'.² But what Milton says about his theme here and in the three invocations is more than a mere indication. These passages read along with Adam's words on the narrations of the 'Divine Interpreter' represent a clear and consistent theory of a new kind of heroic poetry. No poet was more conscious of what he was going to produce and more eager to declare his poetic intention to his reader than Milton. He clearly distinguishes his poem from the Iliad and the Aeneid. He is

Not sedulous by Nature to indite
 Warrs, hitherto the onely Argument
 Heroic deemd, chief maistrie to dissect
 With long and tedious havoc fabl'd Knights
 In Battels feignd;

Then he states in brief but with utmost clarity his own theme:

the better fortitude
 Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom.

He is equally particular in distinguishing his poem from the romances which

describe Races and Games,
 Or tilting Furniture, emblazond Shields,

1. PL, ix. 13-19.

2. From Virgil to Milton, 1945, p.198.

Impresses quaint, Caparisons and Steeds;
 Bases and tinsel Trappings, gorgeous knights
 At Joust and Torneament; then marshald Feast,¹
 Serv'd up in Hall with Sewers, and Seneshals;

and he is certain that all this was the 'skill of Artifice or Office mean' and is not 'that which justly gives Heroic name to Person or to Poem'. So if the theme of the classical epic was after all of a heroic kind the romance did not deserve to be called heroic at all. The argument is obviously a re-statement of what has already been said in The Reason of Church Government. For there the 'main consistence of a true poem' is strictly defined in terms of Christian ethics. It is therefore certain that Milton abandoned the idea of writing a heroic poem in the classical style on a British theme at the beginning of the pamphlet period. In fact at this time his conception of heroic poetry is so deeply moral that he even imagined that the pamphlets themselves constituted a kind of national epic. And when he commenced the composition of Paradise Lost he had already realised that the heroes who 'fought at Theb's and Ilium, on each side mixt with auxiliar Gods' could not be the main interest of the kind of epic he had in view. He was equally certain that stories like the 'Romance of Uthers Son begirt with British or Armorie Knights', could not be the matter of his poem. This rejection of the theme both of the classica

1. PL, ix. 27-32.

epic and of romance is important in Milton's conception of heroic poetry and he wanted this to be understood by his reader. For his whole critical concern in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained is to prepare a taste for divine poetry which he thought was heroic poetry too. What in Paradise Lost is called 'more Heroic' is in Paradise Regained 'above Heroic'. For evidently Milton does not make any distinction between the two poems in respect of what he considers to be their heroic theme. It is also clear that ^{by} 'more Heroic' or 'above Heroic' Milton understands a new ethos of heroism which can be the moral substance of the Christian epic.

It is therefore important for us to enquire if Milton has succeeded in building up a theory of heroic poetry which would explain the form and the spirit of his two poems. That he has made an effort to provide a critical basis for the kind of heroic theme he intends to pursue is evident from his statements in the poems themselves. The Reason of Church Government too gives the outline of a theory of epic poetry which is in several points linked up with what is said on the heroic theme in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The other material which may be useful in our enquiry is some portions of the De Doctrina Christiana which deal with the ethics of human action. For if Milton intends Paradise Lost to be appreciated as a

heroic poem he must have an idea of heroism in human behaviour or in the general operations of the divine scheme as the basis of his new epic doctrine. How far that view of heroism will actually determine the reader's response to Paradise Lost is not important. For it is possible the reader will understand Milton's intention and yet fail to make it the basis of his approach to the poem. Still an idea of what Milton wanted to achieve in epic poetry may be a corrective on criticisms which judge Paradise Lost as a kind of poem which it was none of the intention of its author to make it.

That he was conscious of his responsibility of educating his reader about what he is to expect from his poems is particularly shown in the concluding chorus of Samson Agonistes. Towards the end of Paradise Lost too there is a passage which sets out the moral of the poem as clearly as the last passage in Samson Agonistes sets out the moral of the drama:

Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,
 Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill
 Of knowledge, what this vessel can containe;
 Beyond which was my folly to aspire.
 Henceforth I learne, that to obey is best,
 And love with feare the onely God, to walk
 As in his presence, ever to observe
 His providence, and on him sole depend,
 Merciful over all his works, with good
 Still overcoming evil, and by small
 Accomplishing great things, by things deemd weak
 Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
 By simply meek; that suffering for Truths sake
 Is fortitude to highest victorie,

And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life;
 Taught this by his example whom I now
 Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest.¹

This is obviously Milton's comment on the fable and its significance. But it is also important as a statement of Milton's idea of the heroic spirit of which his poem is an embodiment. It is the Christian heroism of accomplishing great things by things deemed weak, of subverting the worldly strong and worldly wise by simply meek. The highest victory is fortitude in suffering for truth's sake. Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes represent the same heroic ideal and Milton is careful in telling his reader about it. And how important it is for Milton to distinguish this ideal from the traditional conception of heroism is evident in a speech of Michael in the Eleventh Book of Paradise Lost:

For in those dayes Might onely shall be admir'd,
 And valour and Heroic Vertu calld;
 To overcome in Battel, and subdue
 Nations, and bring home spoils with infinite
 Man-slaughter, shall be held the highest pitch
 Of human Glorie, and for Glorie done
 Of triumph, to be stil'd great Conquerours,
 Patrons of Mankind, Gods, and Sons of Gods,
 Destroyers rightlier calld and Plagues of men.²

This is however no denunciation of war such as Virgil puts into the mouth of Anchises in the Sixth Book of the Aeneid.

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1. PL, xii. 557-573.
 2. PL, xi. 689-697.

Adam is shocked at the sight of oppression and sword-law but Michael's speech is not so much a repudiation of violence as it is of the old ethos in which might only is valour and heroic virtue, and man-slaughter the highest pitch of human glory. For it is significant that absence of war is not necessarily the ideal state of life: 'Peace to corrupt no less then warr to waste'. What is important for Milton is the inner Paradise of faith and obedience, a new order in which man achieves his highest victories with the strength of the regenerate mind. In that order 'acts of prowess of eminent' and 'great exploits' are 'of true vertu void'. This is the ethos of the Christian universe contemplated in Paradise Lost and the new heroic ideal which the poem embodies is rooted in it. In Paradise Lost the moral interest is integral with the poetic interest. It is not an exciting story with a grand moral or a grave sermon in a pleasing diction. Milton has said enough in the poem to prepare his reader for a new kind of epic celebrating a new ideal of heroism. We need to comprehend Milton's new idea of valour as a quality of man's moral nature for a proper appreciation of the design of Paradise Lost as a heroic poem. Whether that design has been poetically successful is another question. It is critically important to enquire what kind of heroic poem Milton wanted to produce, that is what Milton

actually meant by heroism. And if the idea of the heroic spirit consistently stated in the Ninth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Books is to be recognised as the ideal which governed Milton's conception of the epic he wanted to compose then the prowess of Satan and his party cannot have been intended as the main heroic material of the poem nor can Satan be called its hero. When Milton speaks of the noblest temper of Hero's old he cannot mean the heroic spirit described in the later books. The fallen angels' war-like spirit and their impressive military movement are not the heroic stuff of the poem because they are so powerfully described any more than Satan is the most important character in it because he speaks the most powerful blank verse. And to say that the first two books of Paradise Lost are more interesting than the rest of the poem is aesthetically no sounder a judgment than that there is nothing so stirring in the Iliad as the wrath of Achilles or that the First Act of Hamlet is more powerful than the rest of the drama because of its Ghost scene. Milton's poetic intention has been much obscured by the power of his blank verse: a great deal of critical confusion about the meaning of his poem has been due to the fact that in it Satan and God speak in the same metre and that at moments the fallen Angel appears the more gifted in eloquence. The belief that Milton belongs to the Devil's

party (Blake made confusion worse confounded by adding 'without knowing it') is equally due to his diction being so 'impiously' copious and majestic even in passages that deal with Heaven's adversary. Those exquisite lines which describe the martial music of the fallen angels may seem too exquisite not to be an expression of Milton's own heroic spirit:

Anon they move
In perfet Phalanx to the Dorian mood
Of Flutes and soft Recorders; such as rais'd
To highth of noblest temper Hero's old
Arming to Battel, and in stead of rage
Deliberat valour breath'd, firm and unmov'd
With dread of death to flight or foul retreat.¹

Quoting this passage E.M.W. Tillyard has observed:

Deliberate valour, the valour of the hero who knows himself and knows what he is fighting, ... was what Milton believed in. In this passage Milton is on the Devil's side.²

But this idea of 'deliberate valour' is obviously inconsistent with the ideal of heroism stated in the later books. And we have seen that even in Book Two Milton has called the song of their 'own Heroic deeds' 'partial' though ravishing to the 'thronging audience'. In fact throughout the poem Milton is careful to tell his reader that it is folly to 'boast what Arms can doe' and that his theme is 'more heroic' than the tale of Achilles or Turnus. Paradise Lost was written at a time

1. PL, 1. 549-555.

2. Milton, 1946, p.269.

when Milton had lost his faith in deliberate valour, in the strength of arms as an instrument of human good. The Restoration produced in him a distrust of all action however heroic which is not the result of man's free cooperation with the will of God. Human prowess working without the support of the divine will can only produce 'disorder'd rage' and 'perverse commotion'. This is the express moral of the only battle described in Paradise Lost:

Whence in perpetual fight they needs must last
Endless, and no solution will be found.¹

When Milton's idea of heroic poetry is determined by such conception of the heroic ideal Satan cannot have been intended as the hero of the poem. When Dryden said that the devil was in reality Milton's hero² he ignored Milton's declared view of the heroic spirit of his poem. He gave a hero to a poem which he could not call truly heroic. The confusion was partly due to the idea that Paradise Lost should be judged by the canons of the classical epic. Richardson says of Adam:

He is not Such a Hero as Achilles, Ulysses, Aeneas,
Orlando, Godfrey, &c. all Romantic Worthies, and
Incredible Performers of Fortunate, Savage Cruelties;
He is one of a nobler Kind, Such as Milton Chose to
Write of, and found he had a Genius for the Purpose.
he is not Such a Conqueror as Subdu'd Armies or
Nations, or Enemies in Single Combat, but his Conquest

1. PL, vi. 693-694.

2. 'Dedication of the Aeneis' (1697), see Essays of John Dryden, 1900, ii. 165.

was What Justly gave Heroic Name to Person and to Poem. His Hero was More than a Conqueror through Him that Loved us.¹

(12) But how far does this new conception of heroic ideal give a meaning and a unity to the action of Paradise Lost? Does this heroism belong to the Son or to Adam or to both? There is nothing in the poem itself which could be taken as Milton's clear answer to this question. But from the design of the Fifth and Sixth Books it is clear that the role of the Son in the third day's battle in heaven is not intended to be an excitingly dramatic role. He does not fight, he triumphs in a divine miracle with powers not his own. His arrival on the battle scene is not in reality the beginning of a fresh action. In fact he has no engagement with the rebels who

astonish all resistance lost,
All courage; down their idle weapons drop.²

And his purpose is, as he says, 'Not to destroy but root them out of Heav'n'. When the rebels are driven to the 'crystal wall of Heav'n' like 'Herd of Goats or timorous flock together throng'd' the spectacle is not so much of a defeated army taken captive by a heroic victor as of the end of the 'Acts of hateful strife', the 'Intestine War in Heav'n' which 'hateful to all' is 'heaviest by just measure' on the rebel and his followers. The offence of Satan is not that he defies God:

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1. Notes and Remarks on Milton's Paradise Lost, 1734, p. clxvi. See Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, p. 317.
 2. PL, vi. 838-839.

his offence is in his malicious hostility to the new order which begins with the anointing of the Son. Michael's address to Satan at the end of the second battle denounces the rebel not as a menace to heaven. His guilt is that he has

instilld
Thy malice into thousands, once upright
And faithful, now prov'd false.¹

He has brought misery into nature uncreated till the crime of his rebellion has disturbed Heaven's blest peace. Satan is an enemy of God only in so far as he opposes God's dispensation. This is important in Milton's theology and no less important in the poem. There could not be a challenge to God's power, but there could be a stupid opposition to the divine order. Satan is an embodiment of this opposition of good by evil. He is not so much a menace as a nuisance and is dealt with as such. The Fifth and Sixth Books therefore are not a song of war and do not depict any exploits like those of Ajax or Turnus. The sound of instrumental harmony that breathes heroic ardour to adventurous deeds, the shout of battle and the clamour such as was never heard in heaven till now have none of the excitement of an earthly war. Neither God nor the Son is really perturbed about Satan's design. This Milton wanted his readers to know and is made explicit in a passage in Book V. When God discerns the evil intent of Satan and the

1. PL, vi. 269-271.

'third part of Heav'ns Host' he tells the Son

such a foe
Is rising, who intends to erect his Throne
Equal to ours, throughout the spacious North;
Nor so content, hath in his thought to trie
In battel, what our Power is, or our right.
Let us advise, and to this hazard draw
With speed what force is left, and all employ
In our defence, lest unawares we lose
This our high place, our Sanctuarie, our Hill.¹

This may appear a little like the anxiety of a general not all too sure of victory. But in reality the Father is here speaking ironically. The Son at once understands the divine banter and replies:

Mightie Father, thou thy foes
Justly hast in derision, and secure
Laugh'st at thir vain designes and tumults vain,
Matter to mee of Glory, whom thir hate
Illustrates²

This makes the ambition of Satan to win the Mount of God appear not only absurd but also a little comic. Throughout Book V Satan is presented as one whom impious envy has made extremely stupid, in the words of C.S. Lewis 'a personified self-contradiction'.³ He names the Palace of great Lucifer the Mountain of the Congregation in imitation of that Mount whereon Messiah was declared in sight of Heav'n. His sermon on orders and Degrees is nonsense. He is equally ludicrous in his con-

1. PL, v. 724-732.

2. PL, v. 735-739.

3. A Preface to Paradise Lost, p.95.

ception of self-existence. When Abdiel warns him:

Then who created thee lamenting learne,
When who can uncreate thee thou shalt know.¹

The leader of the third of Heav'ns Host looks a cad and is treated as a cad by the faithful Abdiel. The military prowess of the Atheist in Book VI should be viewed with this idea of Satan in mind. The three battles in heaven are intended to show the futility of all opposition to the divine decree. The rebels are not just routed or destroyed. Their defeat is more fundamental than that. They cease to exist as angels and become the fiends of hell. And Milton makes it plain that God never wanted a terrific war in heaven and that he only intended to expel the rebels from his territory:

Heav'n the seat of bliss
Brooks not the works of violence and Warr.
Hence then, and evil go with thee along
Thy offspring, to the place of evil, Hell.²

In fact the whole conflict depicted in Book VI is nothing more than a big purge accomplished with an impressive show of violence. The triumph of the Son therefore is not a military triumph: his heroic act is in his obedience to the divine will. He preserves Reason and Law from the assault of those who do not understand them. The rebellion and the expulsion mark the beginning of the moral universe: it had to begin by showing

1. PL, v. 894-895.

2. PL, 273-276.

the visage of the power which is opposed to it. The defeat of that power is certain and foreknown but its capacity for making an assault on what it abhors is equally certain and foreknown.

What Milton calls 'more heroic' or 'above heroic' has therefore to be explained with reference to something other than the battle scenes in Paradise Lost. In Paradise Regained however Christ's conquest of temptations can be called acts more than heroic. But what acts in Paradise Lost can deserve that name?

Can Adam be called a heroic character in any sense? He acts, repents and suffers. Milton's judgment on him is that his heart is 'variable and vain when self-left'. Are we then to imagine that Milton speaks of patience and martyrdom only by way of distinguishing his subject from that of the classical epic and that he has no clear idea of their application to his theme? A misconception like this can arise only when the poem is appreciated in parts and as a story or rather part of a story told in superior verse. If, on the other hand, the poem is read as a whole and if, this is more important, it is believed that it was designed to be read and understood as a whole, the impression will be different. Coleridge has said that the last two books of Paradise Lost are neglected by those

who read the poem only as a story.¹ And although Books IX and X are more popular reading it can be said that the last four books of the poem have been generally considered a literary failure. C.S. Lewis has called the last two books 'an untransmuted lump of futurity' and adds that 'the actual writing in this passage is curiously bad'.² He puts it down to a failure of talent. But so far as Milton's poetic intention and structural design are concerned the last two books are as important as the fifth act of any well-constructed play. And the two preceding books which constitute the climax of the poem have their meaning only when they are related to Adam's vision of the future of man. Milton knew the importance of these four books and wanted to draw the attention of his reader to it. The exordium in Book IX which is a full statement of his epic purpose comes at the right place. And what he promises in this extremely lucid preamble he fulfils. First he prepares his reader for a change of 'Those notes to Tragic'. The tragedy will be the 'world of woe' caused by foul distrust, and breach disloyal on the part of man and 'ange: and just rebuke' on the part of Heav'n. This is indeed the gist of Books IX and X. But this is not the whole poem. Such theme presumably would have been dealt with in his projected

1. Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, ed. R.F. Brinkley, 1955, p.579.

2. A Preface to Paradise Lost, 1954, p.125.

tragedy on Adam's fall. But his epic theme is larger and of cosmic significance. And he calls it a heroic theme boldly affirming that the subject of the classical epic was not the only subject conceivable. Then he prepares his reader, and this is the second important point in his preamble, that his theme is the better fortitude of patience and heroic martyrdom which has been hitherto unsung. His tragic theme is only a part of this larger heroic theme. The substance and design of the last four books conform to this well-defined theory. The 'patience' is the patience of Adam, the 'martyrdom' is the crucifixion of the incarnate Son.

In Adam's suffering there is something of the pious fortitude of Samson. And this patience is of great moment in the moral economy of the human universe which emerges from the Fall. It is the basis of redemption on the human side, the humility which earns grace. Adam is steadfast in his faith at the moment of his worst suffering. Like Samson he is in an agony of self-blame and shows the better fortitude in accepting his misery as a just punishment from Heaven:

Him after all Disputes
Fore't I absolve: all my evasions vain
And reasonings, though through Mazes, lead me still .
But to my own conviction: first and last
On mee, mee onely, as the source and spring
Of all corruption, all the blame lights due.¹

1. PL, x. 828-833.

Adam blames the Serpent as he blames Eve too. Milton makes him real enough to appear human even in his heroic endurance. Both Adam and Samson have a measure of intense disgust and even of fierce indignation about those who are responsible for their fall. But while they condemn their corrupters they do not seek an escape from their own sense of guilt. Adam is determined to bear his misfortune for he believes that this fortitude alone can now save him. When Eve proposes self-destruction Adam discards the idea as utterly impious and immoral:

Eve, thy contempt of life and pleasure seems
 To argue in thee something more sublime
 And excellent then what thy minde contemnes;
 But self-destruction therefore saught, refutes
 That excellence thought in thee, and implies,
 Not thy contempt, but anguish and regret,
 For loss of life and pleasure overlov'd.¹

The ethics of this endurance is stated too clearly to be missed when Adam tells Eve that violence 'against our selves'

savours onely
 Rancor and pride, impatience and despite,
 Reluctance against God and his just yoke
 Laid in our Necks. Remember with what mild
 And gracious Temper he both heard and judg'd
 Without wrauth or reviling.²

This manly contrition which contemplates suffering as a 'mild yoke' and disparages impatience as a 'reluctance against God' is of great moment in the history of Man after the Fall.

1. PL, x. 1013-1019.

2. PL, x. 1043-1048.

Milton makes it the prelude to the vision of redemption in the last two books. The theme of the higher fortitude of patience is integrated with the theme of heroic martyrdom. Together they constitute Milton's total view of human destiny. The suffering of Adam is only an earnest of that 'sharp tribulation' which will at the end renew human life on earth. Milton has taken particular care in making this unity of theme and inner nexus of motives clear to his reader. We can see it only when we read the poem as a whole, as Hilaire Belloc puts it, 'take it in a large draught'.¹ In Book XI the future of mankind is shown as a story of suffering and renovation:

so Death becomes
His final remedie, and after Life
Tri'd in sharp tribulation, and refin'd
By Faith and faithful works, to second life,
Wak't in the renovation of the just,
Resignes him up with Heav'n and Earth renewd.²

When Michael leads Adam to the Hill for the 'visions of God' faith in redemptive suffering is man's highest hope

Ascend, I follow thee, safe Guide, the path
Thoust lead'st me, and to the hand of Heav'n submit,
However chast'ning, to the evil turne
My obvious brest, arming to overcom
By suffering, and earne rest from labour won
If so I may attain.³

Adam faces the tragedy of the fall with a clear knowledge of .

1. Milton, 1935, p.249.

2. PL, xi. 61-66.

3. PL, xi. 371-376.

its moral significance. His pious endurance gives him a sense of purpose even in his suffering. Of the moral drama of redemption the humility of Adam is the beginning and its relation with Christ's victory over temptation and death is brought to our mind by a suggestive allusion:

Not higher that Hill nor wider looking round,
Whereon for different cause the Tempter set
Our second Adam in the Wilderness,
To shew him all Earths Kingdoms and thir glory.¹

Adam's vision of the future of mankind represents a change in the universe which only the regenerate reason could comprehend. He sees because he deserves to see. It is a grace which he earns by his meek suffering.

The heroic martyrdom of Christ is the most important event in Adam's vision: it is the end of a process which begins with the fall and the repentance. But how can we call it the theme of the poem when it does not constitute any part of its action? And we can add to this question its corollary - how can the theme of a poem called Paradise Lost be anything more than what led to the loss of Paradise? If anything that is not directly connected with the circumstances preceding the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden is irrelevant then Books XI and XII contain a good deal of unnecessary material. And if moreover a stricter principle of concentration is to be valued the story

1. PL, xi. 381-384.

of Satan's rebellion and the description of the fallen angels in hell are a digression. From this point of view it would appear that Milton had made a mess of the whole business in a vain effort to give his epic a Virgilian form when his epic material called for a different handling. It would then be imagined that Raphael is made to describe the revolt in heaven because Aeneas describes the sack of Troy in the court of Dido and that the poem ends with a vision of redemption since the Latin epic ends with the foundation of Rome. But it would be reading Paradise Lost with reference to an epic structure which is not its own and subordinating our response to the matter of the poem to the very irrelevant question of its conformity to the formal principles of the classical epic. The design of Milton's poem should be judged in terms of its argument and if it turns out to be on the classical model it should yet be understood that Milton adopted it because of its fitness for his purpose. Paradise Lost has the Virgilian design because it was the only design which was suitable for Milton's vision just as Samson Agonistes is Greek in form because Greek form was the only form through which Milton could express his thoughts.

The heroic martyrdom of Christ is prophesied by Michael in about fifty lines in the middle of the last book. How far was

then Milton justified in mentioning heroic martyrdom as a theme of his heroic song? He gives two entire books to the battle in heaven. The atmosphere of the first two books is heroic and what is more this part of the poem is particularly interesting to the common reader. And the two themes of patience and martyrdom do not get more than a quarter of a book towards the end of the poem. Yet the design of the poem as a whole is in strict conformity with the argument defined in the first book - Man's first disobedience and the advent of his Redeemer. The definition of heroic theme in Book IX is a restatement of the poetic purpose declared at the opening. The first half of the poem which deals with the revolt of Satan is important as a prelude to the central theme of disobedience, fall and redemption. The events in heaven and hell preceding the temptation represent the cosmic background of the human theme presented in the later books. Milton knew this twofold division in the structure of his poem and wanted his reader to know it. At the beginning of the second half of the poem he announces the second movement of his theme:

Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
 Within the visible Diurnal Spheare;
 Standing on Earth, not rapt above the Pole,
 More safe I Sing with mortal voice.¹

At the end of Book VI Raphael says that he has revealed 'what[✓] i

1. PL, vii. 21-24.

past' and relates his story to the life of Adam by calling it a terrible Example. The fall takes place between Raphael's story of the past and Michael's vision of the future. In this structure the episodic interest is subordinated to the unfoldment of the central theme of sin and redemption. In that theme the patience of Adam and the martyrdom of Christ are more important than anything that came before them. The one is shown episodically, the other through a vision. And in the scheme of the poem episodes describing the present are not more important for the unfoldment of the central theme than the narrative parts dealing with the past and the future. And it is significant that while in the first half of the poem only two books constitute a narration of past events by an angel, in the second half four books are in that form. It is therefore clear that Milton did not mean to produce any intensely dramatic effect for the accomplishment of his poetic purpose. So in the intended total effect of the poem things seen in a vision or learnt from a divine historian are no less important than exciting dramatic episodes. Here we may recall the passages quoted in the previous chapter in which Milton presents the angel as a divine interpreter. When Dr. Johnson said that 'Milton would not have excelled in dramatic writing' he was meaning the deficiency of Samson Agonistes as he saw it.

But his comment on Paradise Regained that it is a 'dialogue without action' is in effect a censure on a similar sort of deficiency for in his view the ideal epic results from 'an union of the narrative and dramattick powers'.¹ The design of Paradise Lost, however, does not show that it was intended to produce an intensely dramatic effect. Whether Milton had the talent to produce such effect is a different question. So far as the kind of epic that Milton wanted to produce is concerned, it is an irrelevant question. The distinction which Wordsworth drew between two kinds of poetic imagination is an excellent critical aid to an understanding of the design of Paradise Lost:

The grandstore-houses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination, of poetical, as contra-distinguished from human and dramatic Imagination, are the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton.²

In Paradise Lost as in Samson Agonistes the unity of design is not in any dramatic ordering of external events for in both action is represented in its bearing on a moral vision of the human destiny. The martyrdom of Christ is therefore an integral part of the moral theme of Paradise Lost: it is the last for which the first was made. Milton says enough in the

1. Lives of the English Poets, ed. G.B. Hill, 1905, 1. 188.
2. Preface to Poems, 1815. See Wordsworth's Literary Criticism ed. N.C. Smith, 1905, p.162.

poem to prepare the reader's mind for a comprehension of Christ's redeeming suffering as a foil to the 'heroic' action of Satan and his followers. When Adam asks Michael 'what stroke shall bruise the victors heel' the latter replies

Dream not of thir fight,
As of a Duel, or the local wounds
Of head or heel: not therefore joins the Son
Manhood to God-head, with more strength to foil
The enemy; nor so is overcome
Satan, whose fall from Heav'n, a deadlier bruise,
Disabl'd not to give thee thy deaths wound:
Which hee, who comes thy Saviour, shall recure,
Not by destroying Satan, but his works
In thee and in thy seed: nor can this be,
But by fulfilling that which thou didst want,
Obedience to the Law of God, impos'd
On penaltie of death, and suffering death,
The penaltie to thy transgression due,
And due to theirs which out of thine will grow:
So onely can high Justice rest appead.¹

Of this idea of action Paradise Regained is an embodiment in the form of a brief epic, and Samson Agonistes in the form of a lyrical drama. The God-like act that annuls the doom of Man is then a correlate of all acts that lead to that doom and is no more something outside the matter of Paradise Lost than the reported death of Samson is outside the plot of Samson Agonistes. The epic and the drama are both based on a conception of heroic action which gives them distinctive forms of their own. They cannot be judged in terms of the formal principles of classical poetry.

1. PL. xii. 386-401.

In stating his epic purpose, however, he does not introduce, either for confirming or rejecting any postulates of classical or Renaissance literary doctrine. His main concern is to tell his reader what he is going to accomplish as an epic poet. And since his poetic intention is different from that of the epic poets of the past the statement of that intention has necessarily a critical substance. In giving a new idea of the epic theme he has to say, as he actually says in Book VII, that the conception of the heroic act represented by the older epics is a narrow conception. But although he does not mention by name either in The Reason of Church Government or in the personal passages in Paradise Lost any formula of Renaissance criticism we have reason to believe that he has in mind the epic doctrine of Sir William Davenant and Thomas Hobbes. The Preface to Gondibert which was published in Paris in 1650 along with Hobbes's reply is admittedly an important document in the history of seventeenth century criticism. When Paradise Lost was published Gondibert was about sixteen years old and the Preface which was a little older was then an influential piece of critical work. Milton could not have thought of the poem as anything but a poor romance and whatever might be his role in its author's release from prison his regard for his epic theory must have been extremely limited.

It is possible that Davenant was influenced by The Reason of Church Government in his ideas on Christian epic and its function. At least what he read in Chapelain's Preface to the Adone of Marino, Scudery's preface to Ibrahim ou l'illustre Bassa (1641) or Tasso's Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica was partly in line with Milton's argument. But Milton could have little enthusiasm for the literary ideas of a poet whose whole conception of the Christian epic was that it should not be heathen. Milton's ambition as a poet was something greater than merely a de-Paganizing of the epic fable. And of his idea of the epic as a vision of the universe there is nothing either in Davenant's Preface or in Hobbes's reply. Davenant's observations on epic structure had nothing in them to attract the attention of a poet who though extremely studious of formal perfection showed little concern about technical details. In fact except for making a distinction between the diffuse and the brief epics in The Reason of Church Government Milton says nothing about the formal principles of epic construction. Davenant on the other hand has a definite theory of the ideal epic frame when speaking of his own practice he says that he has laid out his plot on the principle of dramatic construction. Since Milton's original intention was to compose a tragedy on

1. Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J.E. Spingarn, 1908, ii. 17.

the fall of Adam he could have said a few things by way of justifying his preference for the epic form. In The Reason of Church Government there is nothing to suggest that he ever thought it important to give any critical reason for such preference.

Davenant's idea of the function of poetry has no special bearing on epic form and does not go beyond the commonplaces of Renaissance didacticism.¹ Of Milton's conception of poetry as prophecy or revelation there is not even a faint anticipation in the Preface to Gondibert. Consequently there is a fundamental difference between Davenant's conception of the epic theme and Milton's. That difference obviously relates to their idea of heroism or valour as a subject of poetry. Davenant accepts the old conception of heroic poetry as a story of military prowess although he prefers that such prowess should be displayed by men possessed of Christian Virtue:

For the greatest of the Grecian Captain have confess'd
that their Counsels have bin made wise and their
Courages warm by Homer; and since Praise is a pleasure
which God hath invited, and with which he often vouch-
saf'd to be pleas'd when it was sent him by his own
Poet, why is it not lawfull for vertuous men to be
cherish'd and magnify'd with hearing their vigilance,
valour, and good Fortune (the latter being more the imme-
diate gift of Heaven, because the effect of an Unknown
Cause) commended and made eternall in Poesy?²

1. *ibid.* p.33.

2. *ibid.* p.37.

Milton's idea of the Christian epic is rooted in a philosophy of action and of heroism which is altogether different from Davenant's conception of valour and fortune. This difference we need to bear in mind when we consider Gondibert as one 'among the many foot-hills which lead up towards both Paradise Lost and Religio Laici'.¹ For while one must recognise Davenant's contribution to the theory of the Christian epic one must also remember that neither his poem nor his Preface had any influence on Milton's conception of heroic poetry. As A. Harbage has observed 'Gondibert should be viewed in relation not to historical and epic literature but to Davenant's own Siege of Rhodes and the heroic romances of Scudéry and her kind'.² And we must also remember that although Milton mentions Tasso in the section on his literary plans in The Reason of Church Government his idea of the heroic act has nothing in common with the spirit of the Gerusalemme Liberata. Tasso's epic is Christian only in the sense that it depicts war conducted by Christian princes. Otherwise the poem is as Dryden has boldly asserted a servile imitation of Homer.³ In conceiving the theme of Paradise Lost Milton could have drawn little inspiration from a poem in which a king is given fifty sons because Priam had as many, and the hero is given a great

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1. D. Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1945, p.343.
 2. Sir William Davenant, Philadelphia, 1936, p.109.
 3. 'Original and Progress of Satire', see Essays of John Dryden, ed. W.P. Ker, iii. 27-28.

friend because Achilles has his Patroclus. The action of Paradise Lost is identical with its theme: in Paradise Regained and in Samson Agonistes we have the same view of action in the form of a brief epic and a lyrical drama.

CHAPTER FIVE

CALM OF MIND

... and are of power ... to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune Milton

When Milton turned from tragedy to epic and produced a heroic poem on a theme which in the Cambridge Manuscript is contemplated for a drama he did not say a word by way of justifying the change of form. Since he never publicly promised a tragedy on the Fall there was no need for a critical preface for expatiating on the superiority of the epic form and since he was little concerned with technical matters in the academic way there was no impulse for defending his choice even for himself. In The Reason of Church Government several important kinds of poetic composition are mentioned as equally acceptable if they did what all poetry was meant to do. In considering Samson Agonistes as a tragedy and in drawing from it Milton's conception of tragic art we must bear in mind that to Milton epic and tragedy had the same function. There is indeed nothing in Milton's literary ideas or practice to support Arthur Quiller-Couch's belief that he consented with Aristotle in preferring Tragedy as the higher of the two great

serious forms of verse'.¹ Milton did not compose Samson Agonistes because he thought that the tragic form was superior to the epic. He selected the frame of Attic drama because that frame was suitable for his material. In fact the moral content of Samson Agonistes is identical with that of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The diffuse epic, the brief epic and the tragedy all

celebrate ... the throne and equipage of God's Almightyesse, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence

and the function of all was to

allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune.²

Milton's conception of tragedy and his interpretation of the Aristotelian katharsis should be approached in terms of this general view of the function of all poetry.

When Milton defines the function of tragedy in his preface to Samson Agonistes he makes the Aristotelian doctrine of katharsis the basis of his argument. Consequently all discussions on Milton's conception of tragedy have been mainly

1. Studies in Literature (second series), 1922, p.136. The opening sentence of the preface to Samson Agonistes cannot be an affirmation of the absolute superiority of tragedy over all other forms of poetry because (1) by tragedy is here meant 'as it was antiently compos'd' that is, Greek tragedy, and (2) 'all other Poems' may mean all other forms of dramatic poetry. At least this is certain that the superlative is used primarily for affirming the moral power of ancient tragedy. It is extremely improbable that Milton thought the epic he had already produced was inferior to tragedy in that respect.
2. The Reason of Church Government, CM, iii. 238.

an exposition of that controversial dictum in Aristotle's Poetics. This has resulted in a diversion of attention from Milton's view of the end of tragedy to the question as to what could possibly be his interpretation of the Greek idea of katharsis. That Milton seized upon the Aristotelian katharsis as the basis of his ideas on the value of tragedy is evident in three ways. First, ^{on} ~~at~~ ^{title-page} the beginning of his ~~pre-~~ face to Samson Agonistes he quotes Aristotle's statement on katharsis as it is in the sixth section of his Poetics and gives his own Latin translation of it. Secondly, in the very first sentence of the Preface he refers to the same point saying '... therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passiona' Thirdly, the tragedy ends with the line: 'And calm of mind, all passion spent'. And this is sufficient indeed to stimulate and justify an enquiry into a possible Miltonic contribution to one of the vexed problems of Aristotle's theory of tragedy. They have done little to explain what Milton thought about the use of tragedy and vitiated almost all critical approach to the one that he wrote. It seems we have missed a good deal of the intended appeal of Samson Agonistes by treating it as an elaborate gloss on a vexed word in Aristotle's Poetics.

We must bear in mind that Milton introduces the Greek word in his Preface not to explain an important term in the Poetics but to state his own view of the end of tragedy. Secondly, katharsis being itself a term of undetermined meaning in its application to the function of tragedy Milton was free to mean by it whatever he wanted to say on the point. Thirdly, we have the important critical responsibility of explaining Milton's view of tragedy in terms of the tragic drama that he wrote. For when he defines the function of tragedy in the Preface his immediate task is to describe the effect of the tragedy he has written.

We need not, however, assume that what he says about tragedy in the Preface he illustrates in the drama. We cannot rule out the possibility of his critical statement being inconsistent with his literary practice. Nevertheless, since the statement is made in the Preface to a drama we have to consider how far our response to that drama conforms to the tragic effect promised in the Preface and conversely, how far the intention stated in the Preface is fulfilled in the drama. This procedure will be a sensible precaution against our enquiry going astray. Fourthly, and this is particularly important, we must remember that katharsis is only a part of what Milton says about the use of tragedy and that he says a

few other other important things about it.

One of the early editors of the drama has said that the ending of the tragedy exemplifies Milton's view of katharsis as he gets it from Aristotle:

see This moral lesson in the conclusion is very fine and excellently suited the beginning. For Milton had chosen for the motto to this ^a passage out of Aristotle which may show what was his design in writing this tragedy and the sense of which he hath expressed in the Preface that 'tragedy is of power by raising pity and fear or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, etc' and ^{the} he exemplifies here in Manoa and Chorus, after their various agitations of passions, acquiescing in the divine dispensations and thereby inculcating a most instructive lesson to the reader.¹

Obviously the author is here more concerned with the effect on him of what happens in the drama than with what Aristotle must have meant by katharsis. The comment, however, implies a belief that the drama fulfils the intention stated in the Preface. But the fact that this intention is stated with a reference to an Aristotelian dictum seems here unimportant: the editor does not say a word on the Greek theory. Still on one point he is very clear and it is that the calm of mind is produced by a sense of divine justice in human affairs. And this is a fact of experience, of our immediate response to the drama. So if the commentary is critically insufficient

1. Samson Agonistes, ed. Thomas Newton, 1752, p.305.

for not showing the relevance of Milton's statement on katharsis to the process by which this calm of mind is produced it is happily free from the confusion that might have resulted from an attempt at squaring up the effect of the drama with an ancient doctrine.

Later editors, too, have been equally free from the critical worry of explaining that effect in terms of the Aristotelian katharsis. Commenting on the last line of the play H.M. Percival says

This beautiful conclusion has a double application. It refers to the fulfilment of the object of the tragedy, by purging the mind of passion, and to the condition of Milton's own mind after he had fought the good fight of religion and freedom.¹

There is nothing here about the process of the 'purgation' as there is nothing either about what is purged and how. But from the editor's note in the Preface it appears that he believes that Milton's interpretation of katharsis was in a large measure an anticipation of Twining's.²

A.W. Verity on the other hand, thinks that the calm of mind is produced by a religious feeling and yet explains katharsis as a pathological process, and with particular reference to the medical principle of similia similibus curantur. In his note on the last chorus he says:

1. Samson Agonistes, ed. H.M. Percival, 1890, p.198.

2. *ibid.* p.57.

... it should also be true of the audience, that they too are 'purged' *ἢ ἑλέου καὶ φέβου*. What Milton had written in the Preface as to the aim of tragedy he here exemplifies by representing Manoa and the Chorus as submitting resignedly, after doubts and distress of mind, to the decrees of Providence.¹

But in his note on the Preface he explains katharsis in terms of the medical doctrine of similia similibus curantur and refers to Hippocrates, Hahnemann and Paracelsus. And this is confusing in the extreme. For it is, on the face of it, impossible to equate a medical process with the purely moral and religious spirit which is intended to be produced by the drama and which Verity himself sees in it.

In E.K. Chambers's view the ending of Samson Agonistes is not only religious but definitely Christian:

Euripides frequently ends his plays with some remark of the Chorus to the effect of 'Inscrutable are the ways of God'. Milton varies this in the sense of Christian philosophy: 'The ways of God are past finding out, but always for the best'.²

And on Milton's use of katharsis he says that 'it may be illustrated by the closing words of the Chorus'.³ But at the same time he refers to the medical doctrine of similia similibus curantur, and although he is silent about how this may apply to the effect of the drama he suggests that Milton's idea of

1. Samson Agonistes, ed. A.W. Verity, 1892, p.136.

2. Samson Agonistes, ed. E.K. Chambers, 1897, p.110.

3. *ibid.* p.77.

katharsis is different from that of others. It is, moreover, very striking that he does not see any inconsistency in appreciating the drama, as a 'magnificent translation into English of the form and spirit of Greek tragedy'¹ and yet calling its ending Christian. J.C. Collins holds the same confusing view when commenting on the last Chorus he says:

The pious optimism of this grand Chorus is partly no doubt the embodiment of that righteous confidence in God's justice and wisdom which, as a Christian philosopher, he naturally felt; but it is due mainly to the technical exigencies of his work. It is proper for tragedy, when terror and pity have done their work to conclude tranquilly; a principle recognised in the masterpieces of Sophocles and Euripides - Milton's model.²

This curious idea of Samson Agonistes being partly Christian and mainly Greek proceeds mostly from the view that since the play is constructed on the Attic model it is to be judged as another Attic masterpiece. This confusion of most nineteenth century editors lingers in our own days, for instance, in F.A. Patterson who finds in the final Chorus 'the ideal purpose of a Greek drama as developed in the criticism of Aristotle'.³

Most of the editors take it for granted that the effect of Samson Agonistes as it is indicated in the last Chorus

1. *ibid.* p.23.

2. Samson Agonistes, ed. J.C. Collins, 1883, p.94.

3. The Student's Milton, ed. F.A. Patterson, 1930, Notes, p. 94.

answers to Milton's definition of katharsis in the Preface. And while almost all of them see that the 'calm of mind' results from a moral or even a religious feeling none seem to realise that there is some critical difficulty in equating that feeling with what katharsis alone, even as Milton defines it, could mean. This indifference to an important critical task may be ascribed to two basic assumptions regarding the drama. First, that it is by intention and in result Greek both in form and spirit, and, secondly, that it fulfils the purpose of Greek tragedy as it is defined by Aristotle in his doctrine of katharsis which Milton reproduces in his Preface. No enquiry into Milton's idea of the function of tragedy can be worthwhile unless we discard these two assumptions.

Some commentators on Aristotle's Poetics, on the other hand, give Milton the credit of being one of the earliest to understand the meaning of the Aristotelian katharsis. The first to give a pathological interpretation of Aristotle's katharsis and to affirm that Milton held the same view was Thomas Twining who said:

I cannot omit to observe that the short explanation given by MILTON, in the introduction to Samson Agonistes, appears to coincide exactly, as far as it goes, with my idea of the passage.¹

1. Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry, 1789, p.241.

The point was elaborated in a pamphlet on the Poetics by Jacob Bernays published in 1857.¹ Bernays said that by katharsis Aristotle meant a pathological process and that Milton had seized Aristotle's meaning in his Preface to Samson Agonistes. And S.H. Butcher who does not fully accept Bernays's pathological interpretation of katharsis has a similar regard for Milton as an interpreter of the Greek term:

It is worth noting, as has been pointed out by Bernays, and before him by Twining, that Milton had already apprehended something of the true import of Aristotle's words.²

Neither Jacob Bernays nor S.H. Butcher found any discrepancy between the meaning of Milton's katharsis-clause in the Preface and that of the last four lines of the Chorus. And they did not show how a purely pathological view of the kathartic process could be applied to the obviously moral calm with which the play ends.

It was A.O. Pickard who for the first time said that the Preface explains one aspect of the tragic katharsis and the last Chorus shows another:

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1. Republished in Zwei Abhandlungden über die Aristotelische Theorie des Drama, Berlin, 1880. See S.H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 1951, p.244. The first edition of this work appeared in 1894.
 2. Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 1951, p.247. The same view of katharsis was given by H. Weil in 1847 in a paper read at the Philological Congress of Bâle and reprinted in Verhandlungen der zehnten Versammlung deutscher Philologen in Basel, pp.131-141. See Butcher, pp.244-245.

It is then remarkable to find that our own Milton, who was a diligent student of the Poetics and of its Italian Commentators, has expressed so much of the true sense in his Preface to Samson Agonistes.

And commenting on the concluding lines of the play he said:

if the words of the Preface seemed to sketch out the merely physical view of the purgative power of tragedy which we found in the Politics, these lines supply that requirement of greatness and nobility in the sufferings, which can never have been wanting in Milton's thought.¹

So A.O. Pickard at least recognises that the last lines of the play speak of a state of mind which cannot be explained in terms of a pathological katharsis. He however does not say anything about how the physical purgation mentioned in the katharsis-clause of the Preface could be either a part or a necessary pre-condition of the sense of 'greatness and nobility' produced by the last Chorus. Here again important critical issues are ignored or are not as much as seen owing to a basic assumption that Milton rightly enunciated the Aristotelian doctrine in the Preface and that the play was a true example of that doctrine. And even when there is a feeling, such as we find in A.O. Prickard, that the play accomplishes more than what is intended by the katharsis-clause in the Preface there is no critical concern about the surplus.

Supporting the view of Twining and Bernays J.E. Spingarn :

1. Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, 1891, pp.42-43.

said

According to this interpretation of the katharsis, tragedy is a mode of homoeopathic treatment, effecting the cure of one emotion by means of a similar one; and we find Milton, in the Preface to Samson Agonistes, explaining the katharsis in much the same manner.

But Spingarn too does not say anything about how the pathological interpretation of katharsis could be consistent with the moral aim of tragedy. Spingarn's commentary involves a hiatus between the view of Aristotelian katharsis and the view of the function of tragedy as a whole and the assumption that Milton followed the Italian view of purgation has necessarily led him to a confusing conclusion.

Like Milton, Minturno conceived of tragedy as having an ethical aim; but both Milton and Minturno clearly perceived that by katharsis Aristotle had reference not to a moral, but to an emotional effect.¹

It was however, Ingram Bywater, who gave the greatest honour to Milton as an interpreter of the Aristotelian katharsis and consequently produced the greatest confusion for the critics of Samson Agonistes. Bywater fully accepted Bernays's pathological interpretation and gave Milton the credit of being one of the precursors of that interpretation:

All who have studied the history of the katharsis controversy are aware that Milton has to be recognised as one of the precursors of Weil and Bernays and that a pathological interpretation of Katharsis

1. Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, New York, 1954, pp.80-81. The work was first published in 1899.

is implied in the well-known passage which forms the opening of the Preface to Samson Agonistes.

Explaining the point he further says:

The great interest it has for us is in the evidence it supplies that in Milton's view the Aristotelian *κάθαρσις τραγημάτων* was to be conceived as analogous to a bodily process, that the term was borrowed from medicine rather than religion, and that it meant 'purgatio' in its medical sense, and not, as Heinsius and Goulston had supposed, in its ceremonial sense of 'lustratio' or 'expiatio', in other words that a great poet found no difficulty in accepting the initial assumption of the pathological interpretation of *κάθαρσις* and did not regard it as unworthy of Aristotle or beneath the dignity of Tragedy.¹

This estimate of Milton as a discerning interpreter of Aristotle's katharsis has been a strong influence on the criticism of Samson Agonistes since 1900. Referring to Bywater's article W.R. Parker says

in placing a pathological interpretation upon katharsis Milton not only stood almost alone in his time, but also anticipated, by nearly two hundred years, the generally accepted conclusions of modern scholarship on the problem.

This high estimate of Milton's capacities in the field of Aristotelian exegesis led W.R. Parker to make such puzzling statements as: 'The play seems to me an obvious attempt to bring about katharsis'. As though the whole purpose of writing Samson Agonistes was to exemplify a well-understood

1. 'Milton and the Aristotelian Definition of Tragedy', JP, 1900, xxvii. 267-268. That Bywater was influenced by the ideas of Jacob Bernays is evident from his correspondence with the German scholar printed in W.W. Jackson, Ingram Bywater, 1917, pp.102-105.

classical formula. No less puzzling is the remark that 'the ending of Samson Agonistes is more than Miltonic, it is Aristotelian, it is Greek'.¹

J.H. Hanford, too, gives a similar view of Milton's formulation of katharsis of which he thinks the play itself is an example:

He elaborates the homeopathic theory of Minturno in the prefatory statement Finally, he alludes to the doctrine both directly and by implication, in the play.

He admits that

by representing a clearly marked triumph of the human will over its own weakness, and by the substitution of Providence for blind fate as the power which over-rules the action, Samson Agonistes provides material for a different understanding of catharsis from that contemplated by Aristotle.²

But this, he says would be taking a superficial view of the drama. He thinks with Tillyard that in Samson Agonistes there is a tragic sense of waste which bursts through the consolatory words of Manoa and the choric statement of the 'calm of mind'. Still on the whole the consensus of critical opinion on Milton's idea of katharsis is that it is truly Aristotelian. The opinion has been affirmed in a recent commentary on the Poetics where katharsis is defined as an

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1. Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, 1937, pp.68-70. Parker dealt with the Greek spirit in Samson Agonistes in an article published in Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, 1935, xx.
 2. John Milton, Englishman, 1950, p. 258.

'emotional balance and equilibrium ... a state of emotional health' and where Milton is said to have put 'forward in his Preface to Samson Agonistes the same view'.¹

The result of such estimation of Milton as a true Aristotelian in his interpretation of katharsis has been that Samson Agonistes is either admired as a good example of tragedy defined in the Poetics or its author is criticised for his misconception of the art. An instance of the latter view of Milton is provided by F.L. Lucas who says:

And if we could go down to the dead and question the great dramatists of the past what Tragedy meant to them, they would give us some one answer, some another; but would any single one of them except Milton perhaps, echo Aristotle.²

So if Bywater saw that Milton knew what Aristotle meant by tragedy F.L. Lucas saw that Milton did not know what tragedy actually was or ever ought to be.

Only one scholar has so far expressed doubt about the truth of Bywater's proposition and although she has not given any definite view of her own, she has however, done one important service to the study of Samson Agonistes by pointing out that it would be a mistake to link up Milton's interpretations of the term given by the Italian critics of the

1. Humphry House, Aristotle's Poetics, 1956, p.110.

2. Tragedy, 1928, p.28.

Renaissance. Commenting on Spingarn's view¹ that Milton followed Minturno's pathological interpretation she says:

It is unsafe to argue from this harmony with Minturno that Milton had merely found in the commentaries of the Italians a consistent interpretation of catharsis which he forthwith adopted. He must either have chosen for his own one of the various interpretations, or from a selection of their elements, constructed what seemed to him a unified or proper concept.²

Here we have at least a suggestion that we may not get at the Miltonic conception of the function of tragedy by looking for its basis in some well-known formula of Italian criticism.

Thus most editors of Samson Agonistes and influential commentators on it have concentrated on what they call Milton's pathological interpretation of katharsis and have been less careful in ascertaining Milton's view of tragedy than in showing that the katharsis of the Preface is a genuinely Aristotelian stuff. For a fuller enquiry into the subject we have to consider the Preface as a whole, the drama itself, and all other statements of Milton in his other works which may have some bearing on the question.

By the pathological interpretation of katharsis we mean a view of katharsis according to which the whole end of tragedy is to purge the mind of passions as medicine purges the human

1. J. E. Spingarn, Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, 1899, pp. 79-80.
2. Ida Langdon, Milton's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 1924, p. 91.

system of undesirable humours. In a sense this may be called a moral interpretation too. For the purgation of passions may be said to produce a healthy state of mind which alone can be conducive to virtue. But the critics who give a pathological interpretation of katharsis do not concern themselves with its ultimate moral purpose. To them katharsis itself is the sole end of tragedy. A tragic drama in their view removes the pain of passion by contriving a means of indulgence in it. In Bywater's view the pathological interpretation proper was first given by Scaino. He says that it was overlooked by Riccoboni, Beni etc. till it was elaborately stated by Tarquinio Galluzzi in a work published in Rome in 1621.¹ He also mentions that Galluzzi was the Rector of the Greek College at Rome during Milton's visit to Italy.

There are two ways of connecting the idea of a pathological katharsis with the moral end of tragedy. We can either say that the kathartic effect is identical with the moral effect in the sense that a mind free from passions is a moral mind; or we can say that the purgation of passions helps the growth of the moral temper. According to the first

1. Tarquinii Gallutii Sabini Societate Iesu Virgilianae Vindicaciones & Commentarii tres de Tragoedia Comoedia Elegia. Bywater quotes the relevant passages from this work and the work of Scaino entitled La Politica di Aristotilde ridotta in medo di Parafrasi dal Rev. Antonio Scaino da salo published in Rome in 1578. See 'Milton and the Aristotelian Definition of Tragedy', JP, 1900, xxvii. 270-273.

view the whole purpose of tragedy is to create, through elimination of passions, a kind of psychic vacuum which would be not different from the Bud^dhist Nirvana: according to the second view katharsis is only a means to a higher end which is produced by the tragedy itself and that end is none other than creating a sense of moral elevation.

That katharsis in the pathological sense is not what Milton means by the end of tragedy is evident from the first line of the Preface and the last line of the drama. It is confirmed by all that the Preface says and all that the drama does. And moreover it is confirmed by Milton's conception of the end of poetry as he states it in his prose works. The moral force of tragedy mentioned in the Preface is the 'new acquist of true experience from this great event'. 'The calm of mind' is not the result of the elimination of passions through a pathological process. It is the result of a new experience acquired from a great event - the wisdom such as is spoken of in Ecclesiasticus:

All the works of the Lord are exceeding good,
 And every command shall be accomplished in his season.
 None can say, what is this? wherefore is that?
 For in his season they shall all be sought out.¹

That this is the whole substance of the wisdom which produces the 'calm of mind' is shown by what else is said in the Chorus:

1. XXXIX. 16-17.

All is best, though we oft doubt,
 What th'unsearchable dispose
 Of highest wisdom brings about,
 And evcr best found in the close
 Oft he seems to hide his face,
 But unexpectedly returns
 And to his faithful Champion hath in place
 Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns
 And all that band them to resist
 His uncontrollable intent;
 His servants hee with new acquist
 Of true experience from this great event
 With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
 And calm of mind all passion spent.¹

This is the revelation of the drama, the 'true experience' that emerges out of much suffering and much questioning. The Chorus which had once questioned the justice of God and asked:

God of our Fathers, what is man!
 That thou towards him with hand so various,
 Or might I say contrarious,²

now finds an explanation of the suffering it has so long lamented. The feeling of the last Chorus is that of Job when he answered the Lord:

I knew that thou canst do all things,
 And that no purpose of thine can be restrained.
 Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge?
 Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not,
 Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.³

After all its doubts and despairs it now gets the assurance 'And there shall be night no more'. 'It is good' said St.

1. SA, 1745-1758.
2. SA, 667-669.
3. xlii. 2-3.

Paul 'that the heart be established by grace'.¹ 'The calm of mind' at the end of Samson Agonistes is this stability of the heart gained through a revelation of grace. To miss this is to miss the whole power of the drama as Milton conceived it, the lesson of the fable is what we have at the end of the Book of Hosea: 'the ways of the Lord are right and the just shall walk in them'.² And this is the purport of Paradise Lost and of Paradise Regained as well. In Milton's view the end of all poetry was to produce this faith. It is significant that when Milton speaks of the moral force of poetry he also speaks of some purging of the mind of disturbing thoughts and emotions. ~~'These abilities ... are of power ... to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune.'~~ What Milton says in the Preface to Samson Agonistes about purging 'the mind of those and such like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure' is a restatement of what he has said in The Reason of Church Government about the allaying of 'the perturbations of the mind' and setting 'the affections in right tune'. We need not assume that in The Reason of Church Government and in the Preface to Samson Agonistes he was making a conscious effort

1. Hebrews, xiii. 9.

2. xiv. 9.

3. ~~The Reason of Church Government, CM, 111. 236.~~

at fitting in the classical formula of katharsis with his views on the function of poetry. And when he mentions the classical formula in the Preface he is explaining his own view of tragedy in terms of a known idea. And our first enquiry should be into his idea of tragedy and in the process see what use he was making of that old idea. In doing so we must bear in mind that the doctrine of katharsis is not clearly defined in Aristotle and that the Italians interpreted in many ways. And this gives Milton the freedom to give his own meaning to it.

If katharsis is found to have no bearing whatsoever on the moral effect of the drama the katharsis-clause in the Preface has to be considered as an altogether irrelevant insertion of a classical formula which just came handy in a Puritan's excuse for writing a tragic play. And it will be a clumsy excuse indeed - a pointless mixture of puritanism and pedantry. The author of Samson Agonistes was not in need of such excuse. The play was the thing and he knew it. It is possible the Preface was a defence, but certainly Milton knew his purpose too well to have to invent a specious argument for making it. And it is improbable that for such argument he should have resorted to a doctrine without being sure of its relevance. He knew that Tragedy aroused passions, but

there is nothing in the Preface to show that he thought it purged passions only by arousing them or that the purging of emotions was its only end. If purgation of emotions like those of pity, fear or terror was all that tragedy was to accomplish and if, moreover, it could purge them merely by exciting them then the story of a Roman gladiator eaten up by a lion would do the work as well. But tragedy excites pity and fear in a special way and to a special purpose. That purpose Milton says is to temper and reduce them to just measure, and the means of doing it 'is a kind of delight stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated'. Even admitting that in interpreting these words there is a danger of reading too many things in them which Milton perhaps did not mean I think they deserve a close analysis in their bearing on the purport of the Preface.

The sense of the katharsis clause in the Preface is that tragedy produces a proper disposition of mind by presenting a proper disposition of events, that is, it creates a significant attitude to life by presenting life in a significant way. Its effect is powerful because what it says comes home to our mind through the 'true experience' of a great event. The passions are well imitated when they create this experience; the delight that is stirred up is the result of this experience.

The passions are reduced to just measure when this delight of a true experience has occurred. The pathological process of a sheer elimination of passions by arousing them can have nothing to do with this 'true experience' nor can we argue that this true experience is made possible by such purgation. For the purged mind which Milton calls 'calm of mind, all passions spent' is itself the result of this 'true experience' In Milton's view, then, tragedy has to arouse the passions only to take the reader through the reality of suffering by which alone could its significance be shown. It is not suffering itself which negates suffering; it is the moral substance of suffering, the reassuring truth that it bears on its front which brings about the mental calm. Of this end of poetry Milton speaks when referring to Aristotle's Poetics and its Italian commentators he speaks of 'what Religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of Poetry, both in divine and human things'.¹ And we must remember that we are not here concerned with what Aristotle or Castelvetro meant by katharsis, but with what Milton thought they meant by it. How correctly he interpreted the classical and the neo-classical doctrines is another enquiry.

But how are we then to explain the second sentence of the

1. Of Education, CM, iv. 286.

Preface in which by way of illustrating the process of purification Milton says:

Nor is nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion; for so in physic things of melancholy hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours?

What Milton meant by purging of passions by arousing them was nothing more than the idea that suffering which resulted from passions could be overcome in any way only when it was experienced. And he explained the process through an analogy which was the medical metaphor of the Italian commentators on the Poetics. It is not his definition of the whole purpose of tragedy; it only indicates part of the process through which a tragic experience becomes a moral experience. For we must remember that Milton first speaks of the ancient reputation of tragedy as the 'gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems' and then adds 'therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions And in the Preface it is a rationale for writing a tragedy which will teach not by preaching but by depicting a morally significant action. The wisdom of tragedy is the same as the wisdom of the Law. But it comes upon the reader or the spectator in a special way and with a special power because

it comes through the doors of suffering. Of this wisdom Milton speaks in the third sentence of the Preface where by way of further elaborating the moral power of tragedy he says:

Hence philosophers and other gravest writers, as Cicero, Plutarch, and others, frequently cite out of tragic poets, both to adorn and illustrate their discourses.

The pathological metaphor, therefore does not indicate all that tragedy is expected to do. It only indicates an important point of difference between the pulpit and the stage, between the spoken word of the law and the force of that law as seen through an action. And it is significant that Milton employs such medical analogy in his observations on moral teaching. Speaking on the way of removing the evil of malice from the human mind he says in The Reason of Church Government that:

Two heads of evil he has to cope with, ignorance and malice Against the latter with all the branches thereof He on the contrary, beginning at the prime causes and roots of the disease, sends in those divine ingredients of most cleansing power to the soul, Admonition and Reproof; besides which two there is no drug or antidote that can reach to purge the mind, and without which all other experiments are but vain, unlesse by accident.¹

In the same book he says that in ancient times philosophy was an effective means of purging the mind of all that was undesirable:

1. CM, 111. 264.

Therefore God, to the intent of further healing mans deprav'd mind, to this power of the Magistrate, which contents it self with the restraint of evil doing in the external man, added that which we call censure, to purge it and remove it clean out the inmost soul. In the beginning this authority seems to have bin plac't, as all both civil and religious rites once were, only in each father of family, afterwards among the heathen, in the wise men and Philosophers of the age.¹

That Milton does not distinguish the moral effect of the pulpit from that of the stage is also evident from the same work:

whether this may not be, not only in Pulpits, but after another persuasive method, at set and solemn Paneguries, in Theaters, porches, or what other place or way may win most upon the people to receive at once both recreation and instruction, let them in authority consult.²

So the idea of purgation is not in Milton a pathological process of expelling passions from the mind by raising them. It is related with the ultimate purpose of moral instruction. The tragic purgation follows from a sense of the moral law and of divine justice which the tragic spectacle creates. And Milton would say the same thing of comedy in which the laughter is, almost in the Bergsonian sense, a kind of moral criticism:

For a Satyr as it was borne out of a Tragedy, so ought to resemble his parentage, to strike high,

1. CM, 111. 256.

2. CM, 111. 240.

and adventure dangerously at the most eminent
vices among the greatest persons¹

We can imagine that if Milton were to enunciate a formula of comic purgation it would have been not a theory of purging the sense of disdain by evoking that sense, as Bywater thinks Aristotle would have propounded in his promised book on comedy,² but one of countering the evil in human conduct with the power of a moral disapproval. Dealing with Milton's use of the medical metaphor of purgation we should be careful enough to see that it is only a metaphor which explains a part or an aspect of his whole proposition and does not stand squarely for the proposition itself. In a An Apology for Smeectymnuus, he uses the metaphor in a way which may lead to such misreading. Justifying the use of biting words in a Satire he says: 'when as anger thus freely vented spends it selfe, ere it break out into action'.³ Now this could never mean for Milton that the whole end of a harsh satire was to cure the distemper of the bilious. He only wanted to say that the severe criticism of a satire was after all a less violent act than a physical attack.

Now we have to ask the question as to how far this moral view of katharsis could be accepted as the Greek or Aristotelian

1. An Apology for Smeectymnuus, CM, iii. 329.
2. Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, 1909, p.152.
3. CM, iii. 321.

view. Secondly, we have to judge if the function of Greek tragedy, as we understand it today could be the same as the function of Milton's tragedy. As to the Greek theory of katharsis our basis is the katharsis-clause in the Poetics which has been supposed to be Aristotle's full definition of tragedy. For such supposition, I think, there is no ground. It is only a statement on a particular aspect of the total working of tragedy, an important aspect, or mode of operation, and not its very essence. For if in Aristotle's view the whole purpose of tragedy was but to effect a therapeutic purgation of undesirable emotions by just arousing them what should we mean by his statement that 'poetry is more philosophical than history'? The pathological view of katharsis is inconsistent with the idea of the philosophical value of poetry unless we were to mean that katharsis is not the end of tragedy but only a factor in its modus operandi there being other and more important factors in it.

And since there is no way of knowing how Aristotle would have elucidated katharsis and shown its relevance to an understanding of the value of tragedy our interpretations are liable to proceed from untenable hypothesis. Against such danger Bosanquet warned us when he said:

a rough and ready interpretation of his terms, by merely converting them into their current equivalents, will

certainly at times lead us astray.¹

And the danger here is, in fact, twofold. While we may take Aristotle's terms too literally we may as well read into them a meaning which Aristotle did not intend. The importance of the Poetics is in some significant variety of its suggestiveness and this alone has kept it alive through the centuries. Milton found in the katharsis-clause a helpful suggestion for a clear definition of the end of tragedy and read into it a meaning which he thought was Aristotle's meaning as well. In my view there is nothing in the Poetics which would be inconsistent with Milton's conception of katharsis. What Aristotle actually meant by it we have no means of knowing today. But what Milton means by it is a fair deduction from the Greek doctrine. And even if we are to assume that Milton was inclined to one or more of the Italian interpretations of katharsis we will only find another support for the moral significance that he gives to it. For the more important Italian commentaries of the Poetics are concerned with an ethical basis for the idea of tragic purification. The Italian commentators like Minturno and Scaliger tried to find an ethical significance in katharsis but failed to devise a consistent formula. In my view Milton succeeded

1. B. Bosanquet, History of Aesthetic, 1892, p.58.

where the Italian critics failed. In fact Milton's main task was not to explain the Aristotelian katharsis: it was so in the case of the Italian critics. The Preface to Samson Agonistes is a statement of his own view of tragedy and the last Chorus, in so far as it has a bearing on his conception of katharsis, is, similarly, an expression of his own view of it. If we leave Aristotle out of it all his view is simple and consistent. Katharsis, in Milton's view, and in the view of Aristotle as Milton understood it, was a process which made the fulfilment of the moral purpose of tragedy possible. It does not follow from this that katharsis as such is the accomplishment of that moral purpose. It is not purgation of pity and fear which represents the whole power of tragedy: it is, much rather, a tragic purgation, that is, the purgation such as tragedy alone can effect in a special way which is important to Milton. And of this tragic katharsis Milton says in the third part of the opening sentence in the Preface: 'to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those emotions well imitated'. Here too we face the danger of reading into Milton's words more than what he meant. But a measure of safety is guaranteed by the fact that Milton's statement, though brief, is more systematic and coherent than the bare clause in

the Poetics where the kathartic process is not directly related to a moral purpose. In Milton's Preface the statement of the moral power of tragedy is followed by a statement on katharsis which is elucidated by a medical analogy. And it is significant that Milton comes back to the moral power of tragedy in his third sentence. We cannot, therefore, ignore Milton's conception of the moral effect of tragedy however difficult it may be to integrate it with his or Aristotle's idea of katharsis. But unless we assume that Milton introduced the katharsis-clause just by way of respecting an important topos of classical poetics, and this would be an improper assumption to make in regard to Milton, we must see how far it can be made to bear upon the moral effect of tragedy.

So it is not the purgation which creates the delight: it is the delight which effects the purgation. And if there is any key in the Preface to Milton's theory of tragedy it is in this statement. When we keep in mind delight and purgation in their proper sequence we cannot argue that in Milton's view the end of tragedy is the pleasurable relief from passion suggested by the pathological interpretation of katharsis. We might as well call it the 'restorative delight' although it is an expression in a speech of Satan.¹ It is happiness

1. PR, 11. 73.

born of reconciliation to suffering which means a comprehension of its moral good. Tragedy repairs the mind by breaking its weaker parts; it gives happiness through a proper representation of suffering.

The moral end of tragedy, therefore, is determined by the process through which it is achieved. The mind is purged of passions not because it has first been excited: it is purged because it has been taken through significant experiences. Tragedy, he says, produces the calm of mind by tempering and ordering our affections into a proper moral disposition. We seem to be chary of seeing Milton's moral view of literature for fear of making him look like too much of a didactic Puritan. But we cannot, on the other hand, ignore the fact that whenever Milton speaks of poetry he speaks of its spiritual and moral end.

Katharsis in a moral sense could then be the end of tragedy as Milton conceived it. But it is katharsis effected in a particular way, that is through a proper fable and to a particular purpose. Of this relation between the theme and the effect of poetry there is an indication in The Reason of Church Government. After defining the function of poetry as 'allaying the perturbations of the mind' Milton mentions the themes which would best fulfil that function:

to sing the victorious agonies of Martyrs and Saints, the deeds and triumphs of just Nations, *ambitious* doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of Kingdoms and States from justice and Gods true worship.¹

The whole passage has an important bearing on Milton's conception of tragedy and read with the draft of his literary projects in the Cambridge Manuscript would tell a good deal about what Milton meant by katharsis.

The jottings on projected dramas in the Cambridge Manuscript are particularly important for an enquiry into Milton's idea of drama. For one thing they show that the ending of Samson Agonistes was the kind of ending Milton intended for any drama that he might compose. The last words in the jottings on the first two dramas are 'Faith, Hope, Charity'. The third draft too ends on a similar note:

Faith, Hope, Charity comfort him and instruct him
[Adam]; Chorus briefly concludes.

The fourth draft 'Adam unparadised' is concluded in the same way: 'He repents, gives God the glory, submits to his penalty'. The draft of 'Abram from Morea' or 'Isaac Redeemed' ends thus:

At length a servant sent from Abram relates the truth, and last he himself comes in with a great Train of Melchizedek whose shepherds being secret eye witnesses of all passages had related to thir master, and he conducted his friend Abraham home with joy.

1. CM, lli. 238.

The draft of 'Sodom' is equally significant:

then calling to the thunders lightnings & fires
 he bids them heare the call & command of God to
 come & destroy a godlesse nation he brings them
 down with some short warning to all other nations
 to take heed.

The last sentence of the draft of 'Moabitides or Phineas' is:
 'After all arguments drivn home then the word of the Lord may
 be brought, acquitting & approving Phineas'.¹ So the more
 important of the projected plays were to end on a note of
 hope and faith, justifying the ways of God to man. And the
 'calm of mind' of Samson Agonistes is calm produced by a return
 of faith after one has been 'greatly moved'. God redeems the
 faithful champion when His people realize the faith such as is
 declared in the last verse of Wisdom of Solomon which too is a
 declaration of faith in God's solicitude for his chosen people:

For in all things, O Lord, thou didst magnify thy people,
 And thou didst glorify them and not lightly regard them;
 Standing by their side in every time and place.

Milton's conception of katharsis has to be interpreted in
 terms of this calm of mind proceeding from a sight of the law
 in human travail. We seem to have missed this profoundly
 spiritual power of Milton's drama in our desire to make of it
 yet another Greek tragedy written by seventeenth-century
 English classicist. I do not know any Greek drama which

1. CM, xviii. 231-235.

anticipates the spirit of Samson Agonistes although I could well imagine that an Athenian dramatist would have produced a play of this kind if he had known the mysteries that St. John saw in the island of Patmos and could ever comprehend the piety and the faith such as we find in the Revelation.

The Judaic Christian spirit of Samson Agonistes was first explained by Sir Richard Jebb in an article in which he said that the drama was Hellenic in structure but Hebraic in content. Drawing a well-argued contrast between Hellenism and Hebraism Sir Richard said

when a man with this bent of thought selected as the subject for a poem an episode of Hebrew history, the treatment of the subject was sure to be genuinely Hebraic. It would be needless to point out how, or how thoroughly, the spirit of the Samson Agonistes is the spirit of Hebraism. Samson is the champion of the Israelites against the Philistines. Jehovah is the God of Israelites; Dagon is the protecting deity of the Philistines. Samson, through disloyalty to himself, has been permitted to fall into the hand of the idolaters; and Israel shares in his humiliation. Yet, even in the abasement, Samson is confident that the Lord of Hosts will finally assert His own majesty against the idol. This confidence is justified: the honour of the true God and his chosen people are vindicated by the catastrophe which punishes the weakness, as it closes the penance, of His individual minister. This is the issue of the drama - Jehovah has prevailed over Dagon; Israel is avenged on Philistia.¹

1. Sir Richard Jebb 'Samson Agonistes and Hellenic Drama' Proceedings of the British Academy 1908, iii. 4. Sir Richard does not mention Wordsworth's interesting opinions on the Hebraic spirit of Samson Agonistes: 'When he wrote that (Samson Agonistes), his mind was Hebraized. Indeed, his genius fed on the writings of the Hebrew prophets. This arose, in some degree, from the temper of the times; the Puritan lived in the Old Testament, almost to the exclusion of the New', Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, ed. N.C. Smith, 1905, pp.257-258.

But this masterly analysis of the Hebraic spirit of the fable misses the unique quality of the action of the play which more than anything else distinguishes it from Greek tragedy. And the special significance of what we may call the katharsis of Samson Agonistes is the direct result of this peculiarity of its action. And if the action of a drama by which we mean the disposition and sequence of its incidents determine the nature of its structure or form we cannot say that Samson Agonistes is Greek in this respect either. When Sir Richard Jebb argues that the play has a beginning, a middle and an end he has in mind the pattern of action in a Greek tragedy to which the action of Samson Agonistes does not really conform. Sir Richard has made a fine argument against Dr. Johnson's stricture that in Samson Agonistes 'the intermediate parts have neither cause nor sequence, neither hasten nor retard the catastrophe'.¹ And in fact his analysis of the plot or action of the drama is today the basis of all reply to Dr. Johnson's criticism. Yet it is an argument which is no less misleading than the view which it seeks to refute. For what Dr. Johnson perceived as a fault in Milton's plot-construction is the very quality which makes the play un-Hellenic and Hebraic.

Sir Richard argues that the interview of Manoa, Dalila and Harapha constitute the 'middle of the play and lead to the

1. Lives of the English Poets, ed. G.B. Hill, 1905, i. 189.

catastrophe:

The catastrophe, let it be observed, consists in Samson deliberately pulling down the temple of Dagon on his own head and those of the spectators. Samson's will is the agent of the catastrophe. Everything, therefore, which helps to determine Samson's will and to define his purpose leads to the catastrophe.

And then commenting on the special but not un-Greek nature of the action Sir Richard says:

Surely, then, it cannot be said, as Dr. Johnson says, that the action of the drama makes no progress between the opening and the close. The action is indeed, a still action, because the force which is to produce the catastrophe is the inward force of Samson's own despair, not an external necessarily pressing upon him. Precisely the same is the case in the Prometheus vincitus of Aeschylus, a drama, consisting...of a series of interviews!

Most editors of Samson Agonistes and Milton scholars like Bailey, Tillyard, Grierson, Hanford, Parker and others have followed the same line of argument in showing that Samson Agonistes has a 'middle'. But the action of the drama is altogether different in its nature from that of any Greek tragedy. The whole argument of Sir Richard Jebb is that the three interviews rouse Samson from a state of lassitude and inactivity and warm him up into a heroic mood. W.P. Ker stressed the same point when he said

The action of the drama between the beginning and the end is the passion of Samson, beginning in the mood of affliction and remorse, turning more and more into

1. 'Samson Agonistes and Hellenic Drama', p.2.

deliberate valour. The action is in the change of mind leading on to the final victory.¹

This seems plausible and if we were at all to satisfy ourselves that Samson Agonistes has a 'middle' such as all well-constructed dramas must have this would be our only argument. But we shall miss the right appeal of the drama in our effort to prove that it has the right kind of dramatic action. For the power of the drama is not in a physical movement in which one human action or mood leads, by an obvious law of causation to another human action or mood. Of such movement there is nothing in Samson Agonistes. Samson does not prepare himself for any action and there is nothing in the three episodes which directly or indirectly prepares him for it. He does not direct his will to any act: his only will is the will to suffer. And if we are to look for an action in the drama we are to find it in the suffering. The whole effort of Samson from beginning to end is an effort to bear his misery with understanding, to receive it through all the pores of his physical and mental being as a just decree of Heaven. The

1. The Art of Poetry, 1923, p.65. H.J.C. Grierson holds the same view of the action of Samson Agonistes when he says: 'In each of the incidents which follow, the encounter with his wife, the challenge to the boastful Harapha, we see him growing more and more his old self till the summons to appear before the Philistine lords arrives.' And he thinks that the drama 'is not only Greek in spirit and construction but it has something of the French movement along one line to the catastrophe'. Criticism and Creation, 1949, pp.20-21.

three interviews add to that misery and he meets it by an increasing capacity for bearing it. The whole drama is a spectacle of an awful agony of repentance leading to an awful forgiveness. Dr. Johnson called Samson Agonistes a poor drama because he missed the tremendous power of this redemptive suffering when the recompense of misery comes from a capacity for facing it with fortitude. And those of us who have tried to redeem the play from the unjust stricture of the Doctor have been no more responsive to the unique feature of its action. Dr. Johnson was at least consistent in ignoring the action of the play as he, in fact, ignored the play itself when he said that it was a 'tragedy which Ignorance has admired, and Bigotry applauded'.¹ But those who have refuted his charge have done so in the wrong way. For the action of Samson Agonistes is neither physical nor psychological. If we are to give it a name by way of defining it we can call it a moral action which consists in a deliberate surrender of the will to the will of God. The whole drama of Samson Agonistes is the drama of this pain, of the will to suffer and to atone. And the fulfilment of Samson's mission results from this atonement. Therefore the connection between the three interviews and the final act of the hero is not one of physical

1. The Rambler no. 139, see Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. A. Murphy, 1810, v. 436.

causation in the sense of a sequence of events occurring in space and time. The dénouement comes as a miracle of the divine will which could be understood on the human plane as God's grace visiting a soul purified by repentance. Milton thought there was a great drama in a tale of such suffering leading to redemption, of a self-surrender bringing self-fulfilment. And he thought there was a tragedy too, the tragedy of deserved suffering humbly borne. And the dramatic interest of the story is in the element of surprise in Samson's unexpected decision to go to the Philistine feast there to fulfil his divine mission. When he agrees to do the bidding of his captors he is not animated by any sense of desperation caused by the three interviews. In fact he does not know what he is doing. In his will to suffer he did not know what reward the suffering would bring. Now in his will to act he is equally in the dark as to the exact issue of his action. The situation is tense with the mystery of some divine purpose of which Samson has but a very vague premonition.

Manoa, Dalila, and Harapha, therefore, do not contribute to the action by way of rousing Samson to a heroic and active state of mind. Their importance in the drama is that they give Samson a full comprehension of his misery and show his capacity for bearing it with patience. He rejects Dalila's

offer of intercession not because he has already rejected his father's proposal for a ransom. In both acts as in his defiance of Harapha he is prompted by the same will to suffer and to expiate. And the three episodes are dramatically important because they bring out Samson's capacity for doing his penance. When the officer asks him to come to the feast he has a sense

Of strength, again returning with my hair
After my great transgression.¹

He has already turned down Manoa's proposal for ransom, has dismissed Dalila with a harsh rebuff and has bravely repudiated Harapha. Yet he does not act and has no knowledge of how he can act at all. But of one thing he is now certain To obey the commands of the Philistine lords would be a fresh act of transgression and would call for yet more repentance:

If I obey then,
I do it freely; venturing to displease
God for the fear of Man, and Man preferr,
Set God behind: which in his jealousie
Shall never, unrepented, find forgiveness.

This is a turning-point in the plot. Samson will not transgress again and he has a feeling that God's purpose may yet be fulfilled through him:

Yet that he may dispense with me or thee
Present in Temples at Idolatrous Rites
For some important cause, thou needst not doubt.²

1. SA, 1355-1356.

2. SA, 1372-1379.

This return of faith results from the fulness of Samson's atonement. And this Milton has shown with a fine dramatic skill. He does not make Samson challenge Harapha or the officer and proceed to the feast in the conviction that he is now strong enough to wreak vengeance on the Philistines. He, on the other hand makes his hero wait on the will of God with patience and humility. And the three episodes which we call the 'middle' of the play show Samson in the exercise of this patience which ultimately earns him God's forgiveness and grace. Of this patience the Chorus speaks at the end of the fourth episode:

But patience is more oft the exercise
Of Saints, the trial of thir fortitude,
Making them each his own Deliverer,
And victor over all
That tyrannie or fortune can inflict.¹

The Chorus speaks of another power as well which works

When God into the hands of thir deliverer
Puts invincible might
.....
Hee all thir Ammunition
And feats of Warr defeats
With plain Heroic magnitude of mind
And celestial vigour armd.²

But Samson is not to show such 'heroic magnitude of mind'.

As the Chorus says

... but sight bereav'd
May chance to number thee with those
Whom Patience finally must crown.³

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1. SA, 1287-1291.
 2. SA, 1270-1280.
 3. SA, 1294-1296.

Samson's final victory is the reward of his patience. He grows into the will of God by submitting to his decree. In Samson Agonistes the human will is important and counts in the affairs of men only in so far as it conforms to the will of God and through suffering alone can one earn the restitution of his proper virtue. The drama in Samson Agonistes is in the mystery of this moral restoration which does not come in the wake of any physical events. For it takes place in the soul of Samson in a way which he does not himself understand. It comes as a sudden outburst of hope the issue of which is yet unknown. There is nothing in it of the 'deliberate valour'¹ when the Chorus says:

How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach.

Samson, then coming to sense of some new power in him, says:

Be of good courage, I begin to feel
Some rouzing motions in me which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts.

He has shaken off his sense of 'lostness' for he has learnt through suffering. But he yet does not know what it will come to:

I with this Messenger will go along,
Nothing to do, be sure, that may dishonour
Our law, or stain my vow of Nazarite.
If there be aught of presage in the mind,
This day will be remarkable in my life
By some great act, or of my days the last.²

1. Cf. W.P. Ker's statement quoted on pages 231-232.

2. SA, 1380-1389.

He has a summons to some task but yet does not know how that task is to be fulfilled. It is not a strong man deciding to act. There is a feeling of returning strength, which marks the end of a long and hard penance. Samson is absolved through suffering and is now a fit instrument for God's work. To miss this point is to miss the whole significance of the action of a drama where it is not man but God who acts and where all good work is a form of worship and the only evil is impiety. When Samson is led to the 'many pillars' of the Philistine theatre

With head a while enclin'd
And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd.¹

And his last act is indeed a prayer through which he makes his own will seize the will of God in an act of great moment. Milton presents the whole action as an instance of the grace of God operating in history, as a 'great event' in which man is morally wakeful even in sin and comes to 'true experience' through his penance. And what Samson says of the effect of his last act on the Philistines is indeed the effect of the drama on the reader:

such other tryal
I mean to shew you of my strength, yet greater;
As with amaze shall strike all who behold.²

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1. SA, 1636-1638.
 2. SA, 1643-1645.

I have attempted this analysis of the action of Samson Agonistes because of its bearing on what we ought to mean by its katharsis. For my chief proposition is that the 'calm of mind' which Milton intends to be the effect of his drama is produced by its moral purport, that it is the great argument of the event and not the passions which it arouses which accomplishes the katharsis in Samson Agonistes. The 'calm of mind' results from the faith that 'all is best'. The whole drama is a grand ritual in which the human soul comes to a comprehension of the Divine providence through a prayer of pain. All evil is born of a cleavage between God's will and man's and can be overcome only through suffering. This idea of redemptive suffering is at the very core of the tragedy. There is a sentence in Cardinal Newman's essay on 'Poetry' which seems to me to be the proper description of the effect of Samson Agonistes on the reader:

Hence, while it recreates the imagination by the superhuman loveliness of its views, it provides a solace for the mind broken by the disappointments and sufferings of actual life; and becomes, moreover, the utterance of the inward motions of a right moral feeling, seeking a purity and a truth which this world will not give.¹

The 'purgation' of Samson Agonistes is the result of such 'inward emotions of right moral feeling' which is different

1. English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century), ed. E.D. Jones, 1916, pp.234-235.

from what is called the pathological elimination of passion through passion.

Yet Samson Agonistes is a tragedy, a tale of human suffering that moves to tears even when it provides the solace of a reassuring faith. When Manoa says

Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause, Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson.¹

he only brings the tragedy of the event to its highest pitch. There is a tear in these words of consolation, for nothing can be more deeply pathetic and moving than a father accepting the death of his son as the proper fulfilment of the divine purpose:

And which is best and happiest yet, all this
With God not parted from him, as was feared,
But favouring and assisting to the end.²

The tragedy is in some tension between a sense of sorrow and a sense of justice; for the law of God can be understood through suffering. And sorrow becomes bearable when its meaning is perceived through piety. The substance of Milton's tragedy is in this redemptive power of pious suffering which transforms sorrow into its own reward. It is profounder than what we call the 'sense of tears in mortal things' for it shows suffering as a part of the moral order of the universe

1. SA, 1708-1710.

2. SA, 1718-1720.

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
 Or knock the brest, no weakness, no contempt,
 Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
 And what may quiet us in a death so noble.¹

Words such as these only heighten the pathos of the situation and yet make it endurable through an inner force of piety. But the spirit of such tragedy is nevertheless different from the spirit of a Greek tragedy. On this point I disagree with W.R. Parker who says:

Our emotional reaction, therefore, is much like our final emotional reaction to the Prometheus and Oedipus Coloneus and Hercules Furens. Whether the dramatist speaks of Fate, or whether he tells us that 'All is lost', we have witnessed pain, and have seen that triumph of the human spirit over pain which alone, in the end makes it endurable.²

This is missing the whole power of drama in which suffering is not only endurable but is also an instrument of revelation. Both in Oedipus Coloneus and in Samson Agonistes there is great suffering greatly borne. And in this view both plays are equally tragic. And yet the differences between them is great. In Sophocles suffering is made endurable through a comprehension of its intensity; in Milton suffering is made elevating through a comprehension of its significance. In Aeschylean drama there is a clearer moral order where suffering is the punishment of sin. But the ethics of

1. SA, 1721-1724.

2. Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, Baltimore, 1937, pp.228-229.

Aeschylus has nothing of the piety of the Christian poet. The law in Prometheus Bound is the will of a capricious Deity jealously guarding his supremacy against any other contending power that may challenge it. To a modern reader Prometheus is guilty of treason rather than of impiety and his defiance of Zeus has the appeal of a heroic act. In Samson Agonistes the hero does not defy God: he, out of human weakness, betrays His trust, and by acting against the known will of God he only acts against himself and the people whose future depends upon him. W.R. Parker ignores this fundamental difference between Hellenic and Christian conceptions of fate when he says that 'Fate is a mysterious divine decree, to both Milton and the Greeks'.¹ He quotes from the De Doctrina Christiana a few sentences and interprets them out of their proper context to fit in Milton's idea of the Providence with the Greek idea of fate. In the chapter on 'the Providence of God, or of His General Government of the universe' Milton says: 'Generally speaking, however, no distinction is made between the righteous and the wicked, with regard to the final issue of events, at least in this life'.² But we have to read through the passage as a whole to get at its true meaning. At the end of this section Milton says:

1. ibid. p.213.

2. De Doctrina Christiana, CM.xv. 61.

The reason for this may be seen Job v.7 'Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward' ... 'though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged; yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God'. Jer.xii.j. 'Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?' Dan.xii.10. 'Many shall be purified and made white and tried'.¹

To Milton the seeming prosperity of the wicked is only a terrific earnest of their ultimate destruction and the suffering of the just is only a stimulus to the higher virtue.

'Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried' - this is the central principle in Milton's idea of suffering which is at once punitive and a means of purification. Prometheus suffers in a spirit of noble pride and humiliation to him would be disgrace and submission a total defeat of his spirit. And we can imagine that in the lost Prometheus Unbound there was not so much a pious surrender of a sinner to his God as a happy rapprochement between powers that were equally rightful. W.R. Parker asks us to keep in mind the opinions of Sophocles regarding Fate² as we read the passage in Samson Agonistes beginning with 'God of our Fathers, what is man'. But this Choric passage does not express the feeling which the drama produces as a whole: it is the feeling that it removes. The spirit of the tragedy is in its Christian idea of suffering

1. De Doctrina Christiana, CM. xv. 61-62.

2. Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, p.217.

such as is perhaps best expressed in Ecclesiasticus:

My Son, if thou comest to serve the Lord,
 Prepare thy soul for temptation.
 Set thy heart aright, and constantly endure,
 And make not haste in time of calamity.
 Gleave unto him, and depart not,
 That thou mayst be increased at thy latter end.
 Accept whatsoever is brought upon thee,
 And be long suffering when thou passest into humiliation.
 For gold is tried in the fire,
 And acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.
 Put thy trust in him, and he will help thee,
 Order thy ways aright, and set thy hope on him.¹

Milton's conception of fate is too clear to be misunderstood. It is clear in Samson Agonistes and what he says about it elsewhere is consistent with what is demonstrated in the tragedy. Parker has dealt at some length with Milton's idea of fate in its relation to Samson Agonistes,² but in his many quotations from Milton's works bearing on the subject we miss the one passage which is Milton's clearest statement on 'that power / Which erring men call Chance'. Indeed this passage in Comus has greater relevance to our discussion of fate in Samson Agonistes than anything else in Milton:

... this I hold firm,
 Vertue may be assail'd, but never hurt,
 Surpriz'd by unjust force, but not enthrall'd,
 Yea even that which mischief meant most harm,
 Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.³

The fallen Angels who 'complain that Fate / Free Vertue should

1. ii. 1-6.

2. Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, pp.211-229.

3. 588-592.

enthrall to Force or Chance'¹ do not express the view of human destiny on which the two epics and the tragedy are based. What Raphael tells Adam about fate and free will represents the philosophy of human action illustrated in

Samson Agonistes:

He left it in thy power, ordain'd thy will
By nature free, not over-rul'd by Fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity;
Our voluntarie service he requires,
Not our necessitated.²

And when God says 'What I will is Fate'³ he does not promulgate a law of Necessity which is incompatible either with free will or with grace. The same conception of fate is stated in De Doctrina Christiana: 'fate can be nothing but a divine decree emanating from some almighty power'.⁴ Of the Chorus's pronouncement that

Just are the ways of God,
And justifiable to Men;
Unless there be who think not God at all⁵

W.R. Parker says that it has only a 'very specific application' and that in the very next ode the Chorus is 'again thinking God contradictory and unjust'.⁶ But what the Chorus says in a particular context cannot be taken as an expression

1. PL, ii. 550-551.

2. PL, v. 526-530.

3. PL, vii. 173.

4. CM, xiv. 27.

5. SA, 293-295.

6. Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, p.223.

of the moral purport of the drama as a whole. Nor is it important for us to consider if Samson Agonistes resembles Greek tragedy in representing suffering as either deserved or undeserved. For Samson Agonistes is not a tale of sin and punishment. Oedipus is guiltless and so is Philoctetes in the plays of Sophocles; but a Greek tragedy would be equally Greek in spirit if the hero's misfortune were the result of his mistake or misdeed. In Samson Agonistes there is an obvious hamartia but it is not that alone which constitutes the moral significance of its action. For Milton's dramatic purpose is not to show that disobedience never goes unpunished. That would be the substance of a trite morality. Milton set himself the higher task of showing how that disobedience can initiate a moral endeavour leading to the fulfilment of the divine will. His drama is not only a morality, it is also a marvel. And what the last chorus calls the 'unsearchable dispose' does not leave the reader with the sense of mystery such as is produced by Oedipus Rex or Trachiniae. It is the mystery which reassured the chosen people that they were not forsaken by their God.

Samson Agonistes is a tragedy of Christian suffering and we shall miss its intended power and its whole significance if we try to make it look less Christian by way of showing

that it is more tragic. We should better try to understand the kind of tragedy that Milton wanted to produce than force it to be tragedy that we think it ought to be. And when we speak of Milton's debt to classical literature we ought to remember the very significant words in The Reason of Church Government:

That what the greatest and chocest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I, in my proportion, with this over and above, of being a Christian, might doe for mine.¹

Our question, then is, not whether Samson Agonistes is Hellenic in spirit, for obviously it is not, but whether being truly Christian in its view of human suffering it is also a tragedy. Sir Richard Jebb showed that it was not Hellenic in spirit but did not raise the question if it was a tragedy nevertheless. And those who have endeavoured to prove that it is have been mostly concerned with showing that it is tragic because it is very Greek. On the other hand those who think that it is un-Greek would say, like P.F. Baum, that 'in the fashioning of a thoroughly Hebraic story in dramatic form, much of the tragic quality is lost'.² The third view, and this is no less confusing, is that of J.H. Hanford who says that the drama is both Hellenic and Christian:

1. CM, iii. 236.

2. 'Samson Agonistes Again', PMLA 1921, xxxvi. 368-69.

The antique strain in Milton's experience and thought stands side by side with the Christian, and they alternate or combine in their domination of his artistic moods.¹

Hanford does not say anything about the nature and circumstance of such alternation and combination of contrary ideas.

Both Hanford and Tillyard say that Samson Agonistes is tragic in the Greek way, that the fulfilment of its hero's mission does not diminish its human tragedy. 'There is a sense of waste in the play' Tillyard says 'which arouses the tragic feelings, though it would certainly be greater if we could feel more enthusiasm for Samson's tedious butcheries and if his blindness did not make death a merciful release.'² So in Tillyard's view Samson Agonistes is tragic but not intensely tragic. But tragedy which is weak in its tragic power and evokes but a dim response is a poor tragedy. I think we miss the tragic power of Milton's play because we look in it for the kind of tragedy we know in Sophocles or Shakespeare and fail to understand the feeling it was intended to produce. And we can get that feeling only with some effort. Samson Agonistes is not easy reading though its language is simple and it has no ready appeal. Its disposition of events is simple enough but its inner moral economy with its special

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1. John Milton, Englishman, 1950, p.259.
 2. E.M.W. Tillyard, Milton, 1946, p.333.

tragic intent works in a subtle process and will yield its full meaning and effect only to those who give it the closest attention. Samson Agonistes is not dramatic in a popular way for it does not stimulate the dramatic sympathy by working on our more easily susceptible affections. To know Samson we must first become intimate with the whole atmosphere of his work and suffering and the background of national history which give them their significance. All this does not appear on the surface. I think Milton defines the intended effect of the play through Manoah or the Chorus by way of stating explicitly what is too subtly suggested by the course of the action.

I think I have made it fairly clear that we have so far misinterpreted Milton's view of katharsis because we have misread the tragic effect of his drama. In Samson Agonistes there is a view of death and suffering which goes into the quality of its tragic appeal. The tragedy ends in a sight of the law and yet it is tragic for the law can be seen only through suffering. It is a drama of revelation and it is tragic because the revelation comes through pain. And this alone could be the substance of a Cristian tragedy in which human misery is beautiful because it unfolds the divine purpose.

The dire necessity of Samson Agonistes is this necessity

of suffering as a component of the human universe, not so much as an inescapable punishment of sin as an indispensable means of attaining virtue. Milton made an important distinction between this view of suffering and the suffering represented in ancient tragedy. When Satan speaks of the tragedians of fate and chance and change in human life:

High actions, and High passions best describing¹

Christ answers, speaking not of Greek tragedy in particular, but of Greek literature as a whole

Alas what can they teach, and not mislead;
Ignorant of themselves, of God much more,
And how the World began, and how man fell
Degraded by himself, on Grace depending?
Much of the Soul they talk, but all awrie,
And in themselves seek vertue, and to themselves
All glory arrogate, to God give none,
Rather accuse him under usual names,
Fortune and Fate, as one regardless quite
Of mortal things.²

The description of the fallen Angles' intellectual entertainment in Paradise Lost can as well be read as Milton's view of classical literature. Its similarity with Christ's statement on pagan lore is obvious:

Others more milde,
Retreated in a silent valley, sing
With notes Angelical to many a Harp
Thir own Heroic deeds and Hapless fall
By doom of Battel; and complain that Fate
Free Vertue should enthrall to Force or Chance.

1. PR, iv. 266.

2. PR, iv. 309-318.

Thir Song was partial, but the harmony
 (What could it less when spirits immortal sing?)
 Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
 The thronging audience. In discourse more sweet
 (For Eloquence the Soul, Song charms the Sense.)
 Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
 In thoughts more elevate, and reason high
 Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate
 Fixt Fate, free Will, Foreknowledge absolute,
 And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.
 Of good and evil much they argu'd then,
 Of happiness and final misery,
 Passion and Apathie, and glory and shame,
 Vain Wisdom all, and false Philosophie:
 Yet with a pleasing sorcerie could charm
 Pain for a while or anguish, and excite
 Fallacious hope, or arm th'obdured brest
 With stubborn patience as with triple steel.¹

In Greek tragedy the human answer to 'pain and anguish' is this stubborn patience. There the human spirit is grand in the grandeur of its lonely suffering. The tragic katharsis may be in the sheer bearing of the tragic suffering in its full measure the relief from pain being in the very intensity of its experience. In Samson Agonistes suffering is not in a spirit of endurance but in a spirit of piety and it is beautiful because it is meaningful. It is as different from Greek as Paradise Lost is different in theme and appeal from the Greek epic.

Since Samson Agonistes was written at a period of his life when he was more and more coming to a sense of the insufficiency of pagan philosophy as a guide for the Christian

1. PL. II. 546-569.

life we shall miss its points and power if we were to judge it as another Greek tragedy. In respect of his political thought we can see fairly clearly how he modifies the ideas of Aristotle to make them fit in with his Christian ideals. But Aristotle's statement on katharsis being too brief and vague we have no means of knowing how different it is from Milton's. We can however, be certain that the 'calm of mind' which the Miltonic katharsis produces is fundamentally different from the final effect of Greek tragedy and from what the Aristotelian katharsis means in its pathological interpretation.

... the grand delivery
of his cardinal speech: an utterance 254.
Almost divini Herod'silk-

CHAPTER SIX

SANCTIFIED BITTERNESS

Thus did the true prophets of Old combat with the false; thus Christ himself, the fountain of meekness found acrimony enough to be still galling and vexing to the prelati- cal pharisees.
Milton

The 'calm of mind' with which Samson Agonistes ends is attained through experiences both agitating and preplexing. They did not shake the hero's trust in God, but they made him extremely harsh in dealing with his human persecutors. To Dalila he is 'more deaf to prayers than winds and seas', 'inflexible as steel'. And how violent he can be in his 'uncompassionate anger' we see in his reply to Dalila when she wants to touch his hand:

Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake
My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint.¹

This is certainly in the vein of what Mark Pattison has called the 'ferocious reprobation'² of the anti-prelati- cal tracts. Milton knew that this was ferocity: he also knew that such ferocity was needed and therefore proper. He knew that there was a justification for righteous indignation and properly put

1. SA, 952-953.

2. Milton, 1880, p.66.

it at the centre of his theory of rhetoric. Into that theory we need to probe a little further than hitherto unless we accept the view of Middleton Murray that Milton's harshness of temper was merely an expression of inhumanity.¹ Even if we nurture the assumption that Milton was extremely truculent by temperament it is important to enquire what views of rhetoric he held in order to justify the reflection of that temperament in his prose style. It is possible that such views have been specially devised for rationalizing habits of expression which the rules of classical rhetoric and of Christian conduct will not support. But they deserve close examination as a body of rhetorical opinion built up by one of the greatest masters of English prose.

Before we proceed to sum up Milton's own ideas on prose style we can mention two critical opinions which have been advanced as a defence of Milton's polemical violence. For the main part of our discussion in this chapter will be about Milton's own arguments in support of the exceedingly harsh manner of his anti-prelatical tracts.² Defending 'the personalities, the insolence, the frequent grossness and vulgarity of his (Milton's) attacks' in the pamphlets against episcopacy

1. Heaven - and Earth, 1938, p.160.

2. These arguments have received much less notice than they deserve: they are not mentioned in the section on rhetoric in Ida Langdon's Milton's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art.

Denis Saurat says:

They are deeds, and must be judged as such. He adapted his form to the end in view, which was to impress his contemporaries. Hence, first of all, the negligence of his style; he had to produce quickly, at the proper moment; the only quality he looked for was forcibleness.¹

E.M.W. Tillyard holds substantially the same view: 'Believing passionately in the cause he was advocating, he set himself to advance it by any means, personal abuse included, that came handy'.² But he adds that the tracts in their most abusive portion show a kind of 'abstract fury' of which there is an earlier expression in the composition of his Cambridge period. These two views represent an essentially sensible explanation of the savage raillery of Milton's polemics. We shall endeavour to show that Milton had specific arguments in support of his style, and further, that while these arguments are primarily related to the style of the anti-prelatical tracts they also, in a general way, represent Milton's rhetorical theory.

In his Cambridge days Milton held the usual Renaissance view of the powers of prose eloquence. In Prolusion III which is 'An Attack on the Scholastic Philosophy' an estimate of rhetoric follows one on divine poetry:

Rhetoric, again, so captivates the minds of men and draws them after it so gently enchained that it has

1. Milton Man and Thinker, 1944, p.24.

2. Milton, 1946, p.131.

the power now of moving them to pity, now of inciting them to hatred, now of arousing them to war like valour, now of inspiring them beyond the fear of death.¹

And of his acquaintance with classical and Renaissance rhetoric we know enough to show that his early ideas on the rules of prose composition must have been shaped by the practice and precepts of Cicero. D.L. Clark has plausibly conjectured that at St. Paul's School Milton might have read as a text book Charles Butler's Rhetoricae Libri Duo first published in 1598.² This work, mainly an abridgement of Talaueus's Rhetorica made by a Master of Magdalen College, Oxford, was praised by John Brinsley as 'farre above all that ever hath bene written of the same'.³ D.L. Clark has shown that when Milton says of the art of speech studied 'ad bene loquendum, /^m ut Grammatica, vel ad dicendum bene, ut Rhetorica'⁴ he is repeating the similar definition of rhetoric by Talaueus who in his turn learnt it from Quintilian.⁵ It is very likely that as a student Milton was not under the influence of that extreme form of Ciceronianism which is criticised by Ramus in his Ciceronianus (1557). Yet there can be no doubt that in the

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1. Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, tr. P.B. Tillyard, 1932, pp.69-70.
 2. John Milton at St. Paul School, 1948, p.147.
 3. Ludus Literarius; or the Grammar Schoole, 1612, p.204.
 4. CM, xi. 16.
 5. op. cit. p.148.

humanist education of St. Paul's Cicero was an important author and was recognised for virtues which Quintilian praised.¹

Milton's early regard for the Ciceronian rhetoric is particularly in evidence in Prolusion I (1628) which opens with a reference to Cicero's recipe for a good speech:

It is a frequent maxim of the most eminent masters of rhetoric, ... that in every style of oration, whether demonstrative, deliberative, or judicial, the speaker must begin by winning the good-will of his audience; without it he cannot make any impression upon them, nor succeed as he would wish in his cause.²

In Prolusion III (1628) Milton is equally respectful towards the principles of Latin rhetoric;

I have been deeply occupied of late, gentlemen, in seeking, and indeed one of my chief anxieties has been to find, what device of rhetoric would best enable me to engage my hearers' attention: when of a sudden there came into my mind the precept often inculcated in his writings by Cicero (with whose name my speech auspiciously begins) - namely that the fundamental duties of an orator are first to instruct, secondly to delight, and thirdly to persuade. And so I have made it my chief object to fulfil as nearly as possible this three-fold function of a speaker.³

In his Cambridge days Milton learnt to regard classical rhetoric as a model for good writing. He learnt to believe in certain rules to be observed, in certain formal principles of

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1. '... let the student realise that he has made real progress if he is a passionate admirer of Cicero.' Institutio Oratoria, tr. H.E. Butler, 1922, iv. 65.
 2. Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, ed. P.B. Tillyard, 1932, p.53.
 3. *ibid.* pp.67-68.

composition to be rigidly followed. In a letter to Benedetto Buonmattei (1581-1647) he speaks of his reverence for the man

who devotes his powers to establishing by rules and precepts the idiom and usage of the language, whether written or spoken, accepted as correct in the best period, and who circumscribes it about by a barrier which must never be passed, under penalties almost as severe as those laid down by Romulus himself.¹

In *Of Education* 'the spirit and vigor of Demosthenes or Cicero' are an example to the young learner who should be 'taught out of the rule of Plato, Aristotle, Phalereus, Cicero, Hermogenes, Longinus'.² Milton's realisation of the importance of ancient authors as a model for his own style is most eloquently expressed in his letter to Leonard Philaras:

I gladly confess that it is above all by studying constantly from my youth up the works of the many able men who have sprung from Athens that I have acquired whatever literary skill I may have.³

From all that we now know of the method of instruction at St. Paul's School in Milton's time⁴ we can infer that his early

1. *ibid.* p.16. This letter dated 10 September 1638 is about Buonmattei's Della Lingua Toscana, Libri Due, 1643.
2. OE, iv. 286.
3. Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p.26. The letter is dated June 1652.
4. A fairly satisfactory account of Milton's education at St. Paul is available in D.L. Clark's John Milton at St Paul School, New York, 1948. The chapter on Milton's Latin study up to 1625 in H.F. Fletcher's The Intellectual Development of John Milton, vol. I, Urbana, 1956, contains some additional material. C.S. Baldwin's Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice, New York, 1939, D.N. Clark's Rhetoric and Poetry in the Renaissance, New York, 1922 and W.G. Crane's Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance deal with the influence of ancient rhetoric on the education and literature of the English Renaissance.

Latin compositions were very largely influenced by that method. In an article on 'Milton's use of Latin Formularies'¹ Nathalia Wright has shown that Milton's familiar letters were composed according to the rhetorical principles taught at school in his day. As H.F. Fletcher has observed the 'letters should be fully analyzed from the standpoint of how Milton was taught to write them, for from such an analysis we would learn much about the outcome of Milton's grammar school education'.²

Since we are mainly concerned here with the rhetorical principles which Milton developed and practised in his English pamphlets we need not go into any examination of his early prose compositions in Latin. Moreover Milton's mature rhetoric was shaped by principles which had little to do with the Ciceronian rhetoric he was taught at school. We must bear in mind that although Milton was naturally influenced by the system of Latin instruction of his day he was not satisfied with that system. One whole paragraph in Of Education condemns that system as utterly unsatisfactory and fruitless:

And that which casts our proficiency therein so much behind, is our time lost partly in too oft idle vacancies given both to Schools and Universities, - partly in a preposterous exaction, forcing the empty wits of Children to compose Theams, Verses, and Orations, which are the acts of ripest judgment, and the final work of

1. SP. 1943, xl.

2. The Intellectual Development of John Milton, Urbana, 1956, p.206.

a head fill'd by long reading and observing, with elegant maxims and copious invention. These are not matter to be wrung from poor striplings, like blood out of the Nose, or the plucking of untimely fruit.¹

Milton's tracts, however are written in a style which the rhetorical principles implied in his early writings do not sufficiently explain. The anti-prelatical pamphlets represent a manner of prose writing which their author did not attempt to affiliate to any doctrine of classical rhetoric. They were composed under the stress of a polemical passion which could find no room for verbal finesse or decorum. Milton knew this and he also realised that he needed a rhetorical ethos to justify the only manner in which his pamphlets could be written. It was not essentially a defence of scurrilous language, a specious argument in support of loss of balance in controversy. He was not anxious to invent a new principle of formal rhetoric to serve a new rhetorical purpose. Nor did he make an effort to give a new meaning to the most respectable doctrines of classical rhetoric by way of devising a classical sanction for whatever manner of writing suited him. When he took up his pen against episcopacy he knew that what he was going to produce could not be an exercise in fine writing. The passion

1. CM, iv. 277-278. For a description of the system of instruction in this period see Ludus Literarius, 1627, p.121.

and the hurry of the moment would not permit a careful practice of the rules of classical eloquence. All statements about style in his first five pamphlets reveal a conscious disregard for too close an attention to points of rhetorical excellence and a strong emphasis on matter and motive. There is something in them of the moral reaction against the sway of the classical rhetoric which prompted the early Christian writers to formulate a Christian rhetoric. When St. Augustine gave a new rhetorical doctrine in the fourth book of his De Doctrina Christiana ancient rhetoric had become what is known as second sophistic which placed style above the moral substance of writing. For the most important principle of rhetoric stated in the early tracts is in essence a moral principle, a doctrine of eloquence which is concerned more with the deeper sources of thought and action than with the externals of technique. The moral support for a furious manner of writing is rooted in this moral conception of eloquence.

But it would be an error to imagine that Milton's rhetoric in the pamphlet period was shaped entirely by the exigencies of polemical strife. Even in his Cambridge days he could think of disregarding rules of rhetoric to meet the demands of a particular situation. Thus in Prolusion I he says:

At the very outset of my oration I fear I shall have to say something contrary to all the rules of oratory,

and be forced to depart from the first and chief duty of an orator. For how can I hope for your good-will, when in all this great assembly I encounter none but hostile glances, so that my task seems to be to placate the implacable.¹

The statement may seem to be a kind of undergraduate sally. But it must be admitted that a good deal of what Milton says in a semi-serious manner in the Prolusions anticipates some of the maturer ideas of his later days. What he says in Prolusion I about the bitterness of his expression he might well have said later mutatis mutandis about the language of his anti-episcopal tracts:

If you consider that I have spoken with too much sharpness and bitterness, I confess that I have done so intentionally, for I wish the beginning of my speech to resemble the first gleam of dawn, which presages the fairest day when overcast.²

His sarcasms on Joseph Hall's Toothless Satires have a striking parallel in Prolusion VI:

As for my jokes, I don't want them to have no bite in them, or you may well say they are hackneyed and stale, and that some wheezy old woman has spat them out. At the same time I do not think that any one will accuse my jokes of being too biting, unless he has no teeth himself and finds fault with them because they are not like his own.³

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1. Milton Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, tr. P.B. Tillyard, 1932, p.53.
 2. *ibid.* p.54. For an interesting discussion of Milton's relation to his academic audience see A.S.P. Woodhouse, 'Notes on Milton's Early Development', UTQ, 1943-44, xiii.
 3. *ibid.* p.100.

And in defence of his comic manner he puts forth arguments which are repeated in An Apology for Smeectymnuus:

Moreover Socrates, according to the Pythian Apollo the wisest of men, is said often to have bridled his wife's shrewish tongue with a jesting word. Besides, we read that the conversation of the ancient philosophers was always sprinkled with witty sayings and enlivened by a pleasant sparkle; and it was certainly this quality above all which conferred an immortal fame upon all the ancient writers of comedies and epigrams, whether Greek or Latin. Moreover we are told that Cicero's jokes and witticisms, collected by Tyro, filled three volumes. And we are all familiar with that sprightly encomium of Polly composed by an author of no small repute, while we have many other diverting essays on comic subjects by famous authors of our own times.¹

By the middle of his Cambridge period Milton realized that there was a certain force, an urgency of passion, which could not be expressed in a polished Attic manner or in well-trimmed Ciceronian periods. In a letter to his tutor Thomas Young dated circa 1627 he speaks of his preference for 'a style free from all such restrictions, or rather in an Asiatic flow of words, if that might be'. And he does not believe that he can achieve the true eloquence of the heart by following the set principles of rhetoric and logic:

Yet it would be far beyond my power to express fully all that I owe to you, even were I to drain dry all the springs of eloquence and exhaust all the common-places of rhetoric which Aristotle and the famous logician of Paris together have amassed.²

1. *ibid.* pp.90-91.

2. *ibid.* p.5.

And when urgency of passion took control the writing had to be sharp and satirical as in his attack on his fellow-students at Cambridge, Bishop Hall, Salmasius or Morus. About his satirical manner John Aubrey observes: 'Extreme pleasant in his conversation & at dinner, supper &c: but Satyricall. He pronounced y^e letter R very hard a certaine signe of a Satyricall Witt'¹ Antony a Wood recorded in Pesti Oxonienses (1691) that 'he was a person ... of a very sharp, biting and satyirical wit'.² In the anti-prelatical pamphlets this satirical wit is biting enough: it is savage in the Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano, Defensio Secunda and Pro Se Defensio. But in his early work too there is a vein of satire which though gentler is not very unlike the manner of the pamphlets. The violence of the attack on Joseph Hall is not a surprise after the no less violent, though not personal, denunciation in Lycidas:

How well could I have spar'd for thee young swain,
 Anow of such as for their bellies sake,
 Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?
 Of other care they little reck'ning make,
 Then how to scramble at the shearers feast,
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest;
 Blind mouthes! that scarce themselves know how to hold
 A sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought els the least
 That to faithfull Herdmans art belongs!
 What reeks it them? what need they? They are sped;
 And when they list, thir lean and flashy songs

1. Early Lives of Milton, ed. Helen Darbishire, 1932, p.6.

2. *ibid.* p.39.

Grate on their scarnel Pipes of wretched straw,
 The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
 But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
 Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
 Besides what the grim Woolf with privy paw
 Daily devours apace, and nothing sed,
 But that two-handed engine at the door,
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.¹

This well-known passage is cited here because it resembles the more voluble sarcasm in the opening passage of Of Reformation:

they began to draw downe all the Divine intercourse, betwixt God, and the Soule, yea, the very shape of God himselfe, into an exterior, and bodily forme, urgently pretending a necessity, and obligation of joyning the body in a formall reverence, and Worship circumscrib'd, they hallow'd it, they fum'd it, they sprinell'd it, they bedeck't it, not in robes of pure innocency, but of pure Linnen, with other deformed, and fantastick dresses in Palls, and Miters, gold, and guegaw's fetcht from Arons old wardrobe, or the Flaming vestry: then was the Priest set to Con his motions, and his Postures his Liturgies, and his Lurries, till the Soule by this meanes of over-bodying her selfe, given up justly to fleshly delights, bated her wing apace downward: and finding the ease she had from her visible, and sensuous colleague the body in performance of Religious duties, her pineons new broken, and flagging, shifted off from her selfe, the labour of high soaring anymore, forgot her heavenly flight, and left the dull, and droyling carcas to plod on in the old rode, and drudging Trade of outward conformity.²

The similarity of tone is unmistakable: the difference is mostly the difference between the metrically controlled language of verse and the larger freedom of prose. Long before the beginning of the pamphlet period Milton reflected on the

1. 113-131.

2. CM, iii. 2-3.

need for the powerful language of righteous indignation as an essential weapon in the source of truth. The Lady in Comus meets the contemptuous words of her assailant with the declaration that when vice is so glib virtue must not remain tongue-tied:

I had not thought to have unlockt my lips
 In this unhallow'd air, but that this Jugler
 Would think to charm my judgement, as mine eyes,
 Obtruding false rules pranckt in reasons garb.
 I hate when vice can bolt her arguments,
 And vertue has no tongue to check her pride.¹

And her disrespect for the elegances of studied rhetoric is matched by a faith in the power of inspired language of righteous fury:

Enjoy your dear Wit, and gay Rhetorick
 That hath so well been taught her dazling fence,
 Thou art not fit to hear thy self convinc't;
 Yet should I try, the uncontroled worth
 Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
 To such a flame of sacred vehemence,
 That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize,
 And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
 Till all thy magick structures rear's so high,²
 Were shatter'd into heaps o're thy false head.

In Comus there is an element of bitter denunciation which becomes stronger in the passage we have just quoted from, Lycidas. In fact except in the two light-hearted pieces 'On the University Carrier' Milton's satirical wit manifests itself in a language of extreme bitterness. That bitterness he bring

1. 756-761.

2. 790-799.

to his service when as a man of strife and contention he begins his attack on prelacy. Nor can we say that the satirical wit of Milton is present only in his ecclesiastical and political pamphlets. There is a great deal of it in his two sonnets on the reception of his Tetrachordon. The satirical tone of the anti-episcopal passage in Lycidas reappears in the sonnet on Cromwell composed in May 1652:

Helpe us to save free Conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves whose Gospell is their maw.

And the short poem 'On the new forcers of Conscience under the Long PARLIAMENT' is full of banter which is no less sharp than that of the tracts. And certain severity of temper and language remained a characteristic of Milton throughout his life. It appears in Paradise Lost wherever it can appear appropriately. Zephon answers 'scorn with scorn'

and his grave rebuke
Severe in youthful beautie, added grace
Invincible.¹

Abdiel is not satirical but Milton's picture of him as the 'flaming Seraph fearless' - turning his back 'with retorted scorn' on 'those proud towers to swift destruction doomed'² - is picture of a vehement character. In Paradise Regained Christ speaks patiently and calmly, yet in his arguments with

1. lv. 834, 844-846.

2. PL, v. 875, 906-907.

Satan there is an element of gentle but forceful sarcasm which shows that Milton had command of his satirical wit even in his last days:

The first and wisest of them all profess'd
 To know this onely, that he nothing knew;
 The next to fabling fell and smooth conceits;
 A third sort doubted all things, though plain sense;
 Others in vertue plac'd felicity,
 But vertue joind with riches and long life;
 In corporal pleasure hee, and careless ease;

and there is even extreme harshness in Christ's judgment on Greek lore:

while they loudest sing

The vices of thir Deities, and thir own
 In Fable, Hymn, or Song, so personating
 Thir Gods ridiculous, and themselves past shame,
 Remove thir swelling Epithetes thick laid
 As varnish on a Harlots cheek, the rest,
 Thin sown with aught of profit or delight.¹

Of bitterness and severity of language there is a good deal more in Samson Agonistes than would seem appropriate in a drama of grace through contrition. In Samson's conversation with Dalila and Harapha there is a ferocity which is curbed only by the demands of neat blank verse. And although here the fierceness of Milton's temper is expressed mostly in a language of direct denunciation the satirical manner is not altogether absent. So when Milton defends the polemical fury of his early tracts he is stating a rationale for a manner of expression which is rooted in a particular part of his nature.

1. PR, iv. 293-299, 339-345.

The extravagant scurrility of his attack on Salmasius or Morus is surely a form of retaliatory violence. But Milton thought that there could be an ethic of such retaliation and a rhetoric too. And it must be remembered that it is not in Pro Se Defensio which was published in 1655 and which is itself distinguished by grossness of language that Milton first formulates that rhetoric. In fact what he says in this book by way of countering the charge of obscenity against his style is not very significant as a statement of his rhetoric. J.H. Hanford calls it 'one of those curious passages in defense of the use of gross language and personal vilification against the enemies of righteousness which show how little at ease Milton really was about his own controversial practices'.¹ While the passage in question may really seem strange as argument there is nothing either here or in the earlier and more significant statements of rhetorical views to show that Milton was only inventing ways of appeasing a higher literary conscience. He knew what kind of style he was writing and he believed that the style he wrote was the only style suitable for his purpose. And his argument in support of that style is with him a genuine conviction: whether it is convincing for us is another matter.

1. A Milton Handbook, 1946, New York, p.114.

We should not however take the passage in Pro Se Defensio as the locus classicus of Milton's rhetorical theory. For one thing it is not a defence of the harshly satirical style which marks large parts of his early pamphlets; it is essentially a refutation of the charge that his manner of writing was vulgar. It can be linked up with his early defence of righteous indignation in so far as it is in support of the

opinion, that words naked and plain, indignantly uttered, have a meaning far different from obscenity - that they express the utmost vehemence of reproof.¹

Still in Pro Se Defensio Milton's main defence of gross language is in a series of examples of other men who too did not allow their sense of decorum to repress their noble rage:

If this be indecorous at all times and places, how often will you have to charge with a writ of indecency, and obscenity, Erasmus, that miracle of learning, whose brazen statue stands at Rotterdam; how often our own Thomas More, whose name you dishonour by pronouncing it at the same time with your own, lastly, how often the ancient father of the Church, Clements Alexandrinus, Arnobius, Lactantius, Eusebius, when they uncover and cast derision upon the obscene mysteries of the old religions! You will not spare even Job, most modest and patient of men, while, in naked and homely phrase, he imprecates on himself the curse of a harlot-wife, if he had ever lain in wait for the wife of another. Not the writings of Solomon the elegant, nor even of the prophets could escape your proscription of every pretty indelicacy, indeed sometimes even of broad obscenity, whenever the Masorets and Rabins think proper to write their marginal

1. CM, ix. 109.

Keri, to note the eloquent plainness of the text. As for me, I should choose rather to be plain-spoken with the sacred writers, than delicate with the futile Rabins.¹

This looks like a laboured apologia for obscenity when employed against the reprobate. But read in the context of his earlier statements on polemical rhetoric it would be recognized as part of a larger and more systematic literary theory. Like his theory of poetry his theory of prose, so far as he held one, concerns itself with his own practice as a prose writer: he does not introduce or adapt any laws of classical or Renaissance rhetoric for building up a doctrine of polemical style. Nor did he fashion that doctrine merely as a reply to those who censured his savage railery. Those who imagine that Milton's idea of 'sanctified bitterness' grew as a defensive argument against Hall's or his son's strictures on his uncivilized pen disregard a very important passage in Milton's first pamphlet. The ninety small quarto pages of Of Reformation were written in a style which though vehement is free from any form of scurrility and they were written before anybody had criticized him as an indecorous writer. And in this pamphlet he lays down a rhetorical principle of strong and outspoken expression and relates it to the moral zeal of the true Christian

And heerewithall I invoke the Immortal DEITIE,
Reveler and Judge of Secrets, That wherever I

1. GM, ix. 112-113.

have in this Booke plainly and roundly (though worthily and truly) laid open the faults and blemishes of Fathers, Martyrs, or Christian Emperors, or have otherwise inveighed against Error and Superstition with vehement Expressions: I have done it neither out of malice, nor list to speak evill, nor any vaine glory, but of meere necessity to vindicate the spotlesse Truth from an ignominious bondage, whose native worth is now become of such a low esteeme, that shee is like to finde small credit with us for what she can say, unlesse shee can bring a Ticket from Cramer, Latimer, and Ridley; or prove herselfe a retainer to Constantine, and weare his badge.¹

The sense of this need for vehemence in the service of truth is at the centre of all that Milton has to say in defence of his polemical style. The quality that he would cultivate as a writer of prose is first the quality of plainness and in speaking the plain truth in plain language he cannot avoid using 'vehement expressions'. And he also suggests that to vindicate the spotless truth he will not employ the rhetoric which has achieved respectability in the controversial literature of the age. And how consciously defiant he is of the orthodox rhetorical practice is evident in the very first paragraph of the pamphlet. The sentences are too long, clumsy in construction, and deficient in rhythm or elegance. A poet who had learnt to produce a Doric lay, who had pursued with impressive success, utmost perfection in poetic language, and who was acquainted with the graces of Latin prose and with the laws

1. CM, iii. 10.

of their composition was certainly capable of writing more neatly and in better ordered sentences. But he has by this time learnt to despise rhetoric as cheap verbal trickery which an inspired upholder of the true cause could never employ. It is an ally of those who do not know the truth or of those who care more for the fripperies of language than for truth. And it is again in his first pamphlet that he states his view of what he would call false rhetoric:

He that cannot understand the sober, plain, and unaffected stile of the Scriptures, will be ten times more puzzl'd with the knotty Africanisms, the pamper'd metaphors, the intricat, and involv'd sentences of the Fathers; besides the fantastick, and declamatory flashes; the crosse-jingling periods which cannot but disturb, and come thwart a settl'd devotion ¹⁸ worse then the din of bells, and rattles.¹

If it is primarily a criticism of patristic style it is no less significant as a disparagement of an artificial rhetorical manner, of fantastic, declamatory flashes which were then becoming common in the 'metaphysical' sermon. What he condemned as 'new fangled toys, and trimming slight' in verse writing in his Cambridge days he still more strongly condemned in prose writing in the pamphlet period.

After affirming the necessity for vehement language in the cause of truth, Milton proceeds to establish its propriety in Christian ethics. In his third pamphlet entitled Animad-

1. CM, 111. 34.

versions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smeectymnuus (1641) Milton is fiercer in his banter and harsher than in the previous two pamphlets. For Bishop Hall whose A Defence of the Humble Remonstrance provoked the Animadversions Milton had a stronger contempt than for Usher. Yet it must be remembered that Milton's attack on him in this pamphlet was not prompted by any sense of personal wrong. Hall had not yet cast any aspersions on Milton either as a writer or as a man. Still his sarcasms are bitter in the extreme and some of them are, as David Masson has observed 'really so much beyond the bounds of modern good taste that it is difficult to quote them'.¹ But Milton believed that such severity of expression was not incompatible with Christian ethics. The passage in the Preface to Animadversions in which he defends this belief is so important and has been till now so much ignored that we quote it here in full:

Wee all know that in private and personall injuries, yea in publique sufferings for the cause of Christ, his rule and example teaches us to be so farre from a readinesse to speak evill, as not to answer the reviler in his language, though never so much provoked. Yet in the detecting, and convincing of any notorious enemy to truth and his countries peace, especially that is conceited to have a voluble and smart fluence of tongue, and in the vaine confidence of that, and out of a more tenacious cling to worldly respects, stands up for all the rest to justify a long usurpation and convicted pseudisicopy of Prelates,

1. The Life of John Milton, 1871, 11. 259.

with all their ceremonies, liturgies, and tyrannies, which God and man are now ready to explode and hisse out of the land; I suppose and more than suppose, it will be nothing disagreeing from Christian meeknesse to handle such a one in a rougher accent, and to send home his haughtinesse well bespurred with his own holy-water. Nor to do thus are we unauthoritied either from the moral precept of SALOMON to answer him there-after that prides him in his folly; nor from the example of Christ, and all his followers in all Ages, who in the refuting of those that resisted sound Doctrine, and by subtle dissimulations corrupted the minds of men, have wrought up their zealous souls into such vehemencies, as nothing could be more killingly spoken.¹

Milton knew that his pamphlet was full of anger, but he also knew that this anger was no private spleen but an expression of the 'zeal of truth'. The 'well-heated fervency' which proceeds from this zeal is what is called the 'flame of sacred vehemence' in Comus. It is the 'grave rebuke severe' of Zephon, the 'retorted scorn' of Abdiel. This zeal is defined in De Doctrina Christiana in a sentence which sums up all that Milton says in defence of the vehement style in his Preface to Animadversions: 'An ardent desire of hallowing the name of God, together with an indignation against whatever tends to the violation or contempt of religion, is called ZEAL.² The Preface to Animadversions is thus a full statement of the central principle of Milton's polemical rhetoric. What he says later about it either in the Apology or Pro se Defensio is only

1. CM, lll. 105-106.

2. CM, xvii. 153.

an elaboration of this clear rounded statement in the third pamphlet:

And therefore they that love the soules of men, which is the dearest love, and stirs up the noblest ieaousie, when they meet with such collusion, cannot be blam'd though they be transported with the zeale of truth to a well heated fervencie; especially, seeing they which thus offend against the soules of their brethren, do it with delight to their great gaine, ease, and advancement in this world, but they that seeke to discover and oppose their false trade of deceiving, do it not without a sad and unwilling anger, not without many hazards; but without all private and personall spleene, and without any thought of earthly reward, when as this very course they take stoppe their hopes of ascending above a lowly and unenviable pitch in this life.¹

From the examples which Milton cites in his chapter on zeal in the De Doctrina Christiana it is clear that Milton sought a Biblical support for righteous indignation. The Lord turned 'the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes';² when 'Moses' anger waxed hot, ... he cast the tables out of his hands and brake them beneath the mount';³ Phinehas 'took a spear in his hand ... and thrust ... the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly';⁴ Jeremiah is 'like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome; because of the Lord, and because of his holy words'.⁵ Did not Christ say

1. CM, 111. 107.

2. 2 Peter, 11. 6.

3. Exodus, xxxii. 19.

4. Numbers, xxv. 7-8.

5. xxiii. 9.

that 'the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven'.¹ At Stephen's reproof the reprobates are 'cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth'; when oxen and garlands were brought to the temple of Jupiter, Barnabas and Paul 'rent their garments, and sprang forth among the multitude'.² This impressive array of Biblical references in the De Doctrina Christiana³ is certainly intended to be a justification of the zeal which inspired Milton himself in the pamphlet period. For in the pamphlets too he quotes the same authority in support of his language of wrath. And Milton's whole argument in An Apology shows that in defending his manner of writing he is mostly explaining the nature of the impulse of which that writing is an expression. For even when he cites the example of Luther as a harsh writer he says 'I have not examin'd through his works to know how farre he gave way to his owne fervent minde; it shall suffice me to looke to mine own'.⁴ And looking into his mind he realised that 'when God commands to take the trumpet, and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say, or what he shall conceal'. He thought that the example of Jeremiah should be enough to

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1. Matthew, xii. 31.
 2. Acts, vii. 54, xiv. 14.
 3. CM, xvii. 153-161.
 4. CM, iii. 315.

teach these times not suddenly to condemn all things that are sharply spoken or vehemently written as proceeding out of stomach, virulence and ill-nature.¹

This was before the younger Hall had attacked him for the harshness of his language. And what is still more significant is that the statement is made in that section of The Reason of Church Government where he speaks of his inspiration as a defender of truth or as a poet. We need to examine this line of argument before we regret that even 'the august genius of Milton could not resist the virulent contagion of the time'.² It is true that the style of the pamphlets brings to our mind the coarseness and ferocity of contemporary polemical prose and is at times very close to the vulgarity of catch-penny pamphlet. Still there is a quality in Milton's prose which demands a juster estimate than Henry Hallam's that his invective is 'mere ribaldrous vulgarity blended with pedantry'.³ His sarcasms may indeed be too bitter, his allusions beyond the comprehension of the unlearned, and his sentences are often too long and disorderly, Ciceronian in length but not in order and finish. Yet he achieves a force which he at least believes comes from some apocalyptic fire. The zeal which prompted him to write the pamphlets was the zeal of a Hebrew

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1. The Reason of Church Government, CM, 111. 231.
 2. John Morley, Oliver Cromwell, 1900, p.152.
 3. Literature of Europe, 111. 151.

prophet. He had no ambition then of producing a great prose. At Cambridge or at Horton he had not prepared himself for such performance. When he took pen in defence of the true Church his wish was to write a 'sober, plain, and unaffected style'. But if he never wrote a line marred by affectation he felt under the stress of a moral passion that sober and plain prose would not suffice. He knew that some 'also were indued with a staid moderation and soundness of argument, to teach and convince the rational and sober minded'. His own De Doctrina Christiana was an example of such a manner but he also knew that such a style was not

the only expedient course of teaching, for in times of opposition, when either against new heresies arising, or old corruption to be reformed, this cool unpassionate mildness of positive wisdom is not enough to damp and astonish the proud resistance of carnal and false doctors.

It is significant that an entry in the Commonplace Book is concerned with the rise of reproof in writings for the cause of truth. It says: 'Luther refrained neither from harshness nor from jests that were now and then even a little shameful. Sleidan Book 16. p.261'.¹ We have observed that in The Reason

1. CM, xviii. 145. The entry which is in Latin and in Milton's hand is conjecturally assigned to 1641-42. Sleidan's book referred to is Commentaries Strassburg, 1555. Ruth Nohl mentions a copy of Luther's book preserved in the New York Public Library in which 'there is a note probably in Milton's handwriting: "Lutheri scriptum adversus Pontificatum"'. Prose Works of John Milton, ed. D.M. Wolfe, New Haven, i. 390. Milton refers to Sleidan again in An Apology in his defence of harsh language.

of Church Government Milton compares his condition to Jeremiah's. In An Apology there is more of such personal confession to suggest a still closer comparison between the seventeenth-century polemist and the prophets of the Old Testament:

... then Zeale whose substance is ethereal, arming
in compleat diamond, ascends his fiery Chariot,
drawn with two blazing Meteors figur'd like beasts,
but of a higher breed then any other Zodiack yeilds,
resembling two of those four which Ezechiel and S.
John's saw, the one visag'd like a Lion, to expresse
power, high aurtority and indignation, the other of
countnance like a man to cast derision and scorne upon
perverse and fraudulent seducers; with these the in-
vincible warrior Zeale shaking loosely the slack reins
drives over the head of Scarlet Prolats, and such as are
insolent to maintaine traditions, brushing their stiffe
necks under his flaming wheels.¹

Obviously this was a reply to the younger Hall's condemnation of Milton's language which he said 'you should scarce hear from the mouths of canting beggars, at a heathen altar, much lesse was it looked for in a treatise of Controversial Theology'.² But as we have seen the argument he puts forward here was made before anybody attacked his style. Hall's stricture only provoked a more elaborate explanation of Milton's ideas on his vocation as a pamphlet writer:

Thus did the true Prophets of old combat with the
false; thus Christ himselfe, the fountaine of meek
nesse found acrimony enough to be still galling and

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1. An Apology, CII, 111. 313-314.
 2. A Modest confutation of a Slanderous and Scurrilous Libell, Entitled, Animadversions vpon the Remonstrants Defense against Smectymuus, 1642, pp.1-2.

vexing the Prelaticall Pharisees. But ye will say, these had immediat warrant from God to be thus bitter, and I say, so much the plaintier is it prov'd, that there may be a sanctifi'd bitterness against the enemies of truth.¹

The main support for a bitterly indignant language is however in the Old Testament:

Omitting that place in Numbers at the killing of Zimri and Cosbi, done by Phineas in the height of zeal, related as the Rabbin's expound, not without an obscene word, we may finde in Deuteronomy and three of the prophets, where God denouncing bitterly the punishments of idolaters, tels them in a terme immodest to be utter'd in coole blood²

Earlier in the same tract he says, referring to Proverbs, that

we may safely imitate the method that God uses, with the forward to be forward, and to throw scorn upon the scorner, whom if any thing, nothing else will heale. And if the righteous shall laugh at the destruction of the ungodly, they may also laugh at their pertinacious and incurable obstinacy³

It is significant that this Biblical defence of 'tart rhetoric in the churches cause'⁴ (this is Milton's description of his polemical style) is not first introduced in An Apology although it is in this fifth anti-prelatical tract that it is elaborate made. Already in the Animadversions he had cited the authori

1. CM, 111. 314.

2. CM, 111. 315.

3. CM, 111. 288.

4. CM, 111. 315.

of Solomon and of Christ¹ and we can accept Milton's view as a genuine belief in sharp words piously uttered without crediting him with absolute freedom from personal animosity. For what is important for us to consider is not whether he had any private rancour against those who attacked him; of that certainly he had a great deal. What is important in a study of Milton's polemical rhetoric is to see how far this personal element entered into that enthusiasm with which he devoted himself to a public cause. We cannot dismiss Milton's apologia as an odd attempt at either making a virtue of ill temper or sublimating sheer peevishness into a prophetic rage when as we have seen throughout his life he believed that in the battle for truth only the most powerful weapons were to be used. And the powerful prose of the anti-prelatical tracts must be distinguished from the 'hot discourse' of the pamphlets ballads and broadsides preserved in the Thomason Collection. The scholar of Aldersgate Street who had produced the most

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1. CM, 111. 106. F.L. Taft says that Milton's remark on 'things that are sharply spoken, or vehemently written' in the Preface to Book II of The Reason of Church Government confirms the theory that the Modest Confutation appeared while Milton was completing this fourth anti-prelatical tract. See Complete Prose Works of John Milton, ed. D.M. Wolfe, New Haven, 1953, i. 864. But the defensive character of the passage does not by itself prove that it was an answer to the confutant when in the Animadversions itself which provoked the Modest Confutation there is a word in support of the sharp manner.

refined verse for the most refined tastes and whose aristocratic temper had been intensified by respectable literary contacts in Europe would not stoop to the vulgarity of a Water Poet for getting the ears of Oyster women and butchers. We can believe with Dora H. Raymond that Milton's 'scathing, brutal humour [was] designed for popularity with the masses'. For when Milton used invective he certainly wanted it to do its job. But we cannot imagine that he indulged in vulgarity by way of emulating the penny fly-sheets or in order to humour the crowd. So when Dora N. Raymond wishes 'that Milton had made no effort to don the jester's cap and bells' she misses the whole motive behind his satirical wit. And her criticism is particularly confusing when she admits that Milton's 'wit was engendered by anger and was so witheringly scornful as to make one pity, rather than laugh at its victim'.¹ For that was precisely the result which Milton wanted to achieve. He had no comic intent, no desire to entertain just as he had none to produce delightful prose. His whole object in his ire or irony was to crush the adversary. And that is all that Milton wanted to say about his satirical manner in the pamphlets. When Dr. Johnson dismisses it as a kind of 'controversial merriment' he fails to understand that his 'acrimonious and surly Republican'

1. Oliver's Secretary, New York, 1932, p.58.

may adopt the satirical vein for something other than light amusement. While he notices with disapprobation Milton's 'Puritanical savageness of manners'¹ he does not see that when Milton laughs he really desires that hell should grow darker at his frown.

Milton knew the tone and purpose of his satirical wit. He knew it was natural in him and he knew what use to make of it in his tracts. It is in the Animadversions that he first employs the bitterly satirical manner and in the Preface he explains its utility. In An Apology the defence of satire is more elaborate for it was largely a rejoinder to the Confutant's stricture on his bantering levity. Still the Preface to the Animadversions contains a full statement of Milton's idea of the critical laughter:

And although in the serious uncasing of a grand imposture, (for, to deal plainly with you Reders, Prelatry is no better,) there be mixt here and there such a grim laughter, as may appeare at the same time in an austere visage, it cannot be taxt of levity or insolence: for even this voine of laughing (as I could produce out of grave Authors) hath ofttimes a strong and sinewy force in teaching and confuting, nor can there be a more proper object of indignation and scorn together then a false Prophet taken in the greatest dearest and most dangerous cheat, the cheat of soules: in the disclosing whereof if it be harmfull to be angry, and withall to cast a lowering smile, when the properest object calls for both, it will be long enough ere any be able to say, why those two most rationall faculties of humane intellect, anger and laughter, were first seated in the brest of man.²

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1. Lives of the English Poets, ed. G.B. Hill, 1905, i. 102.
 2. CM, 111. 107-108.

The fact that Milton can write of 'grim laughter' and 'lowering smile' and that he puts anger and laughter together as two most rational faculties of the human intellect indicate the theory of satire which is of considerable interest in the history of seventeenth-century criticism. How Milton was influenced by classical or Renaissance idea of satire we shall see later. Obviously Milton does not deal with the matter by way of building up a full discourse on the spirit of satire. He is only explaining his own practice and his own motive and referring in the process to the practices and motives of others. And although the statement in the Preface to the Animadversions is not primarily of the nature of a defensive argument it is very likely that Milton wanted to explode the Remonstrant's idea of a tooth-less satire. Bishop Hall's satire virgidentiarum (1597-98) has two books, the first subtitled 'Toothless Satires' and the second 'Biting Satires'.¹ To Milton all satire must be biting satire and toothless satire is a misnomer: 'You love toothlesse Satyr; let me informe you, a toothless Satyr is as improper as a toothed sleek-stone, and as bullish.'² That Milton had no ambition to produce anything on the model of the classical satire is evident from the fact

1. The Modest Confuter defends Joseph Hall's use of the term 'toothless satires' in Modest Confutation, 1642, pp.8-12.

2. CM, 111. 113-114.

that nothing of the kind is mentioned in the personal passage in The Reason of Church Government. Nor did he think that a work like Animadversions was a variety of satirical prose to be read and valued as literature. 'I should not chuse this manner of writing', he says in The Reason of Church Government 'wherein knowing my self inferior to my self, led by the genia power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand.'¹ But what is still more significant is the fact that in defending the use of satire in An Apology Milton does not bring to his support the work of either Aristophanes or of Juvenal and does not introduce in his argument either the Platonic or the Aristotelian ideas on comedy. He mentions Sophron's mimes which 'were of such reckoning with Plato, as to take them nightly to read on, and after make them his pillow', refers to Scaliger's description of mime as 'a poem imitating any action to stir up laughter', speaks of the ironic element in Plato's dialogues, quotes from the first and the tenth Satires of Horace and suggests that Joseph Hall 'might have learnt better among the Latin, and Italian Satyrists and in our own tongue from the vision and Creed of Pierce Plowman'.² This alone would show that Milton is not here primaril

1. CM, 111. 235.

2. CM, 111. 329.

concerned with a theory of satire and is not giving his estimate of comic or satirical poets. His main purpose is to defend his own satiric manner, to prove that it is most powerful when it is most biting. So he comes back to Joseph Hall's absurd idea of toothless satire:

But that such a poem should be toothlesse I still affirme it to be a bull, taking away the essence of that which it calls it selfe. For if it bite neither the persons nor the vices, how is it a Satyr, and if it bite either, how is it toothlesse, so that toothlesse Satyrs are as much as if he had said toothlesse teeth.¹

The Confutant had quoted Bacon's criticism of the impropriety of turning 'Religion into Comedy or Satyr' to oppose Milton's idea of laughter as the 'strong and sinewy force in teaching' stated in the Animadversions.² To this Milton's answer is not merely a Horatian line on wise jesting. If he has defended the use of invective by citing examples from the Old Testament in defence of laughter also he goes to the same source. Against Bacon's opinion he refers to Solomon:

laughter being one way of answering A Foole according to his folly, teaches to sorte of persons, first the Foole himselfe not to be wise in his own conceit as Salomon affirms, which is certainly a great document, /w

1. CM, 111. 329.

2. Modest Confutation, p.2. The source of the quotation is Bacon's A Wise and Moderate Discourse, Concerning Church-Affaires written in 1589 with the title An Advertisement touching the Controversies in the Church of England and published in 1641.

to make an unwise man know himselfe. Next, it teaches the hearers, in as much as scorne is one of those punishments which belong to men carnally wise, which is oft in Scripture declar'd; for when such are punisht the simple are thereby made wise, if Salomons rule be true. And I would ask, to what end Eliah mockt the false Prophets? was it to shew his wit, or to fulfill his humour? doubtlesse we cannot imagine that great servant of God had any other end in all which he there did, but to teach and instruct the poore misledde people.¹

But why should Milton quote so profusely from the Bible and deal with the whole question of the use of invective and wit in his writing from a religious point of view when the social purpose of the Old Comedy or of the Latin formal satire would have been more to the point. Milton's answer to this question is:

If therefore the question were in oratory, whether a vehement vein throwing out indignation or scorn upon an object that merits it, were among the aptest ideas of speech to be allow'd, it were my work, and that an easie one, to make it cleare both by the rules of best rhetoricians, and the famoussest examples of the Greek and Roman orations. But since the Religion of it is disputed, and not the art, I shall make use only of such reasons and authorities, as religion cannot except against.²

But this is not the whole explanation. Milton's laughter was not the laughter of Aristophanes nor was it like Ben Jonson's laughter 'mixing mirth with instruction and profit with delight'. His laughter was all wrath and he wanted it to be

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1. CM, iii. 317. The allusions are to Proverbs, xxvi. 5, xxi. 11, I Kings, xviii. 27.
 2. CM, iii. 312.

understood as such. Amongst those critics who have commented on the wit in Milton's prose works only Sir Walter Raleigh has noticed this peculiarity of Milton's satire: 'It is not mirthful nor gentle laughter, but rather the fierce, harsh, vehement laughter of the Hebrew Psalms, the laughter of scorn, the shooting out of the lips, the saying "Ha, ha".'¹ It was sheer derision, the laughter at quaint opinions, such as is described by Raphael in Paradise Lost,² the great laughter which was in heaven at the confusion of the Tower of Babel,³ the bitter mockery that went into the description of the Paradise of Fools.⁴ Of the

Sport that wrinckled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides,⁵

the genial smile that is enjoyed as a smile there is nothing in the poetry or the prose of Milton. Though 'extreme pleasant in his conversation' as John Aubrey records,⁶ mild sportive humour must have been foreign to Milton's mental constitution. 'My fate', he says 'extorts from mee a talent of sport, which I had thought to hide in a napkin'.⁷ The distant, severe smile of intense disapprobation which he recalls in An Apology become

1. Milton, 1922, p.70.

2. viii. 78.

3. PL, xii. 59.

4. PL, iii. 496.

5. 'L'Allegro', 31-32.

6. The Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.6.

7. Colasterion, CM, iv. 272.

an intenser form of mockery in the anti-prelatical tracts:
 'they thought themselves gallant men, and I thought them fools,
 they made sport, and I laugh'.¹

It is, however, an irony that Joseph Hall whose 'Toothless Satires' provoked Milton's expatiation on biting laughter had himself the very same idea of satire. In the Proem to Book II of his Characters of Vertues and Vices (1608) Joseph Hall said:

Perhaps in some of these (which thing I do at once
 fear and hate) my style shall seem to some less grave,
 more satirical The fashions of some evils are,
 besides the Odiousness, ridiculous; which to repeat,
 is to seem bitterly merry. I abhor to make sport with
 wickedness, and forbid any laughter heere but of dis-
 dain.²

This is obviously very different from the gentle humour of Theophrastus. Of that humour Hall was incapable: and it was foreign to Milton's nature.

The idea of 'sanctified bitterness' explained by Milton in such detail in the Animadversions and in An Apology thus has the status of rhetorical doctrine. It is a doctrine which Milton does not affiliate to a particular tradition of rhetoric, classical or Renaissance. While he says that he can 'urge the

1. CM, iii. 300.

2. Works, ed. P. Wynter, 1863, vi. 106. It is the first imitation of the Characters of Theophrastus (c. 371-c. 287 B.C.) in the English language. Sir Thomas Overbury's Characters was published in 1614 and John Earle's Micro-cosmographie in 1628. For an interesting study of the influence of Theophrastus on English literature see G.S. Gordon, 'Theophrastus and his Imitators' in English Literature and the Classics, ed. G.S. Gordon, 1942, pp.49-86.

same out of Cicero and Seneca¹ he does not explain his principle in terms of classical rhetoric. For precedents he mentions Solomon and Luther, but apart from the two quotations from Horace there is no reference to any principle of classical rhetoric. On the other hand although he does not speak of any Hebrew rhetoric he quotes from Proverbs to justify his scornful language. This has an important bearing on a proper estimate of Milton's polemical style. For this style cannot be appreciated without a comprehension of Milton's ideals of satirical prose. There is nothing here of the grace and orderliness of the Ciceronian period or of the studied elegance of the Senecan epigram. Such literary excellences Milton did not intend to achieve: whether he was capable of them is another matter. Milton's sentences are periods only in the sense that they are very long sentences indeed. But they do not have the design of a Ciceronian period. They are clumsy, often chaotic not seldom marked by bad syntax. Milton was not concerned with fine writing and was not ambitious to write an imperishable prose. Every clause and every sentence gives the impression of a man whose only use for the written word is that it should frustrate and destroy the enemy. Two elements in his prose give the impression that it is modelled on Cicero; copiousness

1. An Apology, CM, 111. 318.

of vocabulary and long undulating sentences. Together they make for a fulness and energy of expression which seems to resemble a similar quality in Cicero's prose. Fulness is indeed the most distinctive quality of Cicero's style.¹ This abundance of Cicero's expression necessarily involves an element of diffusiveness which becomes a virtue through an inner control of the speech rhythm. The clauses are so neatly arranged that no part of a period would seem to hang loose and no paragraph would seem rambling and untidy in rhythm or in logic. But such estimate of the Ciceronian manner may create the impression that fluency and diffusion are distinctively Ciceronian qualities. Milton's sentences are long and his manner is diffuse but on the whole the style of the anti-prelatical tracts is not modelled on Cicero. It is not modelled on any classical author. Its guiding principle is the dictum of Longinus that 'nothing is so conducive to sublimity as an appropriate display of genuine passion'.² And it is significant that in An Apology Milton twice speaks of great style as a reflection of greatness of mind although he does not mention Longinus on either occasion. It would however be an error to imagine that Milton learnt the principle from Longinus. It is

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1. Quintilian says that while it is impossible to take away a word from a sentence of Demosthenes one cannot add a word to Cicero's. See Institutio Oratoria, tr. H.E. Butler, 1922, iv. 61.
 2. On the Sublime, tr. H.L. Havell, 1890, p.14.

even probable that he saw a contradiction between Longinus's emphasis on the force and individuality of passion and his prescription of an 'emulous imitation of the great poets and prose-writers of the past'.¹ Towards the end of An Apology Milton makes a statement of his principles of prose eloquence which is closer to the idea of individuality than to the idea of imitation:

For me, Readers, although I cannot say that I am utterly untrain'd in those rules which Rhetoricians have givn, or unacquainted with those examples which the prime authors of eloquence have written in any learned tongue, yet true eloquence I find to be none, but the serious and hearty love of truth: and that whose mind so ever is fully possess'd with a fervent desire to know good things, and with the dearest charity to infuse the knowledge of them into others, when such a man would speak, his words, (by what I can expresse) like so many nimble and airy servitors, trip about him at command, and in well-order'd files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places.²

In the first five tracts, particularly in the third and the last there is little of this 'dearest charity' and words do not, as a rule come in 'well-ordered files'. But the style is fervent and the words always apt. No other excellences are intended and no well-known style is imitated. When he defends his long sentences he does not urge the lengthy period of Cicero but ridicules those who make 'sentences by the Statute, as if all above three inches long were confiscat'.³ There is

1. *ibid.* p.29.

2. CM, 111. 362.

3. An Apology, CM, 111. 286.

an element of unorthodoxy in the structure of Milton's sentences and the general architecture of his paragraphs which shows that both in practice and in principle Milton valued a freedom from old laws of composition.

In the anti-prelatical tracts there is a range of feeling and argument which could not be put into a uniform style. There cannot be a single model of prose for a piece of writing which unites invective with wit and where personal confessions of lyrical intensity are followed by passages of closely reasoned arguments supported by an impressive array of learned allusions. In such prose passages of lofty eloquence are not rare but they come in sudden flashes and may seem incongruous in the context of passages with a different appeal. Here one does not expect what Longinus has called 'gentle and noiseless flow of eloquence' or 'weighty and sober magnificence'.¹ Of these qualities there is a great deal in Arcopagitica. But what Milton calls the 'cool element of prose'² in The Reason of Church Government is scarcely a characteristic of the tracts and except in the De Doctrina Christiana he does not attempt to write in a quiet argumentative manner. But if the prose of the early tracts is ununiform in manner it has an inner unity of appeal which has to be carefully sought out. The basis of

1. On the Sublime, tr. H.L. Havell, 1890, pp.27-28.

2. CM, 111. 235.

that unity is in a certain intensity of passion which inspires equally his invective and wit, his words of self-revelation and his expostulation on the public cause. Since we are concerned here only with Milton's idea of 'sanctified bitterness' and its bearing on the rhetoric which he adumbrates in the anti-pretalical tracts we shall not deal with the rhetorical questions arising out of his other prose works. In Areopagitica there is influence of Isocrates as of Cicero and on the style of a book dealing with this theme such influence is inevitable. But after the publication of An Apology Milton did not deal with any question of rhetoric or formulate for himself any principle of prose composition which would cover the prose works like the Areopagitica or the Eikonoklaste. The style of the Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano and of the Defensio Secunda has more of the dignity and grace of Cicero and a great deal of his balance between the Attic and the Asiatic manners than anything else in Milton's prose, English or Latin. Both the Defences have the fierce invective of the earlier tracts and in both there is a great deal of scurrility. But the periodic structure of their sentences is more orderly than those of the tracts and there is much more of the epigrammatic and the antithetical manner in them than in the Areopagitica. And yet Milton is not conscious of debt to the

orators of Athens and Rome whose themes, he believes, were less than his:

to whatever degree I am surpassed (of which there can be little doubt) by the ancient, illustrious orators, not only as an orator, but also as a linguist (and particularly in a foreign tongue, which I employ of necessity, and in which I am often very far from satisfying myself) I shall surpass no less the orators of all ages in the nobleness and in the instructiveness of any subject.¹

He concedes greater rhetorical powers to the ancients but has nothing to say about how those powers can be exercised in his own day. Here again the strength of eloquence is in the strength of the truths to be uttered and in the passion which inspires that utterance. There is no disparagement of classical rhetoric: on the contrary Milton quotes from Cicero's oration as he quotes from the Bible. But the several invocations in his prose works, intensely lyrical as they are, represent an idea of eloquence which cannot be learnt by study of models or of precepts. And it is significant that this idea of divinely inspired eloquence is more powerfully stated by Christ in Paradise Regained:

Thir Orators thou then extoll'st, as those
The top of Eloquence, Statists indeed,
And lovers of thir Country, as may seem;
But herein to our Prophets farr beneath,
As men divinely taught, and better teaching
The solid rules of Civil Government
In thir majestic unaffected stile
Then all the Oratory of Greece and Rome.²

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1. Defensio Secunda, CM, viii. 13.
 2. PR, iv. 353-360.

This is no repudiation of ancient oratory; but read with the passage we have just quoted from the Defensio Secunda it can be taken as an affirmation of the principle that true eloquence can be achieved by means other than imitation of the ancients. If as he says in Book II of The History of Britain (1670) 'great Acts and great Eloquence have most commonly gon hand in hand, equalling and honouring each other in the same Ages',¹ English eloquence, he thought, could grow independent of classical influence. And how strongly he dislikes an imitative rhetorical manner can be seen from his comment on the Greek historian Dion:

I affect not set speeches in a historie, unless known for certain to have bin so spok'n in effect as they ar writ'n Much less therefore do I purpose heer or elsewhere to Copic out tedious Orations without decorum, though in thir Authors compos'd readily to my hand.²

The distinctive quality of Milton's prose can be better perceived when his ideas on eloquence, such as are stated or suggested in his works, are properly understood. His sprawling periods, harsh words, Latinisms, inversion of the natural order of words and the uncommon collocation of his clauses will not attract those who can admire only a fine and flowing prose. There is nothing even in the glowing paragraphs in the Areopagitica to suggest that Milton ever intended to produce a

1. CM, x. 32.

2. The History of Britain, CM, x. 68.

musical effect through the diction and arrangement of his periods. And in the Eikonoklastes which, I think, is the best specimen of Milton's prose, the most powerful effects are achieved through devices which are Milton's own and arise from the peculiar temper of his intellect. His quick and sudden transition from one idea to another, his short sentences following long ones, his interrogations in the midst of an elaborate argument and above all his habit of introducing an untidy period when a trimmed and orderly one is expected produce a variety of rhythm which can be appreciated only with some effort. There is a line in the second book of Paradise Lost which can be taken as an extremely significant statement by Milton on prose eloquence:

For Eloquence the Soul, Song charm the Sense.¹

The diction and rhythm of even the finest passages in Milton's prose show much less attention to the niceties of euphony or balance than would be needed for writing an exquisite style. Even the glowing paragraphs in the Areopagitica do not suggest the employment of any artifices for charming the ear. His manner, as Saintsbury has observed,² was certainly oratorical but it is a manner which is not consciously imitative of classical oratory. It is true the style of the Areopagitica

1. PL ii. 556.

2. A History of English Prose Rhythm, 1922, p.173.

recalls what T.H. White, an early editor of the book, has called 'the senatorial diction at Athens'. But the Areopagitica is no more a copy of the Isocratic discourse than Samson Agonistes is copy of a Greek play. When T.H. White remarks that Milton 'has transfused into his native idiom the dignified forms and phraseology of Attic Oratory'¹ he means the exercise of a skill for fulfilling a rhetorical ambition of which there is no trace in the Areopagitica. Milton mentions at the beginning of the Areopagitica, Isocrates 'who from his private house wrote that discourse to the Parliament of Athens' and to Dion Crusaeus, 'a stranger and a privat Orator'² for his own work was a form of private oration. But between the studied literary elegance of Isocrates and the inspired verve of the Areopagitica the difference is greater than has so far been admitted. It is important to emphasise this difference in order to comprehend the central principle of the prose style of one who knew the power that 'one sentence of a ventrous edge, utter'd in the height of zeal'³ could exercise on the human mind. If Milton's periods seem less symmetrical

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1. Areopagitica, ed. T.H. White, 1849, pp.xxiii-xxiv. J.W. Hales, another distinguished editor of the Areopagitic holds the same view. See his Areopagitica, 1875, p.xxix.
 2. CM, iv. 296. Isocrates is 'that Old man eloquent' of Sonnet X addressed to Lady Margaret Leigh.
 3. Areopagitica, CM, iv. 326.

in structure than those of Isocrates it is not due to his failure to imitate the Greek orator properly. He did not attempt such imitation. For there is a fundamental difference between a prose written with utmost care for the highest rhetorical effect and a prose poured forth out of an urgency of passion. One who believed that books preserve 'as in a viall the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect' and are 'the pretious life-blood of a master spirit'¹ would naturally have greater regard for inspired language than for laboured rhetorical excellences. In Milton's prose force bursts through form, the energy of an impetuous and abundant mind overflows the limits of formal rhetoric. In poetry the movement of his verse was equal to the demands of an inspired mind and metrical variations or transpositions of words or the use of unfamiliar idiom do not impair the architecture of the verse paragraph. But can we discover in his prose a level of harmony where the jarring elements in diction or in the arrangement of clauses would themselves become the parts of an elaborate pattern of rhythm? Sir Walter Raleigh has made the most important contribution to the study of Milton's prose by answering this question in the affirmative. 'The architecture' he says in his estimate of Milton's prose style 'depends on melody

1. Areopagitica, CM, iv. 298.

rather than on logic'. This is consistent with his view that at 'its best and at its worst alike his (Milton's) prose is the prose of a poet'.¹ The rhetorical principle of this prose of a poet is zeal and what Milton calls 'sanctified bitterness' is a form of eloquence in which this zeal is the active principle.

Between the Renaissance idea of sarcasm and Milton's 'sanctified bitterness' the difference is fundamental though not apparent at the first sight. What George Puttenham calls 'merry skoffe' and 'bitter tawnt' (the one he names Ironia and the other Sarcasmus) are justified on the ground that these

abuses tende but to dispose the hearers to mirth and sollace by pleasant conueyance and efficacy of speech, they are not in truth to be accopted vices but for vertues in the poetical science very commendable.²

With Puttenham sarcasm is nothing more than a rhetorical device employed for creating mirth and has no suggestion of the grim hilarity of Milton's. In his comments on Satyre however, Puttenham enunciated a theory of bitter invective which Milton might have remembered when he was writing his An Apology. Speaking of 'three kinds of poems reprehensiuë, to wit, the Satyre, the Comedie, and the Tragdie' he says that the first and most bitter inuective against vice and vicious men

1. Milton, 1922, p.75.

2. The Arte of English Poesie, 1589; see Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Smith, 1904, ii. 160.

was the Satyre: which, to th'intent their bitterness should breede none ill will, either to the Poets, or to the recitours (which could not haue bene chosen if they had bene openly knowen)¹. Milton's conception of satire is close to this definition of bitter invective:

For a Satyr as it was borne out of a Tragedy, so ought to resemble his parentage, to strike high, and adventure dangerously at the most eminent vices among the greatest persons, and not to creepe into every blinde Tap-house, that fears a Constable more than a Satyr.²

Yet there is an important difference between the two views of satirical writing. Puttenham does not favour 'this bitter poeme called the old Comedy' and he observes that Satyre never meddled 'with any Princes matters nor such high personages'.³ Obviously Puttenham is only giving a history of dramatic poetry and is not concerned with satire as a literature of powerful invective and reproof. As a supporter of the bitterest denunciation of personalities and institutions Milton certainly would not object to the daring raillery of the old comedy. In the satirical theory of the Tudor period there was no place for a satire with blasphemy and treason as its staple. The 'surly republican' of the Stuart period was determined to 'strike high and adventure dangerously'. His bold invective was inspired

1. *ibid.* ii. 32.

2. An Apology, *CM*, iii. 329.

3. Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Smith, 1904, ii. 33-34.

by a sense of sacred wrath of which there is no suggestion in the classical or Renaissance theory of satire.

CHAPTER SEVEN
LAW AND STORY

The scripture also affords us a divine pastoral drama in the Song of Solomon

Milton

The scripture which provided Milton with a conception of prophetic poetry, which influenced his idea of 'tragic' calm and gave a moral sanction to his bitter attacks on the enemies of true religion was to him the highest poetry which he preferred to all other poetry. Considering that his own conception of poetry made it necessary for him to declare his preference for one kind of literature over another it is very important to enquire into the circumstance and basis of such preference. The task is difficult because Milton's choices have to be ascertained from a mass of scattered statements which are more or less of the nature of obiter dicta. A close study of these statements will encourage the assumption that they are intended to indicate definite choices and that taken as a whole they represent a discriminating literary attitude. Let us take for an instance the few suggestive lines on his readings in the invocation of holy Light in the third book of Paradise Lost:

Yet not the more
 Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
 Clear Spring, or shady Grove, or Sunnie Hill,
 Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief
 These Sion and the flowrie Brooks beneath
 That wash thy hallowd feet, and warbling flow.
 Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget
 Those other two equald with me in Fate,
 So were I equald with them in renown,
 Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides,
 And Tiresias and Phineus Prophets old.¹

Here 'but chief These Sion' must have been intended to mean a definite and determined preference for Hebrew literature: the literature of the ancients, very important as it is, can be given but a subordinate position. It does not, however, necessarily imply that Milton places the Old Testament above the classics as literature. Till now no comparative literary judgment is involved in the declaration of a special love for Hebrew poetry. Such judgment is given in Paradise Regained where Hebrew literature is pronounced superior to the literature of Greece. Yet it is important to consider how far Christ's pronouncement in Paradise Regained grows out of the preference stated in the passage we have just quoted.

It may be argued that in Paradise Lost Milton speaks of the Old Testament as his chief reading because there lay the source of his poem. Still we cannot ignore the fact that at the time when Paradise Lost was being composed Sion was nearer

1. Pl., 111. 26-36.

to his soul than Athens. And this has significance unless we assume that in Milton there is a dichotomy between taste and conscience and that he is always striving to suppress the former for the sake of the latter. And whether Milton had a split personality is a question which cannot be settled on a critical plane. For the question can be raised only by those who are already committed to the belief that Milton really had a split personality and they will discover its symptoms in every page that he has written. Those who think that Paradise Lost is a unity and that it reflects the unity of its author's mind will never succeed in countering an opposite view. But one thing can be shown objectively and with evidence which leaves no room for a divided opinion: it is that Milton has a definite approach to literature and that whenever he indicates that approach in his writings he does it with an impeccable consistency. His literary estimates change in the sense that they grow from less mature to more mature attitudes.

We can begin with an examination of Milton's statement in Paradise Lost that the Old Testament was the first thing in his studies. In Aubrey's manuscript notes on Milton's life dated 1681 preserved in the Bodleian there is this account of Milton's reading habits after the loss of his eyesight: 'He was an ^{So: at the clock man's} early riser. Yes, after he lost his sight. He had a ✓

man to read him: the first thing he read was the Hebrew bible, & y^t was at 4^h manè - 4^h + . then he ^{contemplated'} ~~thought~~.¹

In the anonymous manuscript biography of Milton preserved in the Bodleian there is another contemporary witness to Milton's special devotion to the Bible:

Besides the ordinary lectures out of the Bible and its best Commentators on the week day, That was his sole subject on Sundays. And Davids Psalms were in esteem with him above all Poetry.²

When Richardson observed that 'above All he (Milton) found Divine Nourishment for his Muse Where 'tis Superlatively Rich, that is, in the Holy Scriptures' and that he 'if Ever Man was, was Smit with the Love of Sacred Song'³ he certainly relied on Milton's own confession supported by what was current in knowledgeable circles about Milton's literary preferences. Bishop Newton's remark that Milton's 'favourite author after the Holy Scriptures was Homer' affirms the priority in Milton's studies on the basis of information which was still fresh and dependable.⁴

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1. Bodl. MS. Aubrey 8, sig. A.f.1. verso. See The Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.6.
 2. Bodl. MS. Wood D. 4. See The Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.33.
 3. Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton's Paradise Lost, 1734, p.xiv. See The Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.211.
 4. Paradise Lost, ed. Thomas Newton, 1749, i. 1. Newton must have drawn on the same source as Aubrey when he recorded that at 'his first rising he had usually a chapter read to him out of the Hebrew Bible' and that he 'studied and admired the Holy Scriptures above all other books whatsoever'. pp.xlviii, lii.

But was the Hebrew Bible equally important to Milton as literature in his earlier days? At St. Paul's Milton received some instruction in Hebrew which was certainly supplemented by studies at home under the direction of his private tutors. That his interest in Hebrew in the later phase of his schooling was a little deeper than could be stimulated by works like Udall's English version of Martinus's Grammar is evident from the fact that his earliest surviving verses are translations of Psalms CXIV and CXXXVI which were composed, as mentioned in the 1645 edition of Poems 'at fifteen years old'. We cannot be certain that the paraphrases were directly from the Hebrew and it is possible as J.H. Hanford has suggested that they 'follow Buchanan's versions of the Psalms in Horatian meters'.¹ Still this early literary effort indicates a devotion to scriptural poetry which must have been fostered in him by his father, who set to music several psalms,² and by his tutor Thomas Young.³ In the earliest surviving letter of

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1. A Milton Handbook, New York, 1946, p.174.
 2. In Thomas Ravenscroft, The Whole Book of Psalmes, 1621, there are six psalms set to music by the elder Milton. See E. Brennecke, John Milton the Elder and his Music, Columbia University Press, 1938, pp.98 ff.
 3. For a study of Milton's translations of psalms see E.C. Baldwin, 'Milton and the Psalms', ML, 1919, xvii and M.H. Studley, 'Milton and his Paraphrases of the Psalms', PQ, 1925, iv. H.F. Fletcher says on the basis of some indirect evidence that the elder Gill too 'taught the young Milton to read Hebrew'. The Intellectual Development of John Milton, Urbana, 1956, i. 279.

Milton which is addressed to Thomas Young and is dated 26 March 1625 Milton thanks his preceptor for the 'most welcome gift of a Hebrew Bible'.¹ We can assume that the Biblical studies of his youth mentioned in the De Doctrina Christiana refer to the period between his admission at Cambridge and the beginning of his residence at Horton:

I entered upon an assiduous course of study in my youth beginning with the books of the Old and New Testament in their original languages, and going diligently through a few of the shorter systems of divines, in imitation of whom I was in the habit of classing under certain heads whatever passages of Scripture occurred for extraction, to be made use of here after as occasion might require.²

In 'Ad Patrem' he gives an account of his studies which include 'the mysteries uttered by the prophets of Palestine'.³ We should however observe that at this stage Biblical literature is only one important item in literary studies which include Greek and Latin and some modern European languages. And Milton does not compare Hebrew poetry with classical and does not indicate any preference.

But in the Horton period there was a change, if not in his literary views, at least in his choice of studies. In this period Milton mostly concentrated on the classics although

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1. Milton's Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, ed. P.B. Tillyard, 1932, p.6.
 2. CM, xiv. 5.
 3. 85. Quaeque Palaestinus Loquitur mysteria vates.

there is nothing to prove that his interest in Hebrew was waning. In the Defensio Secunda he says:

At my father's country house ... being perfectly at my ease, I gave myself up entirely to reading the Greek and Latin writers.¹

'Some great cycle of my studies'² of which he tells Charles Diodati in a letter dated 2 September 1637 certainly did not exclude Hebrew but the larger part of that study was in classics. The literary interests of *Il Penseroso* are confined to Greek and English masters, the 'divine Philosophy' in Comus is musical as Apollo's lute, and the uncouth swain in Lycidas warbles a Doric lay. There is however one impressive instance of Milton's continuing interest in Hebrew poetry even in the midst of this intensive classical reading. Sending his Greek translation of a psalm to Alexander Gill he says in his letter dated 4 December 1634:

I had indeed a few compositions of my own in that style at hand, but thought none of them worthy to be sent in emulation of your own gift. I therefore send what is not entirely my own, but partly the work of that truly divine poet, this Ode of whom I set about translating into Greek heroic meter at daybreak one day last week, before I was up, not of any set purpose, but on some sudden impulse.³

This regard for David as a divine poet is an important link

1. CM, viii. 121.
2. Milton's Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, ed. P.B. Tillyard, 1932, p.11.
3. *ibid.* p.10. Maason identifies this Greek composition with Milton's Greek version of Psalm CXIV. Life of Milton, 1859, i. 589.

between the Herton period and the pamphlet period in point of literary attitudes. It anticipates the estimate of 'those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets'¹ and of 'the determinate sentence of David and Solomon' with which young learners are advised to 'close the dayes work'² in Of Education. And both in The Reason of Church Government and in Of Education there is something of that special respect for Hebrew poetry which is lyrically expressed in the invocation of holy Light in Paradise Lost and later elaborately defended in the fourth book of Paradise Regained. Christ's denunciation of Greek literature in the shorter epic has been generally considered as an instance of a perversion of literary judgment by religious dogma. Commenting on Christ's utterances on Greek literature E.M.W. Tillyard has observed that 'none of the explanations of this puzzling speech with which I am acquainted have seemed to me in the least adequate'. His own conclusion is that the speech represents a change of moral outlook caused by the frustration of Milton's hopes in 1660:

I can only conclude that Milton had before Paradise Regained undergone some important mental experiences For all his accumulation of knowledge he had been led into a course of action which had apparently achieved nothing In spite of his growing distaste for dogma it was in the Bible especially in the Psalms, that he found expressed what for him was of

1. The Reason of Church Government, CM, 111. 238.

2. CM, iv. 284.

all things most important, the communion of the isolated human being with God.¹

But as an estimate of the wisdom of Greece and of Israel Christ's speech in Paradise Regained will not appear so puzzling when we remember that in the pamphlet period Milton's opinions were almost the same. In Paradise Regained Greek orators are

herein to our Prophets farr beneath
As men divinely taught, and better teaching
The solid rules of Civil Government
In their majestic unaffected stile
Then all the Oratory of Greece and Rome.²

In The Reason of Church Government Moses is 'the only Lawgiver that we can believe to have been visibly taught of God'³ and in Of Education learners are advised 'to dive into the grounds of Law, and legal Justice; deliver'd first, and with best warrant by Moses'.⁴ In Of Education 'those extoll'd remains of Grecian law-givers' are prescribed for reading 'as far as humane prudence can be trusted'.⁵ In The Reason of Church Government there is no depreciation of Greek poetry but there is certainly a belief that Hebrew poetry is a superior kind of poetry and that it 'may be easily made appear over all the

1. Milton, 1946, pp.309-310.

2. iv, 356-360.

3. CM, 111. 182.

4. CM, iv, 285.

5. CM, iv, 285.

kinds of Lyrick poesy, to be incomparable'.¹ The belief is restated more emphatically in Paradise Regained:

All our Law and story strew'd
With Hymns our Psalms with artful terms inscrib'd,
Our Hebrew Songs and Harps in Babylon,
That pleas'd so well our Victors ear.²

That 'Sions songs' were 'to all true tastes excellin'³ was not therefore a critical belief peculiar to Milton's declining years. It had struck root in his mind as early as 1642.

But in The Reason of Church Government there is no repudiation of classical literature. There are, in fact, two observations in Christ's speech on literature of which there is no suggestion in the pamphlet. Christ declares that Greek literature was foolish and vainly imitative of Hebrew literature:

... rather Greece from us these Arts deriv'd;
Ill imitated, while they loudest sing
The vices of thir Deities, and thir own.⁴

The Greek poet was uninspired and consequently something of a plagiarist and a very unsuccessful plagiarist at that. And the model was the poetry of the Hebrews. In dealing with such views we must not be influenced by the fact that they must seem

1. CM, 111. 238.

2. iv. 334-337.

3. PR, iv. 347. Obviously 'artful terms' in PR recalls what is mentioned as 'critical art of composition' in The Reason of Church Government.

4. PR, iv. 338-340.

to the modern reader a form of critical atrocity. We must take it for granted that Milton said what he believed and that his belief was rooted in his basic conceptions of the role of literature in history. In the last phase of his life these conceptions are sharply stated and often take the form of absolute judgments. But we can trace their origin and development in his early literary career and particularly see their connection with the ideas embodied in the pamphlets. Into the history of his disapprobation of classical literature we will enquire in the next chapter. The question we must answer here is whether there is anything in the growth of Milton's literary ideas in his early period which prepares the ground for the view of Hebrew poetry expressed by Christ in Paradise Regained. We have seen that already in The Reason of Church Government and in Of Education he had said that Hebrew poetry was superior to Greek poetry. But how was it a model for imitation by Greek writers? Milton does not say anything about a Hebrew influence on Greek literature in any of his pamphlets. Still the essence of Christ's observation is implicit in Milton's major pronouncements on literature in the anti-prelatical tracts. For one thing we must remember that in Paradise Regained Greek literature is called a bad literature partly because it is a bad imitation of the

literature of the Hebrews. The idea of imitation is introduced as an important item among a number of charges against the poets of Greece. The argument is that if Hebrew poetry is the greatest poetry or the only true poetry then anything that resembles it must be something of a perverse imitation. Christ's denigration of the Greek Muse proceeds from his worship of the poets of Israel. In a Christian view of poetry there can be but one kind of poetic excellence and one standard for judging it. There is no room for compromise between opposite ideals, no concession to things that are repugnant to its principles, and no need for variety. In a house of the true faith there is only contempt for the worshipper of Baal.

In the growth of Milton's view of Hebrew literature we can observe three stages. Till the end of the Horton period Milton's interest in the Old Testament as literature is nothing more than that of a well-educated young man whose literary pursuits are influenced by a devout father and a few teachers known for their erudition in Hebrew. In the second stage which is covered by the prose period Milton develops a considered literary estimate of the Bible and arrives at two critical conclusions. First he now believes that Hebrew poetry as poetry is on a par with classical poetry. The diffuse epic of Homer and Virgil and the brief epic represented in the Book

of Job are alternative forms of fundamentally equal merit; the 'dramatic constitutions' chosen by Sophocles and Euripides can be compared to the divine pastoral drama; and the poems of Pindar and Callimachus can be placed along with the songs of David. Secondly, he thinks that portions of the Old Testament, for example the psalms are even superior in poetic excellence, to Greek poetry.¹

This literary estimate of the Old Testament may at first sight appear to be a restatement of a similar view of Hebrew poetry in sixteenth-century English criticism. Let us take as an instance Thomas Lodge's opinion of Hebrew literature expressed in his Defence of Poetry (1579):

Among the precise Iewes you shall find Poetes; and for more maiestie Sibilla will prophesie in verse. Beroaldus can witnes with me that Dauid was a poet, and that his vayne was in imitating (as S. Ierom witnesseth) Horace, Flaccus, and Pindarus; sometimes his verse runneth in an Iambus foote, anone he hath recourse to Saphic vaine, and aliquando semipede ingreditur. Ask Iosephus, and he wil tel you that Essay, Iob, and Solomon voutsafed poetical practises, for (if Origen and he fault not) theyre verse was Hexameter and pentameter. Enquire of Cossiodorus, he will say that all the beginning of Poetry proceeded from the Scripture.²

Obviously this is not so much an appreciation of Hebrew poetry as an illustrative reference in an argument in support of

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1. The Reason of Church Government, CM, 111. 238.
 2. Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Smith, 1904, 1. 71.

poetry in general. The literary opinion of St. Jerome, Origen and Lactantius came handy in a reply to Stephen Gosson's Schoole of Abuse (1579). And Sir Philip Sidney's estimate of the Old Testament poetry in his The Defence of Poesie is prompted by a similar critical purpose:

And may not I presume a little further, to shew the reasonableness of this worde vates? And say that the holy Dauids Psalmes are a diuine Poem? If I doo, I shall not do it without the testimonie of great learned men, both auncient and moderne: but euen the name Psalmes will speake for mee, which, being interpreted, is nothing but Songes.¹

Sidney's argument is not that Hebrew poetry is as great as Greek poetry, he only wants to affirm that Hebrew poetry is also poetry. And this gives strength to his main argument that poetic work is good work. In The Reason of Church Government on the other hand Hebrew poetry is given a high place as poetry and is even rated higher than classical poetry. And the estimate is not a part of an apology for the poetic art: it is introduced in a survey of poetic forms which covers the whole field of literature.

This belief that Hebrew poetry is sufficient for a Christian leads to a sense of the insufficiency of other literature. Of this there is an expression in The Reason of Church Government itself where Milton says that his achievement as a poet

1. *ibid.* 1. 154-155.

will be governed by the fact of his being a Christian.¹ And the contrast between poetry 'obtained by the invocation of dame memory and her siren daughters' and the poetry that comes through 'devout prayer to that eternal Spirit' is, on the whole, a declaration of the insufficiency of pagan poetry. When heathen literature speaks true wisdom it is still heathen and is something apart from the proper literature of the Christian. Expressions like 'even the sage heathen writers',² 'heathen lore',³ 'heathen Homer',⁴ suggest a considered pagan-Christian distinction. In Eikonoklastes this idea of a heathen lore becomes the basis of a censure on Sir Philip Sidney.⁵ Throughout the pamphlet period Milton suggested a distinction between pagan and Judaic-Christian literature. It was not with him a point of literary criticism or of comparative literature. And there was no occasion for him at any time in this period to attempt purely critical estimates or comparative judgments. His special respect for Hebrew literature arose from the whole spiritual atmosphere of his endeavours, the moral psychology of an inspired reformist.

1. CM, 111. 236.

2. The Reason of Church Government, CM, 111. 273.

3. Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, CM, 111. 441.

4. De Doctrina Christiana, CM, xiv. 175.

5. CM, v. 87.

He felt that he had in him the fire of a Hebrew prophet, that like Jeremiah he was commanded by God 'to take the trumpet, and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast'.¹ Even in the Areopagitica which as a plea for liberty of expression holds in esteem the old and 'elegant humanity of Greece' the moral tone has more of the spirit of an Old Testament prophet than of the elegance and humanity of the Athenian intellect. The belief that England was the 'nation chosen before any other' to be the leader of Europe, that 'out of her as out of Sion, should be proclaimed ... the first tidings ... of reformation' and that the great builders of this 'spiritual architecture'² of the land are become prophets at whose sight Moses is rejoicing is fostered by the spirit of the Old Testament.

The third stage in the growth of Milton's attitude towards Hebrew literature is represented in his invocations in Paradise Lost. The rejection of the classical Muse in Book VII has an important bearing on the comment on classical heroic poetry in the exordium of Book IX. The depreciation of classical literature in Paradise Regained is but one step from this. And that depreciation, harsh though it is, necessarily follows from the conviction that divinely inspired poetry belonged only to the Judaic Christian world. Christ's praise for 'Our Law

1. The Reason of Church Government, CM, 111. 231.

2. Areopagitica, CM. iv. 342.

and Story' in Book IV of Paradise Regained must be understood in the context of his studies described in Book I:

therefore above my years,
The Law of God I read, and found it sweet
Made it my whole delight and in it grew
To such perfection, that ere yet my age
Had measur'd twice six years at our great Feast
I went into the Temple there to hear
The Teachers of our Law. and to propose
What might improve my knowledge or thir own.¹

We can assume that Milton wanted to give a similar account of his own intellectual pursuits. Indeed the lines which follow seem more appropriate as a description of Milton's own aspirations than of the ministry of Jesus:

And was admir'd by all, yet this not all
To which my spirit aspir'd, victorious deeds
Flam'd in my heart, heroic acts, one while
To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke,
Then to subdue and quell ore all the earth
Brute violence and proud Tyrannick pow'r
Till truth were freed, and equity restor'd.²

Apart from their application to the pursuits and ideals of Milton's youth they have a special bearing on the spirit which

1. 206-213 When Cipriani produced an etching of Cornelius Janssen's portrait of Milton as a boy he inscribed these lines under it. David Masson says that 'those lines from Paradise Regained which the first engraver ventured to inscribe under the portrait were really written by the poet with some reference to his own recollection of himself as a child.' Life, i. 51.
2. IA, i. 214-220. 'Of our Lords earlier aspirations Scripture says nothing; and the whole tenour of his public ministry negatives the idea that he aimed at temporal power, or desired to alter the political condition of his countrymen.' Paradise Regained, ed. C.S. Jerram, 1891, p.78.

animated him in the commonwealth period. For the words which he puts into the mouth of Christ were expressive of the mood in which he paraphrased the first eight Psalms in 1653. The paraphrase of Psalm I in particular contains words on the ideal man's reading of the Laws which anticipate Christ's words on his reading:

But in the great
Jehovah's Law is ever his delight,
 And in his Law he studies day and night.¹

Even if Milton had not yet begun writing the De Doctrina Christiana he was in this period more deeply concerned with the foundation of Christian faith than with mere polite literature. This Christian spirit determines the form and purport of Paradise Regained: it gives Samson Agonistes its Hebraic spirit.

We have already observed that Milton's appreciation of Hebrew literature is different from that of the Renaissance critic. But it is important to ask if this attitude was influenced by the early Christian Fathers. When Thomas Lodge affirmed that the Old Testament contained poetry he cited as his authority Jerome and Origen. And Milton too refers to Origen's opinion in support of the view that the Song of Solomon is a pastoral drama.² Jerome's appreciation of

1. Psalm I. The substitution of the word meditate of the Authorised Version by the word studies is significant.

2. The Reason of Church Government, CM, 111. 238. Origen (185-254 A.D.) made this statement in In Canticum Canticozum (contd. on next page)

Biblical literature could indeed be considered as the foundation of all that Milton says about Hebrew poetry in The Reason of Church Government.¹ Both Jerome and Milton thought that Hebrew poetry was not only on a par with Greek poetry but was even superior to it. Still it would be an error to imagine that Milton's literary views were shaped by the Christian Fathers. He knew their writings and possibly liked some of their opinions, but on the whole his regard for them was limited. His view of Hebrew poetry grew from the demands of his spiritual growth: it did not require the support of respectable Christian authority. He accepted certain things from the patristic opinion of Hebrew poetry because they were

Prologus. See Opera Omnia, xiv. 240.

It is possible that Milton got this view of Origen from David Paraeus's In Divinam Apocalypsin S. Apostoli et Evangelistae Iohannis included in Operum Theologicorum, Frankfurt, 1628, ff. 1077. Paraeus's work on the Revelatio was translated into English as A Commentary upon the Divine Revelation of the Apostle and Evangelist John by Elias Arnold in 1644. For an interesting discussion of Paraeus's influence on Milton see A.C. Cook, 'Milton's view of the Apocalypse as Tragedy', Herrig's Archiv, 1912, cxxix.

1. Jerome (c. A.D. 340-420) admired the sweetness of the Psalms, the dignity of the Song of Solomon, the perfection of the Book of Job and the literary qualities of the Prophetic writings in general. While he thought that David was a Hebrew Pindar and Horace he also affirmed the superiority of Hebrew to classical literature when he added 'if I can but teach what I have learnt there will be born something unknown to Greece'. See J.W.H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase, 1943, p.19.

similar to his own opinion. There is nothing in his criticism of the Old Testament to show that like Jerome he was anxious to prove that the Hebrew poets had achieved the technical excellence of classical poetry. While he believes that the Hebrew songs are perfect in the critical art of composition he does not think that it is important to see how that art was identical with that of the Greeks. Jerome's estimate of Hebrew poetry is too dogmatic and too defensive in tone to appear very convincing to a mind which was never disturbed by its love of Greek literature. Jerome was loud in proclaiming the excellence of Hebrew poetry because of some sharp conflict in his mind between his Christian conscience and his literary taste. To resolve that conflict he took a line of literary criticism which is peculiar to the poetic doctrine of the Christian Fathers:

There (in the Book of Job) are hexameter lines, running in dactyls and spondees, and frequently, because of the idiom of the tongue, other feet which have not the same number of syllables but do have the same time Now if anyone is incredulous that the Hebrews practiced meters in the fashion of our Horace or the Greek Pindar or Alcaeus and Sappho as in the Psalms or Jeremiah's Lamentation or in nearly all the canticles of the Scriptures, he should read Philo, Josephus, Origen, and Eusebius of Caesarea, and he will learn whether it is true or not.¹

Jerome needed to say this because like Tertullian he once asked 'What concern has Horace with the Psalter, Virgil with

1. Patrologia Latina Cursus Completus, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1841-1879, xxviii. 1081-1084.

the Gospel'?¹ and dreamed that he was shipped in heaven for /w his love of the classics. Milton did not praise Hebrew literature for satisfying a doctrinal scruple and he had none of the worries of the Christian Fathers about his regard for classical literature. In the Areopagitica he calls Jerome's 'lenten dream' a 'fantasm bred by the feaver which had then seised him'.²

It is indeed very significant that Milton never sought to devise a compromise between his classical learning and his conviction that the highest wisdom was embodied in the Bible. With Philo he thought that Moses was a divinely inspired prophet but unlike Philo he did not want to show that Moses was another Plato. Nor did he share the enthusiasm of Clement and Origen for establishing an equivalence between Christianity and classical wisdom. In Paradise Regained the two are different and the only basis there for a recognition of classical wisdom is in the belief that

moral vertue is exprest
By light of Nature not in all quite lost.

But the 'fountain of light', the 'light from above' is in 'our Law and Story', 'divine in argument' and perfect as art.

1. Epistle, xxxviii. 30. See J.W.H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism, The Medieval Phase, 1943, p.17.
2. CM, iv. 307.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE OLD AND ELEGANT HUMANITY

Unless where moral vertue is exprest
 By light of Nature not in all quite lost.
Milton

In the 'Nativity Ode', which Milton places first in both the editions of his shorter poems, the advent of Christ brings the dissolution of the pagan universe: Apollo leaves the steep of Delphos and his priest is mute. In Paradise Regained Christ denounces the ancient Greeks for the vices of their deities and their fable, which, denuded of its epithets, will scarcely have any worth. Milton's estimate of classical literature was not independent of this basic attitude towards the pagan world. That in the last and poetically most fruitful period of his life his view of classical poetry was influenced by his Christian sensibility he makes plain in the last three poems. In Paradise Lost his Muse is the inspirer of Moses and is not the Muse of the Greeks. In Paradise Regained there is a forthright denunciation of Greek literature and philosophy. The Preface to Samson Agonistes mentions Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides as the three tragic poets yet unequalled by any; but its whole argument is that tragedy as it was anciently composed

had merit since it was moral and could appeal to the Christian mind. If St. Paul quoted from Euripides it was because some moral wisdom could proceed from mere sapience. The Preface is not a tribute to the Greek tragedy; it is a defence of tragedy of which the Apocalypse and Christ Suffering of Gregory Naziansen are examples.

Christ's repudiation of Greek literature and philosophy in Paradise Regained does not mark an abrupt and surprising change in Milton's intellectual attitudes. It proceeds from ideas which worked in his mind throughout his literary development. After Satan's magnificent eulogy of Greek poetry and philosophy Christ's sage reply is

Think not but that I know these things, or think
I know them not; not therefore am I short
Of knowing what I ought.¹

This plain declaration of the insufficiency of Greek wisdom is followed by a criticism of Greek philosophers who are not spiritually qualified to be the teachers of a Christian society.

Alas what can they teach, and not mislead;
Ignorant of themselves, of God much more,
And how the world began, and how man fell
Degraded by himself, on Grace depending?
Much of the Soul they talk, but all awrie,
And in themselves seek virtue, and to themselves
All Glory arrogate, to God give none,
Rather accuse him under usual names,
Fortune and Fate, as one regardless quite
Of mortal things. Who therefore seeks in these

1. PR, iv. 286-288.

True wisdom, finds her not, or by delusion
 Farr worse, her false resemblance onely meets,
 An empty cloud.¹

The description of the fallen angels' intellectual pursuits in Paradise Lost must have been intended as a judgment on Greek philosophy.² By the time Milton began the composition of Paradise Lost he felt the need for stating the sharp difference between the moral universe of the Graeco-Romans and the Judaic-Christian faith. What he says in describing the arts of Hell in Paradise Lost Book II he repeats in Christ's speech in Paradise Regained Book IV³ and the Chorus's words on the doubting mind in Samson Agonistes bear the same meaning:

Yet more ther be who doubt his ways not just,
 As to his own edicts, found contradicting,
 Then give the rains to wandering thought,
 Regardless of his glories diminution;
 Till by thir own perplexities involv'd
 They ravel more, still less resolv'd,
 But never find self-satisfying solution.⁴

The depreciation of different schools of philosophy in Paradise Regained is essentially an attack on vain wisdom which Milton now identifies with Hellenism. The argument against unregenerate learning is argument contra paganos. This was on the whole Milton's attitude towards classical literature and

1. PR. iv. 309-321.

2. See passage quoted on p.

3. E.L. Marilla equates the two passages in "Milton on "Vain wisdom" and "False Philosophie"". Studia Neo Philologica, 1953, xxv. 1 ff.

4. SA. 300-306.

wisdom in the period covered by Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes. In its deeper meaning it was distrust of all wisdom which was not divinely inspired, that vain intellectualism and erudition against which St. Paul warned the Colossians:

Take heed lest there shall be anyone that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of man, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

If we are to take his early view of Greek philosophers we find that in Prolusion II Pythagoras is 'a very god among philosophers, whose name all men of that time hailed with the most profound reverence'² and Plato, 'best interpreter of Mother Nature';³ in Prolusion III Milton advises his fellow students to 'take as your instructor him who is already your delight - Aristotle, who has recorded all these things with learning and diligence for our instruction';⁴ in Comus the Elder Brother wants to call

Antiquity from the old Schools of Greece
To testify the arms of Chastity.⁵

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1. Colossians, ii.8. Probably St. Paul meant the Gnostics. Milton interprets it as a warning against all knowledge that is not sacred. cf. De Doctrina Christiana, CM, xiv. 24; Likeliest Meang, CM, vi. 98.
 2. Milton Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, tr. P.B. Tillyard, 1932, p.64.
 3. *ibid.* p.65.
 4. *ibid.* p.72.
 5. 439-440.

In 'Il Penseroso' the contemplating man loves to 'unsphear the spirit of Plato' and in the system of education outlined in Of Education it is important that 'their young and pliant affections are led through all the moral works of Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, Plutarch, Laertius, and those Loecrian remnants'.¹ And the young poet's love of classical poetry would seem as deep. In Prolusion VI Homer is 'the rising sun or morning star of cultured literature, at whose birth all learning was born also as his twin'.² In Of Education 'the choice histories, heroic poems, and Attic tragedies of stateliest and most legal argument' are prescribed as a very important item in the curriculum. As late as 1652 he says that he has acquired his literary skill from the writers of Greece.³ When he could repeat Homer's two poems almost without book⁴ he had achieved a mastery of classical authors which would seem impossible without the enthusiasm of a humanist. About 1655

hee began that laborious work of Amassing out of all the Classic Authors both in Prose and Verse, a Latin Thesaurus to the emendation of that done, by Stephanus ... & had begun a Greek Thesaurus.⁵

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1. CM, iv. 294.
 2. Milton Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, tr. F.B. Tillyard, 1932, p.90.
 3. Letter to Lenard Philaras, June, 1652. See infra vi. 5.
 4. Toland's life of Milton, The Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.179.
 5. John Phillip's Life of Milton. See ibid. p.29.

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1. CM, iv. 234.
 2. Milton Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, tr. P.B. Tillyard, 1932, p.90.
 3. Letter to Lenard Philaras, June, 1652. See infra vi. 5.
 4. Toland's life of Milton, The Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.179.
 5. John Phillip's Life of Milton. See ibid. p.29.

Aubrey too 'heard that after he was blind, that he was writing a Latin Dictionary'¹ and Edward Phillips says that after finishing his Pro Se Defensio he

being now quiet from State-Adversaries and publick Contests, he had leisure again for his own Studies and private Designs; which were his fore-said History of England, and a New Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, according to the manner of Stephanus; a work he had been long since Collecting from his own Reading and still went on with it at times, even very near to his dying day.²

So not many years before he began writing Paradise Lost and perhaps till his last days Milton was collecting words from the philosophers who are condemned in Paradise Regained.³

Thomas Birch records Milton's daughter Deborah saying that Isaiah, Homer and Ovid's Metamorphoses were books which the daughters were often called upon to read to their father.⁴

Also it must be remembered that in the De Doctrina Christiana Milton often quotes from pagan authors to illustrate his arguments. Quoting from Thucydides and Virgil in affirming the justice of placular punishments he says that the 'same might be

1. *ibid.* p.4.

2. *ibid.* p.72.

3. Wood mentions Milton's Latin Thesaurus as the basis of Edward Phillips's Speculum Linguae Latinae. Athanas Oxonienses, 1721, ff. 1118. There is mention of 'a Large Manuscript, in three Volumes of Mr John Milton' in Linguae Romanae Dictionarium Luculentum Novum, 1693, preface, sig. A 2 v.

4. A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton, 1738, i. 61.

easily shown by a multitude of other Pagan testimonies and examples'. Dealing with the sin of concupiscence he quotes a line from Ovid with the remark that 'this is not ill expressed by the poet'.¹ Explaining some Biblical passages bearing on the death of the body he quotes from the Suppliants of Euripides in the conviction that the Greek dramatist 'has, without being aware of it, given a far better interpretation of this passage than the commentators in question'.² In the Tenure of Kings and Magistrates there was an expression of even greater respect for Euripides: 'How much more rationally spake the heathen King Demophoon in a Tragedy of Euripides, than these Interpreters would put upon King David'.³ It is said on the authority of one of Milton's daughters, that after the Holy Scriptures, his favourite volumes were Homer, Euripides, and Ovid.⁴ In De Doctrina Christiana seven out of nine quotations from the classics are from these three authors. And although there is, curiously enough, no direct reference to Plato, there are frequent allusions to Aristotle who in the Tenure of Kings and Magistrates is called 'one of the best interpreters of nature and morality'.⁵ There are several passages in the De

1. CM, xv. 191.

2. CM, xv. 237.

3. CM, v. 13.

4. Thomas Newton's Life of Milton, Paradise Lost, 1749, 1. lvi

5. CM, v. 12.

Doctrina Christiana which would seem to support the view that Milton believed in unity of wisdom, in some identity, on some specific points, between Hellenic thought and the Judaic-Christian faith.

It cannot be denied, however, [he says] that some remnants of the divine image still exist in us, not wholly extinguished by this spiritual death. This is evident, not only from the wisdom and holiness of many of the heathen, manifested both in words and deeds, but also from what is said Gen. ix. 2.¹

Arguing against the foolishness of impugning the justice of God he quotes from Proverbs and the Odyssey and he generally has no hesitation about strengthening a Christian argument by referring to confirmatory Gentile opinion.

How then are we to explain the tirade against Greek literature and philosophy in Paradise Regained? It is a question with an important bearing on Milton's idea of poetry and is particularly relevant to a study of Milton's later intellectual development. E.M.W. Tillyard thinks that the anti-classical spirit of Paradise Regained is the result of a fundamental change in the poet's mental life after the Restoration. His answer to this question is the most important in the sense that it recognises Christ's speech as a powerful expression of opinions that were really held by Milton in full knowledge of

1. CM, xv. 209.

his mental history.

The whole speech [he says] is a masterpiece of restrained eloquence, whose rise and fall hint at the stores of power that lie all ready beneath the surface. There is no question but it expresses Milton's considered opinions, perhaps his most keenly felt opinions, at the time.¹

There could not be a quieter and more convincing reply to the absurd view of Denis Saurat who attributes what he calls a 'surlly boutade against books' to a 'mood of fatigue',² a view obviously influenced by the common belief shared even by Mark Pattison that in Paradise Regained there is a frigidity which is the effect of age.³

Equally untenable is the finer judgment of John Bailey who says that

Milton was an Arian, and therefore felt at liberty to emphasize the Jewish limitations of Christ But, in any case, in the Paradise Regained stress is necessarily, for dramatic purposes, laid on the Hebrew and Messianic character of Christ, and from that point of view it is not unnatural to make him the spokesman of Hebrew resistance to the intellectual encroachments of Greece and Rome.

This extremely ingenious explanation is followed by the comment

that the contemptuous tone adopted about classical culture in the speech of Christ was not only dramatically defensible, but balanced by the far finer

1. Milton, 1946, p.309.
2. Milton: Man and Thinker. 1946, p.197.
3. Milton, 1880, p.192.

passage, evidently written from his heart, in which he exalts the glories of Athens.¹

On the whole John Bailey's view is a restatement of an earlier and popular view that 'Milton put only one side of his mind into the mouth of Christ; the other side we have had already in the mouth of Satan'.² This view is attractive because it preserves Milton's reputation as a classicist and represents a satisfying formula of a synthesis between the Renaissance and the Puritanic tempers. And Satan's eulogy of Athens seems too powerful and too beautiful to be considered an expression of ideas which were not Milton's own. Yet we must ask the question if Milton intended Satan's estimate of Hellenic culture to be accepted as his own estimate and if it was really his intention to make Christ's adversary an exponent of his own intellectual ideas. To assume that he did is to imagine that Paradise Regained has no unity of moral design and that the speeches which mostly reveal its motif express contrary ideas for the promotion of a happy compromise between them. A supposition such as this is absurd if only for the reason that in a poem where Christ the Redeemer pits himself absolutel

1. Milton, 1945, pp.204-205.

2. Stopford A. Brooke, Milton, 1879, p.157. John Bailey's view of the dramatic aptness of Christ's anti-classical speech is favoured by Kenneth Muir who however does not mention the earlier critic: 'In fact he (Milton) was at pains to draw a credible picture of the historical Jesus, depicting him with the limitations, as well as the virtues, of a Jew living in the early days of the Roman Empire'. John Milton, 1955, p.170.

against Satan the tempter the latter could not be made the spokesman of any of its leading ideas unless the author is of the Satan's party without knowing it. Satan's speech on pagan arts and philosophy is grand as his impious rhetoric in hell is grand. Milton made both equally powerful for properly executing the design of the two poems. If the wisdom of the Christian universe was to be established and the literature in which it is embodied was to be proclaimed as the true word of God the worth of the other universe and of the other literature must be honestly understood. If Greek literature is to be repudiated it must be repudiated in the face of well-reasoned and impassioned exposition of its highest merit. When Milton depicts a temptation he makes the tempter's argument appear as plausible as he could make it. It is so in Comus, and a still more impressive example is Adam's address to the Wisdom-giving Plant. And there is enough in the setting and diction of the two speeches in Paradise Regained to show Milton's real intent. It was Robert Thyer who first pointed out that there is a force in the plain and unadorned language of Christ's speech which Milton meant to be more compelling than the ornate language of Satan:

This answer of our Saviour is as much to be admired for solid reasoning, and the many sublime truths contain'd in it as the preceding speech of Satan is for

2/ that fine vein of poetry which runs through it: and one may observe in general, that Milton has quite throughout this work thrown the ornaments of poetry on the side of error, whether it was that he thought great truths best express'd in a grave unaffected stile or intended to suggest this fine moral to the reader, that simple naked truth will always be an overmatch for falsehood tho' recommended by the gayest rhetoric, and adorned with the most bewitching colors.¹

It is important to observe that of the two arguments in support of classical learning which Satan puts forth in the preamble of his panegyric of Athens one would be Milton's own argument. Satan asks Christ to study the Gentile arts in order that he may better be able to expose their errors:

And with the Gentiles much thou must converse,
Ruling them by persuasion as thou mean'st;
Without thir learning how wilt thou with them,
Or they with thee hold conversation meet?
How wilt thou reason with them, how refute
Thir Idolisms, Traditions, Paradoxes?
Error by his own arms is best evinc't.²

In the Arsenapitica Milton refers to the patristic attitude towards pagan learning with the remark that

the question was, notwithstanding sometimes controverted among the Primitive Doctors, but with great odds on that side which affirm'd it both lawfull and profitable, as was then evidently perceiv'd, when Julian the Apostat and subtlest enemy to our faith

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1. Paradise Regained, ed. Thomas Newton, 1752, p.161. Thyer is one of the scholars who prepared notes for inclusion in Newton's variorum edition. Newton's Paradise Lost published in 1749 is the first variorum edition of any English poet.
 2. PR. 1v. 229-235.

made a decree forbidding Christians the study of heathen learning; for said he, they wound us with our own weapons and with our own arts and sciences they overcome us.¹

Still more significant is the fact that Satan too speaks of the light of Nature which is Christ's only point in favour of the moral wisdom of the Greeks:

All knowledge is not coucht in Moses Law,
The Pentateuch or what the Prophets wrote,
The Gentiles also know, and write, and teach
To admiration, led by Natures light.²

Christ is ready to concede moral wisdom and patriotism to the Greek mind:

Such are from God inspir'd, not such from thee;
Unless where moral vertue is exprest
By light of Nature not in all quite lost.
Thir Orators thou then extoll'st, as those
The top of Eloquence, Statists indeed, ³
And lovers of thir Country, as may seem.

He does not make Satan's estimate of the Greek genius appear altogether absurd or utterly baseless: he only shows that it proceeds from an insufficient comprehension of the source of true wisdom. He posits the wisdom of the Hebrews against the wisdom of the Greeks and does not suggest any universal science composed of both. The two are essentially incompatible except that certain elements in the unsanctified knowledge of

1. CM, iv. 306-307.
2. PR, iv. 225-228.
3. PR, iv. 350-355.

the pagans may be acceptable on the ground that the human intelligence often discovers some moral truth in the course of its normal activity. Whatever be the dramatic interest or historical aptness of these ideas of Christ in Paradise Regained it is obvious that Milton intends them to be recognised as his own ideas and that they actually are his ideas at this stage of his mental history. Dora Neill Raymond says that Milton 'identifies himself with deity' in Paradise Regained 'with much daring but with slight sacrilege'.¹ Milton need not be daring or sacrilegious to make Christ the mouthpiece of his Christian conception of art and letters.

A recent view of the anti-classical spirit in Paradise Regained is that it shows the influence on Milton's mind of a similar spirit among some of his contemporaries who in their turn were influenced by the Early Christian Fathers:

For any one of Milton's comments on heathen culture in Paradise Regained we may establish a tradition among his enlightened contemporaries, or what is equivalent, in the Fathers, whom every educated man knew. The Fathers, like Milton, deplored the bawdry of Greek poetry and myth, and none more eloquently than the fine humanist Clement of Alexandria. Milton had read his locus patristicus; he knew the Father's sources, and he addressed readers taught the Clementine lesson by other good classicists. We may not agree entirely with those who thought Zion's songs in general lovelier than Ionia's, but Milton had found

1. Oliver's Secretary, 1932, New York, p.274.

them so in 1644, long before he wrote Christ's literary judgment.¹

There is indeed an obvious parallel between Christ's opinion of pagan literature and the Christian Fathers' suspicion of anything Pre-Christian. It is also true that the distinction between secular learning and sacred knowledge indicated by Christ's speech was important to the representative seventeenth century divines. In the Likeliest Means (1659) Milton had expressed his distrust of vain learning, that 'scholastical trash' which tended 'least of all to the edification or capacity of the people, but rather perplexed and leavened pure doctrine'. While he assures the reader that he does not speak 'in contempt of learning' he affirms that 'if God only be he who gives ministers to his Church till the world's end; and through the whole gospel never sent us for ministers to the schools of philosophy, but rather bids us beware of such "vain deceit", Col. ii. 8'. Truths which Christ says are 'plainest taught, and easiest learnt' because expressed in 'unaffected style' and are received 'from the fountain of light' constitute the whole substance of knowledge that is important for a worthy divine to acquire:

First, I offer it to the reason of any man, whether he think the knowledge of Christian religion harder than any other art and science to attain. I suppose

1. Howard Schultz, Milton and Forbidden Knowledge, New York, 1955, p. 94.

he will grant it that it is far easier, both of itself, and in regard of God's assisting Spirit, not particularly promised us to the attainment of any other knowledge, but of this only; since it was preached as well to the shepherds of Bethlehem by angels, as to the Eastern wise men by that star: and our Saviour declares himself anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, Luke iv. 18; then surely to their capacity.

This was Milton's attitude towards learning a little before the Restoration and it is significant that at this time pedantry is somehow associated with a perverse use of classical erudition in defence of episcopacy:

so that the defenders of tithes, after a long pomp, and tedious preparation out of Heathen authors, telling us that tithes were paid to Hercules and Apollo, which perhaps was imitated from the Jews.

Still more significant is the reproach in this tract on

those titular fathers ... (who) by many rites and ceremonies, both Jewish and Heathenish introduc'd; whereby thinking to gain all, they lost all: and instead of winning Jews and Pagans to be Christians by too much condescending they turned Christians into Jews and Pagans.¹

The view is indeed very close to the educational ideas of men like Roger Williams and William Dell who were opposed to mere academic learning. Dell declared that 'there needs nothing to the ministry of the New Testament but only God's pouring out his spirit' and that the true Christian knowledge

1. CM, vi. 63, 65.

is not only contrary to the philosophical divinity of the schools and university, and the common carnal religion of the nation, but doth also reprove and condemn them.¹

And the sufficiency of the Scripture as a source of true knowledge affirmed in the Likeliest Means and in Paradise Regained was so important to John Webster that he asserted that

the whole Scripture was given that man might be brought to the full and absolute abnegation of all his wit, reason, will, desires, strength, wisdom, righteousness, and all human glory and excellences whatsoever.

Since he believed that true wisdom was 'the fruit of grace' all that needed be taught was the word of God spoken in 'the true original tongue, the language of the Heavenly Canaan'.²

Roger Williams agrees that 'schools of human learning ought to be maintained' and yet declares that 'they will be found to be none of Christ's'.³ Milton's derision of Greek philosophy is in essence an assault on all learning that does not proceed from revelation and is not received through piety and which only satisfies intellectual vanity and material ambition. The denunciation of Greek philosophers almost imperceptibly becomes a denunciation of all false knowledge vainly acquired:

Who therefore seeks in these
True wisdom, finds her not, or by delusion

1. The Stumbling-Stone, 1653, pp.24, 39.
2. Academiarum Examen, 1654, pp.2, 7, 13, 16.
3. The Hireling Ministry None of Christs, 1652, pp.15. 3-4.

Farr worse, her false resemblance onely meets,
 An empty cloud. However many books
 Wise men have said are wearisom; 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 intoxiate, collecting toys,
 And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge;
 As Children gathering pibles on the shore.¹

Christ's speech is not in its purport only a repudiation of paganism: it is mainly intended to be a plea for pursuit of true wisdom which it affirms must be distinguished from mere erudition.

Still we have to accept an opinion like Schultz's with important reservations. For one thing Milton did not share the Christian Fathers' uneasiness about the pursuit of classical literature and was never stricken in his conscience for his love of Homer and Virgil. He read them in peace and he enjoyed reading them. Patristic contempt for classical poetry resulted in a contempt of all poetry. Tertullian called all literature 'foolishness in the eyes of God'² and reminded his readers that Plato would banish even Homer from his republic.³ Jerome calls poetry 'the food of devils' (daemonum cibus).⁴

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1. PR, iv. 318-330.
 2. De Spectaculis, xviii. See J.W.H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase, 1943, p.17.
 3. ad Nationes, ii. 7. See J.W.H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase, 1943, p. 17.
 4. J.W.H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase, 1943, p.17.

Augustine attacks poetry on the old Platonic ground that poets attribute vices to the gods.¹ But the opposition to poetry was a Christian opposition and rejection of classical poetry meant a rejection of all poetry because classical poetry was the only poetry in that age. When Gregory declared that 'the praises of Christ could not be uttered by the same lips as the praises of Jove'² he affirmed a sharp dichotomy between religion and poetry. To Milton such dichotomy never existed. And there is enough material in the Commonplace Book to show that Milton, normally irreverent towards the Fathers, was particularly opposed to their view of poetry and drama. The most significant entry in this respect is the one on 'Public shows' which is in Milton's own hand and can be assigned to 1637 or 1638:

In the work entitled On Spectacles Tertullian condemns their vices and excludes Christians from them.... Cyprian, or whoever wrote the book that deals with the same subject, rolls exactly the same stone. And Lactantius by arguments no whit stronger puts a stigma upon the whole dramatic art. He does not even once seem to have reflected that, while the corrupting influences of the theater ought to be eliminated, it does not follow that it is necessary to abolish altogether the performance of plays. This on the contrary would be quite senseless.³

In the entry on the knowledge of literature which is also in

1. *ibid.* p.47.

2. *ibid.* p.47.

3. CM, xviii. 207.

Milton's own hand and can be assigned to 1635 to 1637 'the example of ... the earliest of the Church Fathers'¹ is cited in support of profane literature; but there is nothing in this entry to suggest that Milton accepted the patristic argument in favour of the liberal arts. For that opinion was too confused and self-contradictory to be of any use to one who was never anxious to devise a Christian reason for the study of pagan literature. Patristic literary opinion was essentially the result of an intellectual predicament: it arose out of a demand for a satisfying compromise between pagan learning and the Christian faith. Consequently when the Christian Father approves of classical learning he does it entirely on the ground that such learning will promote Christianity. Tertullian said that it was important as a preparation for theological studies, Augustine maintained that pagan wisdom was useful for a Christian who should learn from antiquity as the Israelites learnt from the Egyptians.³ Jerome thought that pagan learning could be ancillary to Christianity and mentioned in support of this view that St. Paul had used his knowledge of Greek poets Aratus, Menander and Epimenides.⁴ Milton never felt the need for such

1. CM, xviii. 136.

2. J.W.H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase, 1943, p.18.

3. *ibid.* p.18.

4. Epistlos, lxx, 2. The passages referred to are Acts, xvii. 28; 1 Corinthians, xv. 33; Titus, 1. 12. Milton mentions
(contd. on next page)

compromise for he never said that the classics were a preparatory school for the true Christian. In Of Education he prescribes a thorough study of the important classical authors but he never believed that the classical Muse was like the captive lady of Deuteronomy who by shaving her head and paring her nails would become a good housewife in Israel. When Clement of Alexandria (150-200) said that Christians who were afraid of philosophy were like children who were afraid of hobgoblins he seized the very essence of patristic response to heathen culture. For when a Christian Father wanted to justify the study of classical literature and philosophy he realised that his business was to prove that the hobgoblins were somehow angels. And for such proof they had to devise arguments which Milton never needed for settling his attitude towards the classic.

The most important of these arguments was that pagan wisdom derived from the Old Testament was therefore an integral part of the Christian inheritance. Clement of Alexandria, the chief exponent of this view, said that Plato was taught by the

the second passage in his Preface to Samson Agonistes as an example of St. Paul's respect for tragedy and attributes the Greek saying in question to Euripides. Newton first pointed out that the line - evil communications corrupt good manners - is a quotation from the Thais of Menander. Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, 1752, p.193.

Mosaic law.¹ This opinion of the Greek Father must have been influenced by the similar ideas of the learned Jews of Alexandria like Philo (fl. 39 A.D.) and Aristobulus. But it was Clement's observations on the debt of Greek to Hebrew literature in the Miscellanies² which became the locus classicus of Christian appreciation of gentile literature. St. Augustine (354-430) reaffirmed the belief in Civitate Dei³ as a rationale for a Christian's study of pagan literature. Eusebius (g. 264, g. 340) had earlier expatiated on it in his Preparatio Evangelica⁴ and made it a satisfying apology for the pursuit of pagan learning. In seventeenth-century England the view attracted those who wanted to establish the superiority of Hebrew literature. Although no English writer of the age had the enthusiasm of Theophilus Gale (1628-1678) who produced his four-volume The Court of the Gentiles (1669-1671) chiefly to establish this theory, there were not a few who believed that

Pythagoras by his father was a Jew;
Circumcised: known and taught by Ezekiel too! ...
From speech with God Moses' face did shine:
Plato having read Moses seem'd divine.⁵

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1. The Writings of Clement of Alexandria, tr. W. Wilson, 1867, i. 459, in The Miscellanies, The Ante-Nicene Fathers.
 2. *ibid.* ii. 274-304. This section which is chapter xiv of Book V in The Miscellanies (Stromata) is entitled 'Greek Plagiarism from the Hebrews'.
 3. viii. 10.
 4. ix. 16. See tr. E.H. Gifford, 1903, i. 448-449.
 5. Barten Holyday, A Survey of the World, 1641, pp.50-51.

With the Cambridge Platonists it was important to believe that Plato descended from the Hebrew prophet. 'How utterly' says F.J. Powicke 'this was supposed to be the case is apparent from the strenuous endeavours of orthodoxy to prove that, if men like Plato and Aristotle did not get the truth in their writing from Adam, then it must have come to them somehow from the Hebrew Scriptures.'¹ With religious thinkers like Lord Brooke (1608-1643) the Hebrew origin of Greek wisdom was a premise in the argument that human knowledge was a unity.

That Milton was acquainted with these ideas is beyond doubt. But it is important to observe that he does not make them his own in his estimate of Greek literature. The Christian Fathers and the Cambridge Platonists needed to believe that Plato owed his wisdom to Moses because they needed to find a place for the Greek philosopher in the scheme of Christian learning. To Christ in Paradise Regained the Greek poet is not a disciple but a plagiarist and a very incompetent plagiarist of the Hebrew poet:

That rather Greece from us, these Arts deriv'd
 Ill imitated, while they loudest sing
 The vices of thir Deities, and thir own.²

But it is not in Paradise Regained alone that Milton dis-

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1. The Cambridge Platonists, 1926, p.28. See E.M. Austin, The Ethics of the Cambridge Platonists, Philadelphia, 1935 p.51.
 2. PR, iv. 338-340.

regards the patristic apology for classical studies. Even in the Areopagitica he is indifferent to it although in his defence of classical learning it would have been a very useful weapon. And it is indeed significant that although he relates a story from Eusebius in countering the 'lash' of Jerome's 'tutoring apparition' he does not mention Eusebius's theory of the Hebrew origin of Greek literature. Milton's argument in favour of Greek or any literature outside the Bible is not that it must be of Hebrew descent. He would read Margites for the same reason as he would read Morgante: it may just be profitable to read them.¹

Another argument of the primitive Church in favour of pagan learning was the one first stated by Justin Martyr (100-165) in his First Apology (152). The Greek philosopher was acceptable to the Christian because he shared in that divine Word or Reason who is present in every upright heart and was the author of the revelation. To Justin Martyr Socrates and Heraclitus were Christians in so far as they acted at the dictate of this Reason.² Both Clement of Alexandria (b. middle

1. Areopagitica, CM, iv. 307-308.

2. 'For not only among the Greeks did reason (Logos) prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the Barbarians were they condemned by Reason (or the Word, the Logos) Himself, who took shape, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ.' The Writings of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras, tr. M. Dods, G. Reith, and B.P. Pratten, in Ante-Nicene Christian Library, 1867, ii. 10.

of the 2nd century) and Origen (185-254) believed that philosophy was given by divine providence as a preliminary training, that what the law was for the Hebrews, philosophy was for the Greeks, and that God was the author of both covenants.¹ The view appealed to the Cambridge Platonists to whom all wisdom was the candle of the Lord. The Philonic conception of the Logos as the common inspirer of both Moses and Plato, and its reaffirmation by the Christian Platonists of Alexandria became a satisfactory basis for the seventeenth-century idea of the unity of divine wisdom. The intellectual foundation of Christian humanism is that all wisdom cometh from the Lord.

Milton's ideas on the relationship between pagan wisdom and the Christian faith were different. He made a sharp distinction between the two and while he favoured the study of the one he never believed that it was on a par with the other in the scale of spiritual value. That he firmly rejected the idea of the Logos being the common inspirer of pagan and Christian wisdom is obvious from his rejection of the pagan Muse in Paradise Lost. He who inspired Moses belonged to a

1. W.R. Inge has thus summed up the opinion of Clement: 'Like Augustine in his more liberal mood, he holds that what we call Christianity has always been in existence. Men like Heraclitus and Socrates have lived under the guidance of the divine Logos. If he had to choose between the search for truth and eternal salvation, Clement would without hesitation choose the search for truth. The two cannot be disjoined but the latter without the former would not attract him.' Origen, Hertz Lecture at the British Academy, 1946, p.8.

universe of which the classical world had no knowledge. In Paradise Regained the idea is more strongly affirmed - 'Such are from God inspir'd, not such from thee.'¹ And in his early poetry too there is an expression of a feeling that the spiritual order of classical poetry was an imperfect order to a Christian mind. Apart from the fact that in the 'Nativity Ode' the pagan world retires at the advent of Christ there is, in 'Elegia sexta', the idea of 'adulto sub Jove caelum' which indicates the poet's awareness of the immaturity of the pagan divine order. As we have already observed, in The Reason of Church Government an important distinction is made between heathen and Christian literature. Expressions like 'even the sage heathen writers' in the same work and repeated in the De Doctrina Christiana where Homer is mentioned as 'heathen Homer' are significant for their qualifying terms which certainly indicate a deliberate specification.

Milton's response to classical literature and his estimate of it reflected in his casual statements and allusions must not be mixed up with the question of his debt to Homer and Virgil as an epic poet. While the influence of the classical literary form on his poetry was determined by the laws of literary evolution his attitude to classical authors was controlled by his

1. iv. 350.

conception of true wisdom. And he knew that all that was unique in his literary venture proceeded from a conception of the universe which was different from the universe represented in classical literature. Although there is early expression of this sense of uniqueness he was more intensely conscious of it by the time he began the composition of Paradise Lost. In his letter to Americ Bigot dated 24 March 1656/7 he said that

everything good or praiseworthy which I have written has not been borrowed from authors of established excellence but is entirely original and springs only from the depths of my own mind and heart.¹

Only four years earlier he had confessed to Leonard Philars that

it is above all by studying constantly, from my youth up, the works of the many able men who have sprung from Athens that I have acquired whatever literary skill I may have.²

The originality claimed in the first statement does not seem to be supported by the confession made in the second. But Milton did not think that the original force of his mind could be impaired by the adoption of literary modes or forms from ancient literature. But what he wanted to say through his poetry was more important than the form in which that poetry was to be cast. And his intense awareness of a unique poetic

1. Milton's Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, ed. P.B. Tillyard, 1932, p.39.

2. *ibid.* p.26.

purpose related as it was to his Christian view of life necessarily influenced his opinion of classical literature. His idea of plenary inspiration which was, as we have seen, rooted in the Hebraic idea of the spirit, would not support a worshipful attitude to the classical Muse.

There is no contemporary evidence for the later tradition that Milton was once urged to translate Homer although his reputation for Greek learning would make such invitation appear very probable. And what Richardson says about Milton's reason for declining the invitation is indeed a discerning comment on his strong sense of individuality as a writer:

it has been said Milton was put upon Translating Homer; he was Certainly the Best Fitted for it of any Man on Some Accounts, on Others not at All. for as he says in the P.S. to the Judgment of Bucer concerning Divorce - Me, who never could delight in long Citations, much Less in whole Translations; whether it be Natural Disposition, or Education in Me, or that my Mother bore me a Speaker of what God Made mine Own, and not a Translator, A good Reason for Declining it, as he did.¹

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1. Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton's Paradise Lost, 1734, pp. lxxxv-lxxxvi. See The Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p. 269. The Fifth Ode of Horace is the only entire piece by a Classical author which Milton translated as a separate composition. In his English prose works however Milton gives his quotations from classical authors in his own translation. Such quotations cover Horace in Tetrachordon, An Apology, Sophocles in An Apology and Seneca in the Tenure of Kings. In his collection of Milton's translations from classical poets Tickell included pieces from Richard Washington's translation of the Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano published in 1692 supposing that Milton himself translated the Latin work. Fenton too included them in his edition.

A mind so intensely individual and so absolutely sure of itself should be least expected to respect old poets as its model.

But when Milton speaks of Hebrew poetry he means poetry that was divine and being divine could inspire a sacred vein in others. This is in fact the critical substance of the personal passage in The Reason of Church Government. And it is this view which is so sharply stated by Christ in Paradise Regained. We are puzzled by the sharpness and awful finality of that statement because we instinctively resist the idea that Milton could ever dislike the classics. And we devise a possible solution of the problem because we cannot dissociate Milton from the Renaissance literary mind. I think Edward Dowden is the only important literary critic who not only recognized Christ's comparative judgment of Greek and Hebrew literature as Milton's own considered judgment but also affirms that it was only natural for Milton to give such a judgment. In an article published about half a century ago he observed:

It is not to be supposed that he is here (Christ's speech on Greek literature) writing dramatically in the character of a young Jewish enthusiast. Deeply indebted as Milton was to Greek literature, the views here expressed were his own, and had been his own for many years.... The reply of Jesus to Satan, with other passages of Milton's writing, assure us that he differed from some of his fellow-scholastics in regarding the Bible, not merely as a storehouse of

texts to be ransacked for the ascertainment or proof of a creed, but also as the literature of a nation. The Hebrew lyric song is song inspired by truth and more than a match for that of Greece; the Hebrew prophets, better and more nobly than the Greek orators, instruct us in all that concerns the highest life of a people.¹

What then was Milton's justification for the study of classical literature and wherein he thought, lay its worth? Milton's one answer to it is suggested in Christ's words

Unless where moral vertue is exprest
By light of Nature not in all quite lost.

And the same view of the pagan mind is stated in Of Reformation where he cites an opinion of Aristotle with the remark that the Greek philosopher lays it down 'from the principles of reason'.² And we can assume that when in the Preface to Samson Agonistes Milton speaks of tragedy, 'as it was antiently compos'd' as the 'gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems', he means this principle of reason which is obviously different from the Cambridge Platonists' candle of the Lord and is equally remote from the patristic notion that all wisdom was divinely inspired. In the mature literary opinion of Milton, classical poetry is not divine poetry, and he never devises any allegoresis to give a Christian meaning to a pagan

1. 'Paradise Regained', Milton Memorial Lectures (Read before the Royal Society of Literature in 1908), ed. P.W. Ames, 1909, pp.207-208.

2. CM, lli. 38.

fable. If Milton has anything in common with the Christian Fathers it is his sharp criticism of the profane poetry of the Greeks. There he is no less censorious than Clement of Alexandria in his Protrepticus.¹ But he would not agree with a Christian Father that a Greek writer was sacred because he too was inspired by the Logos or was taught by Moses. At the same time he has no compunction in quoting from Homer to elucidate a point of Christian doctrine when he thinks that what Homer says is true. He does not need any Christian justification for such quotation from a heathen author. For he had none of the unrest of Jerome or of St. Augustine about what he learnt and loved in the classics. The 'old and elegant humanity of Greece' is good and civilizing and a 'prudent spirit acknowledges and obeyes the voice of reason, from what quarter soever it be hard speaking'.² But that 'humanity' was devoid of the light of revelation where alone was the law plainest taught, and easiest learnt. To Milton the distinction was important.

1. II. v-vii.

2. Arcopagitica, CN, iv. 296.

CHAPTER NINE

NATIVE WOODNOTES WILD

... and in no serious book, but the vain and
 amatorious poem of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia
 Milton

Commenting on a possible Shakespearean allusion in Milton's 'Elegia Prima' Thomas Warton said that 'seduced by the gentle eloquence of fanaticism, he listened no longer to the "wild and native wood notes of fancy's sweetest child"'. The remark seems too categorical and the evidence that is produced in its support may not appear altogether unquestionable.

In his *ICONOCLASTES* [Warton continues] he censures King Charles for studying, 'One, whom we well know was the closest-companion of his solitudes, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'.... This remonstrance, which not only resulted from his abhorrence of a king, but from his disapprobation of plays would have come with propriety from Prymne or Hugh Peters.¹

This observation angered several Miltonists of the nineteenth century: Charles Symmons called it 'perverse imbecility'² and J.A. St. John calls it 'paltry malignity'.³ The question may be asked if Milton adored Shakespeare as a great poet and if Renaissance poetry as a whole answered to his idea of great poetry. Without comparing Milton with the author of Historic-

1. Poems, 1791, pp.425-426.

2. Life of Milton, 1806, p.332.

3. The Prose Works of John Milton, 1872, p.326.

Mastix (1633) it is legitimate to enquire if Milton's judgment on Renaissance literature, as far as it can be ascertained from his writings, was not derived from a conception of poetry not typical of contemporary literary taste. To consider the allusion to Shakespeare in the first chapter of Eikonoklastes as a twofold denigration of a bad prince and of a bad poet may be an unjust inference. But that Shakespeare could be a comforting poet to a deposed monarch might have been consistent with Milton's own estimate of the dramatist. And it is significant that the reference to Shakespeare in Eikonoklastes is immediately followed by a comment on 'the vain amatorious Poem of Sr. Philip Sidneys Arcadia; a Book in that kind full of wort and with, but among religious thoughts, and duties not worthy to be nam'd'.¹ Arcadia is 'no serious book ... not to be read at any time without good caution'. The Reason of Church Government condemns the 'vulgar amatorist' and the 'rhyming parasite'.

But is there enough material in Milton's writings to represent his opinion of English literature? And did Milton think it important to state that opinion in his observations on literature and his own literary plans? His first published piece is his sixteen line epitaph on Shakespeare.² And this

1. CM, v. 86.

2. The poem was published on the leaf following sig. A 4 in the Second Folio edition (1632) of Shakespeare where it is entitled 'An Epitaph on the admirable Dramaticke Poet, W' (contd. on next page)

is Milton's only poem on any poet of any language. But how far is this poem an expression of a high enthusiasm for the poetry of Shakespeare? J.H. Hanford certifies that 'Milton's admiration for Shakespeare, is sincere, in spite of the implied reservations of other passages in his works'.¹ E.M.W. Tillyard too thinks that 'Milton's praise is indeed extremely reverential, far more so than the politeness of a verse tribute absolutely demanded'.² In the nineteenth century Mark Pattison called it 'the original and unprompted utterance of the young poet's admiration and sympathy',³ an estimate which a recent critic has reaffirmed more strongly than either Hanford or Tillyard. 'The lines prove' says Kenneth Muir 'that he honoured Shakespeare's memory "on this side idolatry as much as any", and they indicate perhaps why it was impossible to imitate his work.'⁴ Against this array of unreserved

SHAKESPEARE'. In the 1645 edition of Milton's Poems the title is 'ON Shakespear.1630'. For a bibliography of this poem, see Robert Metcalf Smith, The Variant Issues of Shakespeare's Second Folio and Milton's First Published English Poem, Lehigh University Publications, 1928. For discussions of the different readings of the poem and of its possible sources see H.W. Garrod, 'Milton's Lines on Shakespeare', ES, 1926, xii; Heinrich Mutschmann, 'Sources of Milton's on Shakespeare', Further Studies Concerning the Origin of Paradise Lost, 1934; and Theodore Spencer, 'Shakespeare and Milton', MLN, 1938, liii.

1. A Milton Handbook, New York, 1946, p.147.
2. Milton, 1946, p.50.
3. Milton's Sonnets, 1883, pp.79-80.
4. John Milton, 1955, p.22. The second part of this statement echoes E.M.W. Tillyard's shrewd comment on the poem: 'As a model Shakespeare was discouraging; and Milton is interested in setting forth the reason.' Milton, p.51.

appreciation of a famous poetic homage it will be a critical temerity to place an altogether contrary opinion. Yet I must confess that I consider Hurd's criticism of the poem entirely just: 'This is but an ordinary poem to come from Milton, on such a subject'.¹ I think it is not only ordinary, but largely artificial. Its conceits are intricate, too intricate to evoke a powerful feeling. The concluding couplet represents a climax which is rhetorically faultless; but does not gather up corresponding sentiment into an expression of any lyrical intensity. The poem is certainly a genuine tribute but there is nothing in its diction and rhythm to suggest that it is also an inspired tribute. It is a good judgment in good verse but is much less than a song of adoration. And the argument of the poem shows that Milton did not intend it to be anything more than a tribute to a great fame. The theme of monument does not imperceptibly grow into the deeper theme of genius. Expressions like 'unvalu'd Book' and 'Delphick Lines' are even more conventional than 'easie numbers' and the only suggestive phrase 'wonder and astonishment' which is the main key of the poem does not fulfil its promise in the idea of

Our fancy of it self bereaving,
Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving.

Even as a poem in the metaphysical vein it could have an ending showing greater consistency and depth of imagination.

1. Poems, 1791, p.317.

At twentytwo Milton was certainly capable of greater aptness and force of expression than is shown in the last two lines of the poem.¹

In the compositions of the Cambridge period there is no allusion to Shakespeare or to any English poet; in the apostrophe to his native language in 'At a Vacation Exercise' (1627) there is no mention of any poets who had made that language great in the eye of Europe although there is a fling at 'our late fantasticks'. Amongst the many literary references in the Prologues there is none to Shakespeare or to Chaucer or to Spenser. In the pre-Horton period Milton does not voice any enthusiasm for any English writer. The conception of divine poetry embodied in the 'Elegia sexta' did not, for all we can understand, inspire any high regard for the literature of the Renaissance. But even in the Horton period when pursuit of polite literature engaged his entire attention, and when by way of preparing himself for his literary task he covered the whole field of European literature, his enthusiasm for Shakespeare and his contemporaries was extremely limited. The reference to Shakespeare in 'L'Allegro' does not include

1. J.H. Hanford thinks that since the poem 'was very probably written to order for the folio, I should assume that Milton's date is, as frequently, a little too early'. A Milton Handbook, 1946, p.146. There is however no direct evidence to prove that the date was later than 1630.

his tragedy and in 'Il Penseroso' the allusion to

What (though rare) of later age,
Ennobled hath the Buskind stage

is too brief and too qualified an appreciation to indicate a real enthusiasm for Shakesperean tragedy. The passage on literary forms in The Reason of Church Government speaks of 'those dramatic constitutions wherein Sophocles and Euripides raigne' and mentions the Apocalypse of St. John as a 'high and stately Tragedy'¹ but is silent about the tragic universe of Shakespeare. And when we consider the still more striking exclusion of Shakespeare from the short essay on tragedy prefixed to Samson Agonistes it seems extremely doubtful if Milton was an admirer of his tragedies. And it is equally unlikely that Milton's adverse criticism of Renaissance tragedy in the Preface to Samson Agonistes excepted the plays of Shakespeare. We may not assume that when Milton wrote of playwrights who 'intermixing Comic stuff with Tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath bin counted absurd; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratifie the people'² he excluded Shakespeare.

1. CM, 111. 237-238.

2. Preface to Samson Agonistes. Sir Oliver Elton thought that Milton's reference to the contemporary tragedy in 'Il Penseroso' implied a distinction between Shakespeare whom he admired and 'writers like Webster, so unlike the austerity of form and thought of his favourite Greeks'. Il Penseroso, ed. 1894, p.13.

The only quotation from Shakespeare in Milton's works occurs in Eikonoklastes. There is not even a bare allusion to him in the Commonplace Book which mentions Chaucer four times and Spenser twice. And while he quotes from Spenser in relating the story of Greensfield in The History of Britain¹ he does not refer to Shakespeare in the passage on Lear and his daughters² which follows immediately. We can therefore assume that the greatest creative genius of the English Renaissance was not a force in Milton's literary life and that he realised that the older poet represented a moral universe and an order of poetry which were different from his own. And this attitude to Shakespeare is the key to his entire attitude to romantic literature. It is true that Milton speaks with particular regard about Spenser and that his allusions to Chaucer and

1. Ch., x. 18-20.
2. It is believed that Milton made additions and corrections in the work of his nephew Edward Philips, Theatrum Poetarum published in 1675 and Thomas Warton notices a resemblance between the praise of Shakespeare in 'L'Allegro' and the criticism of his tragedies in this book. Edward Philips remarks: 'In tragedy, never any expressed a more lofty and tragic height, never any represented nature more purely to the life: and where the polishments of art are most wanting, as probably his learning was not extraordinary, he pleases with a certain wild and native elegance.' p.104. Poems, 1791, p.64. The occurrence of the words 'wild' and 'native' does not necessarily prove that the judgment as a whole was inserted by Milton. It is more likely that Philips used his uncle's words in restating the well-known comment of Ben Jonson.

Gower are also respectful. But the poetic doctrine explained in The Reason of Church Government has no room for any of them either in respect of form or content. It is particularly significant that the discussion in that tract on the Christian epic has not even a bare reference to the kind of poetry exemplified in the Faerie Queene. While Milton desires to emulate the literary patriotism of Ariosto 'to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue' he seems reluctant to admit that his native tongue had already some adornments. The entire tone of the poetic plan in The Reason of Church Government suggests that the ideal poetry of the English nation was yet to be produced and that England was still to achieve the literary eminence of Greece and Rome, of modern Italy and of the Hebrews of old. The whole achievement of the English Renaissance is ignored. When fourteen years earlier he had hailed his native language he had been anxious to discard from it those 'new fangled toys, and trimming slight' as unwelcome accumulations. It is not easy to ascertain which particular writers Milton meant when he said that 'England hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskillfull handling of monks and mechanicks'.¹ But it is plain that it was Milton's conviction that England had not yet produced her

1. The Reason of Church Government, CM, lli. 237.

national poet who 'in new and lofty Measures would 'sing and celebrate thy divine Mercies and marvellous Judgments in this land throughout all Ages'.¹

But it is not in The Reason of Church Government alone that Milton shows this indifference to the literature of the English Renaissance. When he closely reflects on his study of romantic literature and is in a mood to see its worth his appreciation is extremely qualified. In An Apology he speaks of 'those lofty Fables and Romances, which recount in solemne Canto's the deeds of Knighthood founded by our victorious Kings; & from hence in renowne over all Christendome', where, he says 'I learnt what a noble vertue chastity sure must be, to be defence of which so many worthies by such a deare adventure of themselves had sworne'.² The 'solemne canto's' must be those of the Faerie Queene which is one of the great romances praised in 'Il Penseroso'

And if ought els, great Bards beside,
In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
Of Turneys and of Trophies hung;
Of Forests, and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant then meets the ear.³

1. Of Reformation, CM, 111. 78.

2. CM, 111. 304.

3. 116-120. The other great bards must be Ariosto and Tasso. Warton remarks: 'Both Tasso and Ariosto pretend to an allegorical and mysterious meaning. And Tasso's enchanted forest, the most conspicuous fiction of the kind might have been here intended.' Poems, 1791, p.83.

In the first phase of the pamphlet period Milton speaks of Spenser with particular deference. He quotes a long passage from 'our admired Spencer' in Animadversions.¹ In the Areopagitica 'our sage and serious Poet Spencer' is 'a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas'.² And the allusion to 'our Poet Spencer' in Eikonoklastes may be contrasted with the rather curt allusion to Shakespeare in the same work.³ The statement on Milton's reading in the romances in general in An Apology is essentially a qualified appreciation. 'So that even these books' he says about the romances,

which to many others have bin the fuell of wantonnesse and loose living, I cannot thinke how, unlesse by divine indulgence prov'd to me so many incitements as you have heard, to the love and stedfast observation of that vertue which abhorres the society of Bardello's.⁴

Milton's whole approach to this class of poetry was a moral approach. A romantic tale is good in so far as it teaches by good example and if he

1. CM, iii. 166. The quotation is from the May Eclogue in Shepheards Calendar, 103-131. Cf. Comus, 222-223.
2. CM, iv. 311.
3. CM, v. 84, 110. Dryden says: 'Milton has acknowledg'd to me, that Spencer was his original'. Fables Ancient and Modern, 1700. It is reported that when Milton's widow was 'asked whom he approved most of our English poets' she 'answered Spenser, Shakespeare and Cowley'. Thomas Newton, Life of Milton, Paradise Lost, 1749, i. lvi. John Philips records that Milton helped 'the Grand child of the famous Spenser, a Papist suffering in his concerns in Ireland'. Early Lives of Milton, ed. H. Darbishire, 1932, p.30.
4. CM, iii. 305.

found in the story afterward, any of them (heroes), by word or deed, breaking that oath, I judg'd it the same fault of the Poet, as that which is attributed to Homer; to have written undecent things of the gods.¹

Certainly Milton did not include the Faerie Queene amongst the books which could foster wantonness in anybody. Yet on the whole the paragraph on the romances in An Apology is more a tribute to the moral and discerning reader than to the poets. The earlier comment on the poets of the Italian Renaissance shows that Milton made an important distinction between poets who were capable of 'speaking unworthy things' and those who display 'sublime and pure thoughts without transgression'.² And when he declares about poets guilty of such transgression that 'their art I still applauded but the men I deplored' he did not separate the poet from his work, for in his view such separation was not possible in respect of ideal poetry. By applauding the art he did not mean an admiration for mere skill or technique. He means that there is a kind of poetry which is below the highest kind for it is not the work of a perfect mind but is yet worthy enough to a finely discriminating reader who can receive from it what best it can give. Milton would not only distinguish good books from bad books but would also distinguish the good things in a book from what is unworthy in

1. CM, lll. 304.

2. CM, lll. 303.

it. He would do with the romances what he would do with the work of any heathen author; take the wisdom and discard the dross. The divine indulgence which he says made the romances a source of moral inspiration to him while they could be an incitement to wantonness to others must have been a fact of experience. But he had also a rational principle relating to good reading which needs

A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
(And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek).¹

This moral discernment is important in Milton's estimate of Renaissance literature which he does not reject as altogether unworthy. The author of the Areopagitica could never think of an Index Expurgatorius for profane books, but was extremely cautious in bestowing praise on the books that he read.

An interesting instance of this select and discriminating reading of an author who is on the whole disparaged is in Milton's treatment of Sir Philip Sidney. In the Commonplace Book there are four allusions to Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia which is called a 'vain, amatorious poem' in Eikonoklastes.²

1. PR. iv. 324-325.

2. The first allusion occurs in the entry on Mors Spontanea (fol. 16) and refers to the discussion about suicide between Philoclea and her lover Pyrocles. Since the g's in this entry are in Italian hand it must be dated 1639 or later. J.H. Sanford points out that Milton page references to Arcadia 'fit the edition of 1624, also the duplicates of 1623 and 1638'. 'The Chronology of Milton's Private Studies', PMLA 1924, xxxvi. Ruth Kohl has noted that they
(contd. on next page)

We can presume that in the Horton period Milton read a good deal of Renaissance literature and discovered in the romances the moral wisdom which he mentions in An Apology. His ambition to celebrate Arthur and his Knights in heroic song expressed in 'Mansus' and in 'Epitaphium Damonis' shows that his interest in the romances continued after his return from Europe. But in the pamphlet period he entered upon a phase of his life which involved important changes in his literary views. There is no space for even a bare mention of an English Renaissance poet in The Reason of Church Government. In An Apology the poetry of Spenser and his like is mentioned in a recollection of youthful studies and gets but limited praise. And this comparative indifference to romance and to Renaissance poetry in general matures into the depreciation stated in the exordium to the ninth book of Paradise Lost. He has now a conception of poetry which is too high to cover poems which

describe Races and Games,
or tilting Furniture, emblazon'd Shields,
Impreses quaint, Caparisons and Steeds;
Bases and tinsel Trappings, gorgeous Knights
At Joust and Torneament.¹

fit the 1633 edition as well. Complete Prose Works of John Milton, ed. D.M. Wolfe, 1953, New Haven, i. 371. The other allusions to Arcadia, all in Milton's own hand and dated 1641-1642, are in fols. 17, 187, and 188. CM, xviii. 133, 187, 189.

1. PL, ix. 33-37.

In the early pamphlet period no English poet is mentioned as a probable model for any of his compositions. The more important forms of English literature are altogether ignored in the speculation on literary genres in The Reason of Church Government; while in Of Education no allusion is made to any critic of the English Renaissance in a curriculum which includes the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso and Mazzoni. There is nothing in his writings after the Horton period to show that he was proud of a great English literary inheritance, that he relied on an English poet for his intellectual sustenance. In his later days while he placed the Bible above the classics the literature of his own country was given a place below it. The poet of 'Arcades' and of Comus had some enthusiasm for Jonson's learned sock and Shakespeare's woodnotes wild, of Chaucer's 'story of Cambuscan bold¹ and Spenser's sage and solemn tunes. And a part of this enthusiasm lingers in the first phase of his polemical career

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1. The allusion is to the Squier's Tale which Warton remarks 'best suited our authors predilection for romantic poetry'. Poems, p.82. In Of Reformation there are three quotations from Chaucer and there are four allusions to him in the Commonplace Book in four entries, all in Milton's own hand and dated conjecturally 1641-1643. Ruth Mohl points out that Milton's page references to Chaucer fit Thomas Speght's edition of 1602 and not his first edition of 1598 which is misdated to 1596 in Hanford's 'Chronology of Milton's Private Studies', p.276. For an interesting discussion of this point see F.P. Magoun, 'The Chaucer of Spenser and Milton', MP. 1927, xxv. 129-136.

when he can yet quote from an English author to give point and colour to an argument. But when he reflects on his own literary plans his attention is fixed on literatures other than English, and consequently he creates the impression that he never found a model amongst the poets of his own country.

The exclusion of English poets from the literary survey in The Reason of Church Government must be deliberate and has a bearing on Milton's conception of great poetry. That by great poetry he meant divine poetry he makes plain in the tract itself. When he speaks of Homer and Virgil he is concerned exclusively with the form of their epics and while he thought that the Book of Job provided an alternative epic form and the Jerusalem Liberata was structurally akin to the classical epic he did not think that English poetry had any suitable model to offer to a poet who aspired to give his nation its loftiest literature. But this is not all. He associated with classical literature a moral seriousness which was matched by a fine discipline of form. His later conviction was that with all this moral and technical excellence classical literature was inferior to Hebrew literature. But at the time when he wrote The Reason of Church Government and Of Education he would make Greece and Rome rather than England his school. Moreover his aristocracy of temper prompted him to tread

literary paths unknown to the common reader and to speak of poets and critics who could be read only by the gifted and diligent. This alone can explain the fact that Sidney and Puttenham are not mentioned along with Castelvetro, Tasso and Masconi in Of Education. Milton's high ambition to adorn his native tongue was accompanied with a measure of indifference to the quality of the vernacular literature.

But it is not in respect of his literary plans alone that he ignores the literature of the English Renaissance. Even in a discussion of a particular literary type where a reference to its manifestation in English literature would have been immensely appropriate he confines his illustration to classical literature. An important instance of this can be found in An Apology where an interesting and well-argued defence of satire, 'the benevolence of laughter and reproof' has no reference to the mixing of mirth with instruction in Jonson. There is of course an allusion to the 'Vision and Creed of Piers Plowman' presumably because that poem was of special interest to an enemy of the established church. But the Elizabethan comedy of humours would have been a particularly appropriate illustration. It is possible that apart from his declining interest in the literature of the English Renaissance the other reason for his preferring the poet of the 'Vision of Piers Plowman'

to Ben Jonson is that the former was the older poet and therefore carried greater weight. The quotation from Gower

(g. 1330-1408) in An Apology is preceded by the remark:

I shall allege a reputed divine authority, as ancient as Constantine, which his love to antiquity must not except him against; and to adde the more waight, he shall learne it rather in the words of our old Poet Gower then in mine, that he may see it is no new opinion, but a truth deliver'd of old by a voice from heav'n, and ratify'd by long experience.¹

It is interesting to observe that amongst English writers only Bacon and Thomas More are compared to any eminent classical author. While the sage and serious Spenser is judged superior to the scholastics, the authors of Utopia and New Atlantis, 'our two famous countrymen', are amongst 'the greatest and sublimest wits in sundry ages' like Plato.² But neither

1. There is an allusion to Gower in an entry in the Commonplace Book in Milton's own hand. Ruth Kohl points out that 'Milton's folio numbers show that he used the edition published by Thomas Berthelette, 1532' and that his 'entry has one slight error: f. 61 is in Book III, not IV'. Complete Prose Works of John Milton, New Haven, 1953, i. 497.
2. It is true that Milton's comment on 'Atlantick' and Euto-
nian Politics in Areopagitica CM, iv. 318, shows less enthusiasm for More and Bacon but the comparison made in this passage in An Apology is significant as an indication of Milton's regard for these two Renaissance thinkers of England. There is a reference to Bacon's A Wise and Moderate Discourse, Concerning Church-Affaires, 1641 in the entry on 'Lenitas' in Milton's own hand in the Commonplace Book, CM, xviii. 180. Bacon wrote this tract in 1589 for private circulation when its title was An Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England. Milton refers to this tract in Animadversions, CM, iii. 111, in An Apology, CM, iii. 317, and in Areopagitica, CM, iv. 326.

in the later tracts nor in the De Doctrina Christiana is there any citation from any English writer to illuminate a point of civil or religious wisdom. It is true that a seventeenth-century divine or political writer usually quotes from the Bible and from the classics. But a poet extensively read in the literature of his own country and considerably influenced by that reading in his early poetic career could have been more liberal in his quotations from English authors. The economy was due to a general indifference to Renaissance literature which is clearly indicated in The Reason of Church Government and is consistent with the view of poetry stated there and elsewhere in his works. The growth of his literary mind since his 'covenant with any knowing reader' about his poetic purpose was influenced by ideas which had little in common with the world of Sidney, Jonson, and Shakespeare.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

but chief

Thou Sion and the flowrie Brooks beneath
 That wash thy hallowd feet, and warbling flow,
 Nightly I visit.

Milton

We have endeavoured to ascertain the literary ideas of a poet who never engaged himself in formal criticism, and whose statements on questions of poetic or aesthetic in general are made in writings, prose and verse, covering a period of about half a century. Excepting the note on verse prefixed to the second edition of Paradise Lost and the essay 'Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is call'd Tragedy' which is the preface to Samson Agonistes, Milton wrote no entire pieces, however brief, dealing with a critical matter. His recorded opinions of individual writers are few, casual and brief and do not provide sufficient material for a reconstruction of his literary judgment. In an age when verse-tributes to poets were an important form of literary appreciation Milton's only composition of this kind is a sixteen line epitaph on Shakespeare. In the autobiographical portions of his prose writings his observations on poetry relate to his

own literary plans or defend his literary habits: they either declare what he intends to accomplish as a poet, as in The Reason of Church Government, or justify a particular manner of writing as in An Apology. In addition there are some passages or stray lines in his verse which are significant pronouncements on the nature and function of poetry.

In the course of our analysis of these passages in Milton's writings we have observed that they not only represent a consistent view of poetry but also show that Milton wanted to *a* define such a view for himself and to communicate it to his readers. While he had no speculative interest in poetic as a science he was intensely concerned about the nature of his poetic task and that one talent which was needed for its fulfilment. The theory of poetry which emerges from this concern is of the nature of a literary faith which is gradually unfolded in a long process of spiritual growth. Milton habitually reflects on the nature of his vocation as a poet in an effort to achieve that faith and share it with his reader. He was anxious to speak to his readers about that faith because he realised that it represented a conception of poetry with which they were not familiar. Milton's poetic doctrine grows consistently and steadily. In the twelve years between the 'Nativity Ode', his first important English poem and The

Reason of Church Government where he first made an elaborate statement of his poetic purpose, he developed a conception of poetry little influenced by the formal criticism of the Renaissance and largely inspired by his Christian belief. In the invocations of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained as in the Preface to Samson Agonistes the same conception is restated with greater force.

The idea of divine poetry suggested in the 'Elegia sexta' and first practised on a small scale in the 'Nativity Ode' remains the central point in his theory of poetry throughout the rest of his literary life. Here we have one Milton from beginning to end and one poetic doctrine affirmed in different contexts throughout his works. There was a period in his life when the Renaissance conception of poetry could have exercised a profound influence on his literary ideas. In the five years of extensive study at Horton he lived in the intellectual atmosphere of the Renaissance and acquainted himself with the most powerful influences of European humanism. The literary refinement acquired in this period drew fresh sustenance from his contacts with literary circles in Italy during his tour in Europe. But when he returned home his aspirations were different from those of a Renaissance humanist and his literary ideals now much less important to him than they were

in the Horton period. The hopes raised in his breast by the Long Parliament and the Root-and-Branch petition and his anger against those who wanted to frustrate them created a spiritual temper which is more and more drawn towards the Christian ideal and more particularly to the sentiments and ideas embodied in Hebrew literature. And there is a great deal in Milton's writings to show that he made a sharp distinction between the Hellenic and the Hebraic-Christian and that he related his conception of divine poetry to the Christian idea of revelation.

This Christian influence on Milton's poetic mind does not result in a Christian adaptation of the classical theories of poetry. He never makes any endeavour to build up a Christian poetic by putting a new interpretation upon old literary doctrines, just as he can never think of giving a religious meaning to the Iliad or the Metamorphoses by way of sanctifying classical poetry in Christian eyes. For his concern is not to make his idea of poetry doctrinally impeccable or to prescribe laws for Christian poetry. His main concern was to describe the kind of poetry he wanted to produce. It was Christian poetry because it was an expression of an intensely Christian imagination. And since Milton thought that England was yet to produce poetry that interpreted the highest aspirations of a Christian community his idea of divine poetry was necessarily an idea of

new poetry. This distinguishes his poetic from the narrow sectarian literary ideas of the Puritans. From all we can ascertain from his statements on poetry it is certain that he thought that Hellenic literature and other literatures inspired by it or akin to its spirit were to be distinguished from divine poetry which was a revelation of the word of God. This was to Milton a very important distinction. This has been ignored by scholars because they think it a kind of literary heresy to believe that there could ever be a conception of poetry which was not rooted in classical or Renaissance poetics; or that there could be epic and tragedy modelled on classical forms and yet essentially be inspired by a spirit and a belief of which there is no manifestation in classical literature. Explaining the peculiar power of Wordsworth's poetry Sir Richard Jebb remarked in one of his letters:

From the time when it prevailed over paganism and had rest from without, Christianity has gone on developing in the mind of Christian Europe a habit of pensive meditation more or less devotional, which had nothing corresponding to it in the pagan mind.¹

Perhaps Wordsworth was not so acutely conscious of this important difference between pagan and Christian: in a moment of

1. C. Jebb, Life and Letters of Sir Richard Jebb, 1917, p.108.

despair he could even wish that he were a pagan suckled in a creed outworn. But to Milton an intense awareness of this difference is an important aspect of his mental growth. And when he reflected on his poetic task his mind turned to a moral universe which he thought had superseded the universe represented in classical literature. This supersession of one set of values by another was fundamental to Milton's conception of history.

To seize the essence of Milton's idea of literary history we must not interpret it in terms of our own notions of western civilisation. While Professor Toynbee's idea of modern European culture as a continuous growth from Hellenic culture, or Troeltsch's idea of 'thorough coalescence' and continuity are acceptable categories of historiography to the modern mind, to the seventeenth-century Christian thinker and poet such ideas would imply a denial of the very specific spiritual and moral order he sought to realise. To Dante 'Omero poeta sovrano' (Homer, the sovereign of poets) is one among the unregenerate souls in the Limbo; he is found in a lighted spot but it is a spot in the lower world. Virgil is the Christian poet's guide to the Inferno and Purgatorio but it is Bernard's prayer to the Virgin which gives him his vision of God in the Paradiso. Milton would make the same important distinction between

antique poetry and Christian life. But there is this difference between Dante and Milton, that while the former felt the intellectual need to establish a point of contact between ancient poetry and the new poetry of a Christian society, the latter was too firmly established in his idea of divine poetry to need the support of any classical affiliation. Milton adopted the classical form and observed the classical rule of composition without feeling that in either case he was affiliating Christian poetry to the Hellenic literary tradition. Since he never wrote a treatise on poetics we do not know how seriously he would have formulated or prescribed the poetic doctrines of Aristotle or Horace. But the fact that he did not write such a treatise may itself be an evidence of his lack of interest in speculations on the rules and principles of poetic art. He wrote on logic and on Latin grammar and two books on history. If he had thought that knowledge of literary doctrines was important for the creation and enjoyment of poetry he would have produced a treatise on the subject in the Horton period or after his return from Europe. He prepared a long list of themes for the dramas he might compose but he never set down systematically the rules and principles of dramatic composition. But he was eager to proclaim his poetic ideal and he did so with the utmost clarity and consistency. From this circumstance it is possible

to draw two conclusions: that he was opposed to the rule-ridden neo-classic poetic, and that his main emphasis was on inspiration. The idea of poetry that Milton always propounded was in sharp opposition to the neo-classical system established through the labours of sixteenth-century Italian and seventeenth-century French critics. It is not known if Milton ever read Malherbe (1555-1628) but it is certain that the whole weight of his argument on the nature of poetry was against the dictum of the French critic that craftsmanship was more important for the poet than inspiration. When Milton affirmed the reality of his Muse and the inspiration he receives through her, he had probably, in his mind Hobbes's fling at the inspirationists in his letter to the author of Gondibert. And Hobbes must have been considerably influenced by Malherbe in his rejection of furor poeticus. But Milton's defence of inspiration was not a reaffirmation of a neo-Platonic doctrine any more than his conformity to the structural principles of the classical epic and drama made him an apologist of classical literature.

The two most important considerations which must have alienated Milton from the central convictions of neo-classic criticism are that poetry to him was essentially a spiritual process, and that rules and principles of composition however neatly defined and severely enforced cannot bring great poetry

into being. The idea of literary legislation as a deterrent to erratic composition or as a guarantee of true poetic excellence was unimportant in a poetic where the poet was an inspired speaker of the word of God to a regenerate nation. In explaining the nature and function of poetry, therefore, Milton is primarily concerned with the spiritual and moral processes involved in the regeneration of an individual and a society. He does not repudiate rules: he, in fact quietly observes them. But he is a determined nonconformist in respect of the theme and spirit of his poetry. And the conviction that he is producing a kind of poetry which will be on a higher spiritual level than either classical or neo-classical poetry made him indifferent to the elaborate formularies of Renaissance literary doctrine. When the seventeenth-century neo-classic critics of France insisted on strict conformity to orthodox rules they were facing a literary chaos which they believed only the chastening force of a well-defined creed could bring under control. Milton's idea of poetry did not proceed from any anxiety to preserve some approved critical principles for the promotion of good taste. He concentrated on those aspects of poetry which related to its moral power and gave it the status of the word of God to a regenerate nation. And he found in the Judaic-Christian idea of revelation a basis

for this conception.

This unique feature of Milton's conception of poetry has received much less attention than it deserves. The classical elements in Milton's poetry, for example the structure of Paradise Lost or of Samson Agonistes, and the impingement of his vast classical erudition on his diction create an impression that there could be nothing in his theory of poetry which would be, in any important detail, different from the main propositions of Renaissance criticism. And the reaction against neo-classicism in the seventeenth century represented in the critical work of John Dennis (1657-1734) was not in any sense a recognition of Milton's idea of divine poetry. Dennis's theory of poetry was largely inspired by his love of Milton but his plea for religious theme was no nearer to Milton's poetic than the very similar plea implied in the seventeenth-century French Biblical epic. In eighteenth-century critical thought there was no room for a conception of divine poetry which seemed almost mystical. Dr. Johnson came very near to realising a sharp distinction between the classical epic and poetry rooted in revelation but his limited respect for Milton apart, he was intellectually incapable of comprehending poetry as a divine science. Amongst the pre-Romantics Cowper perceived the profoundly religious spirit of Milton's

poetry, but he was too fascinated by what he called the classical spirit in it to discover the purely Christian source.

In the poetic theory of the Romantic period there is a great deal that comes very near to the Miltonic poetic. When Wordsworth calls the poet 'the rock of defence for human nature' he gives him a function which Milton defines in The Reason of Church Government. Yet there is nothing in Wordsworth's conception of poetry to suggest that he ever equated the poetic imagination with inspiration in Milton's sense or considered the poet as the elected speaker of the divine word. Neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge developed a theory of poetry as revelation from their idea of the vision and the Faculty Divine. Shelley calls poets prophets but his idea of poetry is essentially humanistic and has little in common with Milton's specifically Christian notion of prophetic inspiration. John Keble called Paradise Lost a sacred poem but since he thought that it was an imperfect sacred poem and even wished that 'Milton had taken some subject not so immediately and avowedly connected with religion'¹ he did not bring out Milton's own conception of sacred poetry in his criticism. The author of The Christian Year had an idea of religious poetry and judged Paradise Lost as nothing more than an unhappily defective

1. 'Sacred Poetry' in Nineteenth Century Critical Essays, ed. E.D. Jones, 1916, p.219.

specimen of the kind. Consequently he has nothing to say on Milton's idea of divine inspiration or of prophetic poetry. Newman believed that 'revealed religion should be especially poetical'¹ and this was a truly Miltonic conception. But there is nothing in Newman's observations on Milton or on poetry in general to show that the Cardinal ever tried to understand the poetic doctrine of the seventeenth-century Puritan. In the later nineteenth century Taine and Pattison presented Milton as a healthy child of the Renaissance who later became a surly defender of ideals in life and literature which were sharply opposed to its spirit. And while Garnett and Trent, and in this century Raleigh and Saintsbury, have endeavoured to free Milton from the charge of narrow partisanship they have not enquired into the literary ideas which explain Milton's conception of the relationship between faith and poetry. When T.S. Eliot asserts that there 'seems to me to be a division, in Milton between the philosopher or theologian and the poet'² he speaks of a dichotomy which Milton did not himself perceive. But Milton certainly realised that such a division did exist in the soul of Europe, that there were two moral universes, the Graeco-Roman and the Judaic-Christian.

1. 'Poetry', *ibid.* p.249.

2. 'A Note on the Verse of John Milton', *ES*, 1936, xxi. 38.

And he declared a philosophy of poetry which was rooted in the Judaic-Christian idea of revelation. There he discovered the basis of a poetic in which religion and poetry are not separate functions of the mind but constitute an integral expression of one single spiritual experience. Whether this conviction of Milton is aesthetically valid is a question which is beyond the scope of this essay. And whether Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes are at once great poetry and sacred poetry will ever remain a matter of private response and private judgment. But if in reading Milton it is important to know what he intended to accomplish as a poet we must realise that he was animated by literary ideals which were not rooted in the traditions of classical and Renaissance criticism. We need to realise this before we judge Paradise Lost as an epic which is deficient in human interest and Samson Agonistes as a drama which is not sufficiently tragic. Milton's declared poetic intent implies other standards which may lead to other judgments. And if his literary views are not important in the history of European criticism because they did not influence his contemporaries or successors they are important for a revision of our judgment of his achievement as a poet.

APPENDIX A

Extracts from Milton's Works Bearing on his
Theory of Poetry

Poetry

I

ii. 236-237

Jam nec arundiferum mihi cura revisere Camum,
 Nec dudum vetiti me laris angit amor.
 Nuda nec arva placent, umbrasque negantia molles,
 Quam male Phœbicolis convenit ille locus!
 Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri
 Caeteraque ingenio non subeunda meo,
 Si sit hoc exilium patrios adisse penates,
 Et vacuum curis otia grata sequi,
 Non ego vel profugi nomen, sortemve recuso,
 Laetus & exilii conditione fruor.
 O utinam vates nunquam graviora tulisset
 Ille Tomitano flebilis exul agro;
 Non tunc Jonio quicquam cessisset Homero
 Neve foret victo laus tibi prima, Maro.
 Tempora nam licet hic placidis dare libera Musis,
 Et totum rapiunt me mea vita libri.
 Excipit hinc fessum sinuosi pompa theatri,
 Et vocat ad plausus garrula scena suos.
 Seu cetus auditur senior, seu prodigus haeres,
 Seu procus, aut posita casside miles adest,
 Sive decennali foecundus lite patronus
 Detonat inculto barbara verba foro,
 Saepe vafer gnato succurrit servus amanti,
 Et nasum rigidi fallit ubique Patris;
 Saepe novos illic virgo mirata calores
 Quid sit amor nescit, dum quoque nescit, amat.
 Sive cruentatum furiosa Tragoedia aceptorum
 Quassat, & effusis crinibus ora rotat,
 Et dolet, & specto, juvat & spectasse dolendo,
 Interdum & lacrymis dulcis amaror inest:
 Seu puer infelix indelibata reliquit
 Gaudia, & abrupto flendus amore cadit,

Seu ferus e tenebris iterat Styga criminis ultor
 Conscia funereo pectora torre movens,
 Seu maeret Pelopeia domus, seu nobilis Ili,
 Aut luit incestos aula Creontis avos.¹

No longer am I interested in returning to the Cam and its reeds, nor am I tormented with longing for my room there from which I have long been debarred. Those bare fields that grant no pleasant shade do not attract me (How ill does that place beseech the votaries of Phoebus!), nor am I disposed to continue to endure the threats of the stern Master and the other incidents to which my nature cannot submit. If this be exile, to be again in my father's home and, without a care, to follow the pleasant suggestions of leisure, then I reject neither the name nor the lot of a rusticated man, but rather am happy in the terms of my exile. (Oh, that the poet, that sad exile in the region of Tomis, had suffered nothing worse; then he would not have yielded in aught to Ionian Homer, and thou, Maro, wouldst have been surpassed and so deprived of thy primacy of praise.) For here I may give my hours without restriction to the gentle Muses and am wholly absorbed in my books, which, indeed, constitute my life. When I am weary, I am rapt away by the pageantry of the rounded theatre and the voices on the stage call me to their due applause. Now I listen to the shrewdness of age, now to the prodigal heir; now the suitor appears, now the soldier without his helmet, or the lawyer with his inexhaustible ten-year case thunders out barbarous words to an uneducated court. Often the cunning slave comes to the help of his young master in a love affair, and at every point deceives the very nose of the unbending father; often the maiden, wondering at the new warmth of her feelings, knows not what love is, and even while she knows not, loves. Now frenzied Tragedy shakes her bloodstained sceptre; her hair streams wildly as she rolls her eyes. I am distressed but continue to watch, and find pleasure in watching though distressed. From time to time there is in my tears a sweet bitterness, as when an unfortunate lad has left his joys un-tasted and falls pitifully because of thwarted love; or some fierce avenger of crime comes back across the Styx from the darkness, startling guilty hearts with Death's own torch; or the house of Pelops, or, it may be, the house of noble Ili mourns, or the palace of Creon pays the penalties of his incestuous line.

1. 'Elegia Prima', 11-46.

II

11. 126-127

Hail native Language, that by sinews weak
 Didst move my first endeavouring tongue to speak,
 And mad'st imperfect words with childish tripps,
 Half unpronounc't, slide through my infant-lipps,
 Driving dum silence from the portal dore,
 Where he had mutely sate two years before:
 Here I salute thee and thy pardon ask,
 That now I use thee in my latter task:
 Small loss it is that thence can come unto thee,
 I know my tongue but little Grace can do thee:
 Thou needst not be ambitious to be first,
 Believe me I have thither packt the worst:
 And, if it happen as I did forecast,
 The daintest dishes shall be serv'd up last.
 I pray thee then deny me not thy aide
 For this same small neglect that I have made:
 But haste thee strait to do me once a Pleasure,
 And from thy wardrope bring thy chieftest treasure;
 Not those new fangled toys, and trimming slight
 Which takes our late fantasticks with delight,
 But cull those richest Robes, and gay'st attire
 Which deepest Spirits, and choicest Wits desire:
 I have some naked thoughts that rove about
 And loudly knock to have their passage out;
 And wearie of their place do only stay
 Till thou hast deck't them in thy best array;
 That so they may without suspect or fears
 Fly swiftly to this fair Assembly's ears;
 Yet I had rather if I were to chuse,
 Thy service in some graver subject use,
 Such as may make thee search thy coffers round,
 Before thou cloath my fancy in fit sound:
 Such where the deep transported mind may soare
 Above the wheeling poles, and at Heav'ns dore
 Look in, and see each blissful Deitie
 How he before the thunderous throne doth lie,
 Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings
 To th'touch of golden wires, while Hebe brings
 Immortal Nectar to her Kingly Sire:
 Then passing through the Spheres of watchful fire,
 And mistie Regions of wide air next under,
 And hills of Snow and lofts of piled Thunder,

May tell at length how green-ey'd Neptune raves,
 In Heav'n's defiance mustering all his waves;
 Then sing of secret things that came to pass
 When Beldam Nature in her cradle was;
 And last of Kings and Queens and Hero's old,
 Such as the wise Demodocus once told
 In solemn Songs at King Aeginous feast,
 While sad Ulysses soul and all the rest
 Are held with his melodious harmonie
 In willing chains and sweet captivitie.
 But fie my wandring Muse how thou dost stray!
 Expectance calls thee now another way,
 Thou know'st it must be now thy only bent
 To keep in compass of thy Predicament:
 Then quick about thy purpos'd buisness come,
 That to the next I may resign my Roome.¹

III

11. 244-245

In se perpetuo Tempus revolubile gyro
 Jam revocat Zephyrus vere tepente novos.
 Induiturque brevem Tellus reparata juventam,
 Jamque soluta gelu dulce virescit humus.
 Fallor? an & nobis redeunt in carmina vires,
 Ingeniumque mihi munere veris adest?
 Munere veris adest, iterumque vigescit ab illo
 (Quis putet?) atque aliquod jam sibi poscit opus.
 Castalis ante oculos, bifidumque cacumen oberrat,
 Et mihi Pyrenen somnia nocte ferunt.
 Concitaque arcano fervent mihi pectora motu,
 Et furor, & sonitus me sacer intus agit.
 Delius ipse venit, video Penēide lauro
 Implicitos crines, Delius ipse venit.
 Jam mihi mens liquidum raptatur in ardua coeli,
 Perque vagas nubes corpore liber eo.
 Perque umbras, perque antra feror penetralia vatum,
 Et mihi fana patent interiora Deum.
 Intuiturque animus toto quid agatur Olympo,
 Nec fugiunt oculos Tartara caeca meos.

1. 'At a Vacation Exercise', 1-58.

Quid tam grande sonat distento spiritus ore?
 Quid parit haec rabies, quid sacer iste furor?
 Ver mihi, quod dedit ingenium, cantabitur illo;
 Profuerint isto reddita dona modo.¹

Time, revolving in an unbroken circle, now as the spring gains in warmth calls back new zephyrs; Earth, its losses made good, puts on for a brief space the garment of youth and, now released from the chains of cold, the ground becomes magically green. Am I deceived? Or do not my poetic powers also return? Is not inspiration mine, through bounty of the spring? Through bounty of the spring it is mine, and once again (who would believe it?) gains strength therefrom and now demands for itself some enterprise. Castaly and the twin peaks hover before my eyes and at night dreams bring to me Firene; my breast is alive with mysterious emotions, and madness and divine sounds excite me within. The Delian god himself comes (I see his locks entwined with the laurel of Peneis), the Delian god in person. Now my mind is swept away into the heights of the clear sky and through the wandering clouds I move released from the body; through the shadows I am borne on and through caverns, those sanctuaries of poets, and the inner shrines of the gods lie open to me. My mind beholds all that is done on Olympus and dark Tartarus does not elude my vision.

To what lofty strain does my spirit give utterance with parted lips? To what does this madness, this divine frenzy, give birth? The spring, which has brought me inspiration, shall by that inspiration be sung. In this way she shall gain through the return of her own gift.

IV

11. 248-250

Mitto tibi sanam non pleno ventre salutem,
 Quâ tu distento forte carere potes.
 At tua quid nostram prolectat Musa camoenam,
 Nec sinit optatas posse sequi tenebras?
 Carmine scire velis quàm te redamèque colamque,
 Crede mihi vix hoc carmine scire queas.

1. 'Elegia quinta', 1-24.

Nam neque noster amor modulis includitur arctis,
 Nec venit ad claudos integer ipse pedes.
 Quam bene solennes epulas, hilaremque Decembrim
 Festaque coelifugam quae coluere Deum,
 Deliciasque refert, hyberni gaudia ruris,
 Haustaque per lepidos Gallica musta focos.
 Quid quereris refugam vino dapibusque poesin?
 Carmen amat Bacchum, Carmina Bacchus amat.
 Nec puduit Phoebum virides gestasse corymbos,
 Atque hederam lauro praeposuisse suae.
 Saepius Aoniis clamavit collibus Euee
 Mista Thyonæo turba novena choro.
 Naso Corralæis mala carmina misit ab agris:
 Non illic epulae non sata vitis erat.
 Quid nisi vina, rosasque racemiferumque Lyaeum
 Cantavit brevibus Tæia Musa modis?
 Pindaricosque inflat numeros Teumesius Euan,
 Et redolet sumptum pagina quaeque merum;
 Dum gravis everso currus crepat axe supinus,
 Et volat Elæo pulvere fuscus eques.
 Quadrimoque madens Lyricen Romanus Jaccho
 Dulce canit Glyceran, flavicomamque Chloen.
 Jam quoque lauta tibe generoso mensa paratu,
 Mentis alit vires, ingeniumque fovet.
 Massica foecundam despumant pocula venam,
 Fundis & ex ipso condita metra cado.
 Addimus his artes, fusumque per intima Phoebum
 Corda, favent uni Bacchus, Apollo, Ceres.
 Scilicet haud mitum tam dulcia carmina per te
 Numine composito tres peperisse Deos.
 Nunc quoque Thressa tibi saelato barbitos auro
 Insonat argutâ molliter icta manu;
 Auditurque chelys suspensa tapetia circum,
 Virgineos tremulâ quae regat arte pedes.
 Illa tuas saltim teneant spectacula Musas,
 Et revocent, quantum crapula pellit iners.
 Crede mihi dum psallit ebur, comitataque plectrum
 Implet odoratos festa chorea tholos,
 Percipies tacitum per pectora serpere Phoebum,
 Quale repentinus permeat ossa calor,
 Perque puellares oculos digitumque sonantem
 Irruet in totos lapsa Thalia sinus.
 Namque Elegia levis multorum cura deorum est,
 Et vocat ad numeros quemlibet illa suos;
 Liber adest elegis, Eratoque, Ceresque, Venusque,
 Et cum purpureâ matre tenellus Amor.

Talibus inde licent convivia larga poetis,
 Saepius & veteri commaduisse mero.
 At qui bella refert, & adulto sub Jove caelum,
 Heroesque pios, semideosque duces,
 Et nunc sancta canit superum consulta deorum,
 Nunc latrata fero regna profunda cane,
 Ille quidem parcè Samii pro more magistri
 Vivat, & innocuos praebat herba cibos;
 Stet prope fagineo pellucida lymphæ catillo,
 Sobriaque è puro pocula fonte bibat.
 Additur huic scelerisque vacans, & casta juvenus,
 Et rigidi mores, & sine labe manus.
 Qualis veste nitens sacræ, & lustralibus undis
 Surgis ad infensos augur iture Deos.
 Hoc ritu vixisse ferunt post rapta sagacem
 Lumina Tiresian, Ogygiumque Linon,
 Et lare devoro profugum Calchanta, senemque
 Orpheon edonitis sola per antra feris;
 Sic dapis exiguus, sic rivi poter Homerus
 Dulichium vexit per freta longa virum,
 Et per monstrificam Perseiae Phoebados audam,
 Et vada formineis insidiosa sonis,
 Perque tuas, rex ime, domos, ubi sanguine nigro
 Dicitur umbrarum detinuisse greges.
 Diis etenim sacer est vates, divùmque sacerdos,
 Spirat & occultum pectus, & ora Jovem.
 At tu siquid agam, scitabete (si modò saltem
 Esse putas tanti noscere siquid agam)
 Paciferum caninus caelesti semine regem,
 Faustaque sacratis saccula pacta libris,
 Vagiturque Dei, & stabulantes paupere tecto
 Qui suprema suo cum patre regna colit;
 Stelliparumque polum, modulantesque aethere turmas,
 Et subito elisos ad sua fana Deos.
 Dona quidem dedimus Christi natalibus illa,
 Illa sub auroram lux mihi prima tulit.
 Te quoque pressa manent patriis meditata cicutis,
 Tu mihi, cui recitem, iudicis instar eris.¹

I, who have eaten but little, send you a wish for good health which you, who have eaten too much, perhaps lack. But why does your Muse challenge mine and refuse to allow it to seek the seclusion that it desires? You would fain know

1. 'Elegia Sexta'.

through verse how much I love and cherish you; believe me, you will scarcely be able to discover this through verse, for my love cannot be imprisoned in contracted measures, and does not come whole and complete to a metre that limps.

How well you describe the stately feasts and the joys of December, the ceremonies that commemorate the Deity who came down from heaven, the delights of the country in winter and the Gallic must quaffed by the merry fireside. But why do you complain that poetry absents itself from wine and feasting? Song loves Bacchus and Bacchus loves song, and Phoebus was not ashamed to wear the green ivy clusters and to prefer that ivy to his own laurel. Right often on the Aonian hills have the ninefold throng, mingling with the rout of Thyoneus, cried "Euee." Naso sent poor poetry from the Corallaeon fields; for in that country there were no feasts nor planted vines. Of what but wine and roses and Lycaeus with his grapes did the Teian Muse sing in her short measures? Teumesian Euan inspires the poetry of Pindar and every page is redolent of the wine that had been quaffed, as it pictures the crash of the heavy chariot, overturning because the axle is broken, or the speed of the rider, dark with Elean dust. Only when his lips were moist with four-year-old wine did the Roman lyrist sing sweetly of Glyceria, and of Chloe with her yellow hair. Your laden table with its noble provision strengthens your mind and kindles your inspiration. Your Massic cups foam with a fertile vein of song and from the jar itself you pour the verses stored therein. To these helps we add the devices of art, and Apollo, who enters the inner chambers of the heart; Bacchus, Apollo and Ceres, all give their favor to one person. No wonder, then, that such sweet verses should have been composed by three deities through you, when to this end they were agreed.

Now also the Thracian lute, all repoussé of gold, sounds for you, touched softly by skilled fingers, and against the background of hanging draperies is heard the music of the lyre, guiding with its vibrant art the dancing feet of the maidens. Let such scenes at least hold the attention of your Muses and call back all the creative power that your deadening indulgence drives away. Believe me, when the ivory sounds, and in time with the plectrum the gay throng fills the perfume-laden rooms, you will feel Phoebus stealing silently into your heart, even as sudden warmth courses through your veins. And as the maiden plays, through her eyes and through her fingers, Thalia will slip swiftly into every nook and corner of your being.

For light Elegy is the concern of many gods, and calls to her measures whatever god she will. Bacchus comes to aid elegies, and Erato and Ceres and Venus, and tender Love with his rosy

mother. To such poets, then, bountiful feasts are permitted, and frequent draughts of old wine. But the poet who sings of wars and of heaven subject now to mature Jove, and of pious heroes and leaders half divine, who sings now of the sacred conferences of the high gods, now of the abysmal realms where barks a savage dog, that poet should live sparingly as did the Samian teacher and should find in herbs his simple food. Let the crystal water stand beside him in a beechen cup, and let him drink only sober draughts from a pure spring. Let him have, in addition, a youth chaste and free from evil, uncompromising standards, and stainless hands. Such is your character, augur, when, bright with sacred vestments and lustral waters, you rise to approach the angry gods. In this fashion, we learn that wise Tiresias lived after he lost his eyesight and Ogygian Linus and Calchas, fugitive from his doomed home, and aged Orpheus, taming wild creatures amid those lonely caves. So Homer, eating but little and drinking but water, carried the Dulichian hero over the long stretches of sea and through the monster-making hall of Persa's daughter, child of Phoebus, and the waters made treacherous by the songs of women, and through thy realms, O King of the Lower World, where it is said that he held with black blood the hosts of the shades. For the poet is sacred to the gods and is their priest. His inmost soul and lips breathe Jove.

But if you shall desire to know what I am doing (if only at least you think it worth while to learn what I am doing), I am hymning the king of heavenly lineage, prince of peace, and the happy days promised by the sacred books; the wailing of the Christ child and the stabling under a poor roof of Him who rule together with his Father, the realms on high; and the starry heavens and the hosts that sang in the upper air and the gods suddenly shattered in their own shrines. This is my gift to the birthday of Christ, the first rays of its dawn brought the theme to me. For you are waiting themes also studied on my native reeds, you shall be the judge to whom I shall recite them.

V

11. 136

What needs my Shakespeare for his honour'd Bones,
The labour of an age in piled Stones,
Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid
Under a Star-pointing Pyramid?

Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame,
 What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
 Thou in our wonder and astonishment
 Hast built thyself a live-long Monument.
 For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art,
 Thy easie numbers flow, and that each heart
 Hath from the leaves of thy unvalu'd Book,
 Those Delphick lines with deep impression took,
 Then thou our fancy of it self bereaving,
 Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving;
 And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,
 That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die.¹

VI

11. 149-150

How soon hath Time the subtle thief of youth,
 Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year!
 My hasting dayes flie on with full career,
 But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
 Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,
 That I to manhood am arriv'd so near,
 And inward ripenes doth much less appear,
 That som more timely-happy spirits indu'th.
 Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
 It shall be still in strictest measure eev'n,
 To that same lot, however mean, or high,
 Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n;
 All is, if I have grace to use it so,²
 As ever in my great task-Masters eye.

VII

11. 144

There let Hymen oft appear
 In Saffron robe, with Taper clear,
 And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
 With mask, and antique Pageantry,

1. 'On Shakespeare'.
2. Sonnet VII.

Such sights as youshfull Poets dream
 On Summer eeyes by haunted stream.
 Then to the well-trod stage anon,
 If Jonsons learned Sock be on,
 Or sweetest Shakespeare faucies child,
 Warble his native Wood-notes wilde;
 And ever against eating Cares,
 Lap me in soft Lydian Aires,
 Married to immortal verse
 Such as the meeting soul may pierce
 In notes, with many a winding bout
 Of lincked sweetnes long drawn out,
 With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
 The melting voice through mazes running;
 Untwisting all the chains that ty
 The hidden soul of harmony.†

VIII

11. 144-145

Or let my Lamp at midnight hour,
 Be seen in som high lonely Towr,
 Where I may oft out-watch the Bear,
 With thrice great Hermes, or unspear
 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;
 And of those Daemons that are found
 In fire, air, flood, or under ground,
 Whose power hath a true consent
 With Planet, or with Element.
 Som time let Gorgeous Tragedy
 In Scepter'd Pall com sweeping by,
 Presenting Thebes, or Pelops line,
 Or the tale of Troy divine.
 Or what (though rare) of later age,
 Ennobled hath the Buskind stage.
 But, O sad Virgin, that thy power
 Might raise Musaeus from his bower,
 Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
 Such notes as warbled to the string,

1. 'L'Allegro', 125-144.

Drew Iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
 And made Hell grant what Love did seek.
 Or call up him that left half told
 The story of Cambuscan bold,
 Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
 And who had Canace to wife,
 That own'd the vertuous Ring and Glass,
 And of the wondrous Hore of Brass,
 On which the Tartar King did ride;
 And if ought els, great Bards beside,
 In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
 Of Turneys and of Trophies hung;
 Of Forests, and enchantments drear,
 Where more is meant then meets the ear.¹

IX

11. 132-133

Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heav'ns joy,
 Sphear-born harmonious Sisters, Voice, and Vers,
 Wed your divine sounds, and mixt power employ
 Dead things with inbreath'd sense able to pierce,
 And to our high-rais'd phantasie present,
 That undisturbed Song of pure concert,
 Ay sung before the saphire-colour'd throne
 To him that sits thereon
 With Saintly shout, and solemn Jubily,
 Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
 Their loud up-lifted Angel trumpets blow,
 And the Cherubick host in thousand quires
 Touch their immortal Harps of golden wires,
 With those just Spirits that wear victorious Palms,
 Hymns devout and holy Psalms
 Singing everlastingly;
 That we on Earth with undiscording voice
 May rightly answer that melodious noise;
 As once we did, till disproportion'd sin
 Jarr'd against natures chime, and with harsh din
 Broke the fair musick that all creatures made
 To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
 In perfet Dispason, whilst they stood

1. 'Il Penseroso', 85-120.

In first obedience, and their state of good.
 O may we soon again renew that Song,
 And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long
 To his celestial consort us unite,
 To live with him, and sing in endles morn of light.¹

X

11. 269-274

Nunc mea Pierios cupiam per pectora fontes
 Irriguas torquere vias, totumque per ora
 Volvere laxatum gemino de vertice rivum;
 Ut tenues oblita sonos audacibus alis
 Surgat in officium venerandi Musa parentis.
 Hoc utcunque tibi gratum, pater optime, carmen
 Exiguum meditatur opus, nec novimus ipsi
 Aptius à nobis quae possint munera donis
 Respondere tuis, quamvis nec maxima possint
 Respondere tuis, nedum ut par gratia donis
 Esse queat, vacuis quae redditur arida verbis.
 Sed tamen haec nostros ostendit pagina census,
 Et quod habemus opum chartâ numeravimus istâ,
 Quae mihi sunt nullae, nisi quas dedit aurea Clio,
 Quas mihi semoto somni peperere sub antro,
 Et memoris laureta sacri Parnassides umbrae.

Nec tu vatis opus divinum despice carmen,
 Quo nihil aethereos ortus, _ semina caeli,
 Nil magis humanam commendat origine mentem,
 Sancta Promethéae retinens vestigia flammae.
 Carmen amant superi, tremebundaque Tartara carmen
 Ina ciere valet, divosque ligare profundos,
 Et triplici duros Manes adamante coercoet.
 Carmine sepositi retegunt arcana futuri
 Phoebades, & tremulae pallentes ora Sibyllae;
 Carmina sacrificus sollennes pangit ad aras,
 Aurea seu sternit motantem cornua taurum;
 Seu cum fata sagax fumantibus abdita fibris
 Consultit, & tepidis Parcam scrutatur in extis.
 Nos etiam patrium tunc cum repetemus Olympum,
 Aeternaeque morae stabunt immobilis aevi,
 Ibinus auratis per caeli templa coronis,

1. 'At a solemn Musick'.

Dulcia suaviloquo sociantes carmina plectro,
 Astra quibus, geminique poli convexa sonabunt.
 Spiritus & rapidos qui circumat igneus orbes,
 Nunc quoque sydereis intercinit ipse choreis
 Immortale melos, & inenarrabile carmen;
 Torrida dum rurilus compecit sibila serpens,
 Demissoque ferox gladio mansuescit Orion;
 Stellarum nec sentit onus Maurusius Atlas.
 Carmina regales epulas ornare solebant,
 Cum nondum luxus, vastaeque immensa vorago
 Nota gulae, & modico spumabat coena Lyaeo.
 Tum de more sedens festa ad vorvivia vates
 AEsculeâ intensos redimitus ab arbore crines,
 Heroumque actus, imitandaque gesta canebat,
 Et chaos, & positi latè fundamina mundi,
 Reptantesque Deos, & alentes numina glandes,
 Et nondum AETnaeo quaesitum fulmen ab antro.
 Denique quid vocis modulamen inane juvabit,
 Verborum sensusque vacans, numerique loquacis?
 Silvestres decet iste chorus, non Orphea cantus,
 Qui tenuit fluvios & quercubus addidit aures
 Carmine, non citharâ, simulachraque functa canendo
 Compulit in lacrymas; habet has à carmine laudes.

Nec tu perge precor sacras contemnere Musas,
 Nec vanas inopesque puta, quarum ipse peritus
 Munere, mille sonos numeros componis ad aptos,
 Millibus & vocem modulis variare canoram
 Doctus, Arionii meritò sis nominis haeres.
 Nunc tibi quid mirum, si me genuisse poëtam
 Contigerit, charo si tam propè sanguine juncti
 Cognatas artes, studiumque affine sequamur?
 Ipse volens Phoebus se dispertire duobus,
 Altera dona mihi, dedit altera dona parenti,
 Dividuumque Deum genitorque puerque tenemus.

Tu tamen ut simules teneras odisse camoenas,
 Non odisse reor, neque enim, pater, ire jubebas
 Quâ via lata patet, quâ pronior aera lucri,
 Certaue condendi fulget spes aurea nummi:
 Nec rapis ad leges, malè custoditaue gentis
 Jura, nec insulsis damnas clamoribus aures.
 Sed magis exultam cupiens ditescere mentem,
 Me procul urbano strepitu, recessibus altis
 Abductum Aoniae jucunda per otia ripae
 Phoebeo lateri comitem sinis ire beatum.
 Officium chari taceo commune parentis,
 Me poscunt majora, tuo pater optime sumptu

Cum mihi Romulae patuit facundia linguae,
 Et Latii veneres, & quae Jovis ora decebant
 Grandia magniloquis elata vocabula Graiis,
 Addere suasisti quos jactat Gallia flores,
 Et quam degoneri novus Italus ore loquelam
 Fundit, Barbaricos testatus voce tumultus,
 Quaeque Palaestinus loquitur mysteria vates.
 Denique quicquid habet caelum, subjectaque coelo
 Terra parens, terraeque & coelo interfluis aer,
 Quicquid & unda tegit, pontique agitable marmor,
 Per te nosse licet, per te, si nosse libebit.
 Dimotaque venit spectanda scientia nube,
 Nudaque conspicuos inclinat ad oscula vultus,
 Ni fugisse velim, ni sit libasse molestum.¹

Now I would fain have the Pierian springs turn their refreshing courses through my heart and pour over my lips the whole stream that is released from the twin summits, in order that, forgetting all trivial melodies, my Muse may rise on adventurous wings to do honor to my revered father. This song a modest effort, she meditates for you, honored father, though uncertain of its acceptability. Yet I do not myself know what gifts of mine can more fitly match yours to me, although not even my greatest gifts could equal yours, much less could your gifts be balanced by a gratitude that finds but dry expression in empty words. But still this page displays my rating; I have enumerated on this sheet the wealth that I have, which is, in fact, nothing except what golden Clio has given me and what dreams have created for me in some secluded cavern, dreams and the laurel copses of the sacred grove, the shadows of Parnassus.

Do not look down upon divine song, the poet's function, than, which there is nothing that more commends his ethereal birth and heavenly ancestry, that more commends the mind of man because of its origin. For song retains the sacred traces of the Promethean fire. The gods on high love song; and song has power to stir the trembling depths of Tartarus and to fetter the gods of the lower world; it grips the unsympathetic Mnemosyne with triple adamant. It is with song that the priestesses of Phoebus and the pallid lips of trembling Sibyls reveal the secrets of the far-distant future. It is a song that the sacrificing priest makes at the hallowed altar, whether he strikes down the bull that is shaking its gilded horns, or when he expertly consults the will of fate hidden in the smoking

1. 'Ad Patrem', 1-92.

flesh, and seeks to discover destiny in the warm entrails. We, too, when we shall return again to our native Olympus and the periods of unchanging time shall be fixed forever, shall move through the spaces of the sky wearing wreaths of gold and blending sweet songs with the soft-sounding plectrum, songs with which the stars and the vaults of the twin poles shall resound. Even now the fiery Spirit that circles the swiftly moving orb is singing, himself, among the starry bands an imperishable strain, a hymn that cannot be told, while the glowing Serpent curbs his burning hisses and fierce Orion with lowered sword becomes gentle, and Mauretanian Atlas feels no longer the burden of the stars.

Poetry used to add beauty to royal banquets, when luxury and the measureless depths of insatiable appetites were not yet known, but the feast sparkled with wine temperately enjoyed. Then as he sat at the festal board, as tradition enjoined, the minstrel, with his unshorn locks encircled with oak leaves, would sing of the prowess of heroes and of deeds that deserve imitation, and of Chaos and the broad-based foundations of the universe, and the creeping gods and the acorns that nourished those deities, and of the thunderbolt not yet sought from the cavern of Aetna. In fine, what avails the empty modulations of the voice, when devoid of words and their meaning and of rhythmical language? Such a melody befits the choruses of the woods, not Orpheus, who checked the course of streams and added ears to the oaks by his poetry, not by his lyre, and by his singing reduced to tears the ghosts of the dead. It is from song that he has this glory. Do not, I beg, continue to think lightly of the holy Muses, nor regard as useless and poor those through whose boon you yourself skillfully adjust a thousand sounds to fitting rhythms and, expert in varying your melodious voice by a thousand tuneful changes, may justly be heir to Arion's name. If it has been your fate to beget in me a poet, why do you think it strange if, being so closely united by the precious tie of blood, we pursue kindred art and related interests? Phoebus himself, in his desire to divide himself between two persons, gave one-half to me and the other half to my sire, and thus we, father and son, possess the divided deity.

Nevertheless, though you pretend to dislike the tender Muses, I think that you do not really dislike them, for you did not, father, bid me go where a broad way lies open, where the opportunities for gain are easier, and the golden hope of amassing riches shines steadily. Nor do you force me to the civil code, and the ill-guarded principles of national justice, and thus condemn my ears to senseless clamor. But in your desire to enrich still further my cultivated mind you took me far away

from the din of the city to those high retreats of delightful leisure along the Aonian stream and permitted me to walk a happy comrade by Phoebus's side.

I pass over in silence the normal attachment to a dear parent; in my case something greater is demanded. When at your expense, my noble father, there were revealed to me the eloquence of the language of Romulus and the graces of Latin, and also the sonorous vocabulary developed by the oratorical Greeks, a vocabulary that befitted the mouth of Jove, you urged me to add the beauties of which the French language is so proud, and the speech that with degenerate lips testifying by his words to the wars of the barbarians the Italian of today pours forth, and the mysteries uttered by the prophets of Palestine. In fine, whatever heaven holds, and mother earth below the sky, and the air that moves between earth and sky, whatever^{the} the waters cover, and the tossing shimmering surface of the sea, all this I may now and in the future come to know because of you; and, as the clouds divide, science comes into view, and naked bends her lovely face to my kisses, unless I should wish to flee, unless it should be irksome to me to sip these sweets.

XI

11. 166

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep
 Clos'd o're the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,
 Where your old Bards, the famous Druids ly,
 Nor on the shaggy top of Mons high,
 Nor yet where Deva spreads her wisard stream:
 Ay me, I fondly dream!
 Had ye bin there ... for what could that have don?
 What could the Muse her self that Orpheus bore,
 The Muse her self, for her enchanting son
 Whom Universal nature did lament,
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
 His goary visage down the stream was sent,
 Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore. 1

1. 'Lycidas', 50-63.

XII

11. 275

Sed neque nos genus incultum, nee inutile Phoebō,
 Quā plaga septeno mundi sulcata Trione
 Brumalem patitur longā sub nocte Boōten.
 Nos etiam colimus Phoebum, nos munera Phoebō
 Flaventes spicas, & lutca mala canistris,
 Halantenque crocum (perhibet nisi vana vetustas)
 Misimus, & lectas Druidum de gente choreas.
 (Gens Druides antiqua sacris operata deorum
 Heroum laudes imitandaque gesta canebant)
 Hinc quoties festo cingunt altaria cantu
 Delo in herbosā Graiae de more puellae
 Carminibus lactis memorant Corineōda Loxo,
 Fatidicamque Upin, cum flavicornā Hecaērgē
 Nuda Caledonic variatas pectora fucco.¹

But we who live where the region of the sky that is furrowed by the seven-fold Wain endures wintry Boōtes and interminable night, we are neither an uncultivated race nor useless to Phoebus. We also worship him; we have, in fact, sent gifts to Phoebus (unless the old tradition is baseless), ears of golden grain and yellow apples in baskets and fragrant crocuses sent, too, chosen bands from the Druids. (The Druids, an ancient folk occupied with the rites of the gods, used to sing the praises of heroes and their deeds so worthy of emulation.) Therefore, as often as on grassy Delos the Greek maidens move round the altar with festal song in the old, old fashion, they recall to memory in their joyous strains Loxo, daughter of Corineus, and prophetic Upis, and Hecaērgē, with her golden hair, maidens whose nude breasts were dyed with Caledonian woad.

XIII

11. 276-277

O mihi si mea sora talem concedat amicum
 Phoebaeos decorasse viros qui tam bene norit,
 Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,

1. 'Mansus', 35-48.

Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem;
 Aut dicam invictae sociali foedere mensae,
 Magnanimos Heroes, & (O modo spiritus adsit)
 Frangam Saxonias Britonum sub Marte phalanges.
 Tandem ubi non tacitae permensus tempora vitae,
 Annorumque satur cincti sua jura relinquam,
 Ille mihi lacto madidis astaret ocellis,
 Astanti sat erit si dicam sim tibi curae;
 Ille meos artus liventi morte solutos
 Curaret parvâ componi molliter urnâ.
 Foristan & nostros ducat de marmore vultus,
 Nectens aut Paphiâ myrti aut Parnasside lauri
 Fronde comas, at ego securâ pace quiescam.
 Tum quoque, si qua fides, si praemia certa bonorum,
 Ipse ego caelicolum semorus in aethera divum,
 Quò labor & mens pura vehunt, atque ignea virtus,
 Secreti haec aliquâ mundi de parte videbo
 (Quantum fata sinunt) & totâ mente serenum
 Ridens purpureo suffundar lumine vultus
 Et simul aethereo plaudam mihi laetus Olympo.¹

Oh, if only my lot would grant me such a friend, who would know so well how to honor the votaries of Phoebus, if ever I shall call back into the realms of song our native kings and Arthur, who wars even beneath the earth; or if I shall sing of the high-souled heroes of the Table invincible through their comradeship, and (Oh, that the inspiration may be mine!) if I shall break the Saxon phalanxes under the war god of the Briton. At length, when, after finishing the years of a life by no means silent, when, full of years, I shall yield to Death her rights, that friend will stand by my bedside with tearful eyes; it will suffice for me to say to him as he stands there, "May I be the object of thy care." He will have my limbs, relaxed in ashen death, laid to rest softly in a small urn; perhaps he will sculpture my features in marble, wreathing my locks with Paphian myrtle or Parnassian laurel, and I shall find rest in perfect peace. Then, too, if there is any loyalty, if there are definite rewards for the righteous, I myself, removed to the ethereal regions of the gods on high, whither toil and a pure mind and an aspiring virtue carry men, shall (in so far as destiny permits) from some part of that distant universe behold these things, and with a soul filled with smiling serenity, my face shall be suffused with rosy light and with joy I shall applaud myself on high Olympus.

1. 'Mansus', 78-100.

XIV

11. 150

Captain or Colonel, or Knight in Arms,
 Whose chance on these defenceless dores may cease,
 If deed of honour did thee ever please,
 Guard them, and him within protect from harms,
 He can requite thee, for he knows the charms
 That call Fame on such gentle acts as these,
 And he can spread thy Name o're Lands and Seas,
 What ever clime the Suns bright circle warms.
 Lift not thy spear against the Muses Bowre,
 The great Emathian Conqueror bid spare
 The house of Pindarus, when Temple and Towre
 Went to the ground: And the repeated air
 Of sad Electra's Poet had the power
 To save th'Athenian Walls from ruine bare.¹

XV

11. 152

Harry whose tuneful and well measur'd Song
 First taught our English Musick how to span
 Words with just note and accent, not to scan
 With Midas Ears, committing short and long;
 Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,
 With praise enough for Envy to look wan;
 To after-age thou shalt be writ the man,
 That with smooth aire couldst humor best our tongue.
 Thou honour'st Verse, and Verse must lend her wing
 To honour thee, the Priest of Phoebus Quire
 That tun'st their happiest lines in Hyman, or Story.
Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
 Then his Casella, whom he woo'd to sing,
 Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.²

XVI

11. 151

A Book was writ of late call'd Tetrachordon;
 And wov'n close, both matter, form and stile;

-
1. Sonnet VIII.
 2. Sonnet XIII.

The Subject new: it walk'd the Town a while,
 Numbring good intellects; now seldom por'd on.
 Cries the stall-reader, bless us! what a word on
 A title page is this! and some in file
 Stand spelling false, while one might walk to Mile-
 End Green. Why is it harder Sirs than Gordon,
 Colkitto, or Macdonnel, or Galasp?
 Those rugged names to our like mouths grow sleek
 That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp.
 Thy age, like ours, O Soul of Sir John Cheek,
 Hated not Learning worse than Toad or Asp;
 When thou taught'st Cambridge, and King Edward Greek.¹

XVII

11.151-152

I did but prompt the age to quit their cloggs
 By the known rules of antient libertie,
 When strait a barbarous noise environs me
 Of Owles and Cuckoos, Asses, Apes and Doggs.
 As when those Hinds that were transform'd to Froggs
 Raild at Latona's twin-born progenie
 Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee.
 But this is got by casting Pearl to Hoggs;
 That bawle for freedom in their senseless mood,
 And still revolt when truth would set them free.
 Licence they mean when they cry libertie;
 For who loves that, must first be wise and good;
 But from that mark how far they reave we see
 For all this wast of wealth, and loss of blood.²

XVIII

11.155

When I consider how my light is spent,
 Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
 And that one Talent which is death to hide,
 Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present

-
1. Sonnet XI.
 2. Sonnet XII.

My true account, least he returning chide,
 Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd,
 I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
 Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
 Bear his milde yoke, they serve him best, his State
 Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
 And post o're Land and Ocean without rest;
 They also serve who only stand and waite.¹

XIX

1. 5-6

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
 Of that Forbidd'n Tree, whose mortal tast
 Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
 Restore us, and regain the bliseful Seat,
 Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
 Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
 In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
 Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill
 Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flowd
 Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above th' Aonian Mount; while it persues
 Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rime.
 And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost preferr
 Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
 Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspred
 Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
 And mad'st it pregnant: What in mee is dark
 Illumin, what is low raise and support;
 That to the highth of this great Argument
 I may assert Eternal Providence,
 And justifie the wayes of God to men. ²

1. Sonnet XIX.

2. Paradise Lost, 1. 1-26.

XX

1. 40

Others more milde,
 Retreated in a silent valley, sing
 With notes Angelical to many a Harp
 Thir own Heroic deeds and hapless fall
 By doom of Lattel; and complain that Fate
 Free Vertue should enthral to Force or Chance,
 Thir Song was partial, but the harmony
 (What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)
 Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
 The thronging audience. In discourse more sweet
 (For Eloquence the Soul, Song charms the Sense,)
 Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
 In thoughts more elevate, and reasond high
 Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
 Fixt Fate, free Will, Foreknowledge absolute,
 And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.
 Of good and evil much they argu'd then,
 Of happiness and final misery,
 Passion and Apathie, and glory and shame,
 Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie;
 Yet with a pleasing sorcerie could charm
 Pain for a while or anguish, and excite
 Fallacious hope, or arm th' obdured brest
 With stubborn patience as with triple steel.¹

XXI

1. 53-55

Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,
 Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
 May I express thee unblam'd? since God is Light,
 And never but in unapproach'd Light
 Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,
 Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
 Or hear'st thou rather pure Ethereal stream,
 Whose Fountain who shall tell? before the Sun
 Before the Heav'ns thou wert, and at the voice
 Of God, as with a Mantle didst invest

1. Paradise Lost, 11. 546-570.

The rising world of waters dark and deep,
 Won from the void and formless infinite.
 Thee I re-visit now with bolder wing,
 Escap't the Stygian Pool, though long detain'd
 In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight
 Through utter and through middle darkness borne
 With other notes than to th' Orphean Lyre
 I sung of Chaos and Eternal Night,
 Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
 The dark descent, and up to reascend,
 Though hard and rare: thee I revisit safe,
 And feel thy sovran vital Lamp; but thou
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain
 To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn:
 So thick a drop serene hath quencht thir Orbs,
 Or dim suffusion veild. Yet not the more
 Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
 Clear Spring, or shadie Grove, or Sunnie Hill,
 Smit with the love of sacred Song; but chief
 Thee Sion and the flowrie Brooks beneath
 That wash thy hallowd feet, and warbling flow,
 Nightly I visit: nor somtimes forget
 Those other two equald with me in Fate,
 So were I equald with them in renown,
 Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides,
 And Tiresias and Phineus Prophets old:
 Then feed on thoughts, that voluntarie move
 Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful Bird
 Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid
 Tunes her nocturnal Note. Thus with the Year
 Seasons return, but not to mee returns
 Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,
 Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summers Rose,
 Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
 But cloud in stead, and ever-during dark
 Surrounds me, from the chearful waies of men
 Cut off, and for the Book of knowledg fair
 Presented with a Universal blanc
 Of Natures works to mee expung'd and ras'd,
 And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
 So much the rather thou Celestial Light
 Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
 Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
 Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
 Of things invisible to mortal sight.¹

1. Paradise Lost, 111. 1-55.

XXII

1. 148-149

Descend from Heav'n Urania, by that name
 If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine
 Following, above th' Olympian Hill I soare,
 Above the flight of Pegasean wing.
 The meaning, not the Name I call: for thou
 Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
 Of old Olympus dwelilst, but Heav'nlie borne,
 Before the Hills appeerd, or Fountain flowd,
 Thou with Eternal wisdom didst converse,
 Wisdom thy Sister, and with her didst play
 In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleas'd
 With thy Celestial Song. Up led by thee
 Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presum'd,
 An Earthlie Guest, and drawn Emyreal Aire,
 Thy temping; with like safetie guided down
 Return me to my Native Element:
 Least from this flying Steed unreind, (as once
Bellerophon, though from a lower Clime)
 Dismounted, on th' Aleian Field I fall,
 Erroneous there to wander and forlorne.
 Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
 Within the visible Diurnal Spheare;
 Standing on Earth, not rapt above the Pole,
 More safe I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd
 To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes,
 On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues;
 In darkness, and with dangers compass round,
 And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
 Visitst my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn
 Purples the East: still govern thou my Song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few:
 But drive farr off the barbarous dissonance
 Of Bacchus and his Revellers, the Race
 Of that wilde Rout that tore the Thracian Bard
 In Rhodope, where Woods and Rocks had Eares
 To rapture, till the savage clamor dround
 Both Harp and Voice; nor could the Muse defend
 Her Son. So fail not thou, who thee implores:
 For thou art Heav'nlie, shee an empty dreame.¹

1. Paradise Lost, vii. 1-39.

XXIII

1. 182-183

Sad task, yet argument
 Not less but more Heroic then the wrauth
 Of stern Achilles on his Foe persu'd
 Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage
 Of Turnus for Lavinia disspous'd,
 Or Nentun's ire or Juno's, that so long
 Perplex'd the Greek and Cytheres's Son;
 If answerable stile I can obtaine
 Of my Celestial Patroness, who deignes
 Her nightly visitation unimpior'd,
 And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires
 Easie my unpremeditated Verse:
 Since first this Subject for Heroic Song
 Pleas'd me long choosing, and beginning late;
 Not sedulous by Nature to indite
 Warrs, hitherto the onely Argument
 Heroic deem'd, chief maistrie to dissect
 With long and tedious havoc fabl'd Knights
 In Babels feign'd; the better fortitude
 Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom
 Unsung; or to describe Races and Games,
 Or tilting Furniture, emblazon'd Shields,
 Impresses quaint, Caparisons and Steeds;
 Bases and tinsel Trappings, gorgious Knights
 At Joust and Torneament; then marshald Feast
 Serv'd up in Hall with Sewers, and Seneshals;
 The skill of Artifice or Office mean,
 Not that which justly gives Heroic name
 To Person or to Poem. mee of these
 Nor skill'd nor studious, higher Argument
 Remaines, sufficient of it self to raise
 That name, unless an age too late, or cold
 Climat, or Years damp my intended wing
 Deprest; and much they may, if all be mine,
 Not Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear.¹

XXIV

11. 46-48

Be famous then
 By wisdom; as thy Empire must extend,
 So let extend thy mind ore all the World,

1. Paradise Lost, ix. 13-47.

In knowledge, all things in it comprehend,
 All knowledge is not coucht in Moses Law,
 The Pentateuch or what the Prophets wrote,
 The Gentiles also know, and write, and teach
 To admiration, led by Natures light;
 And with the Gentiles much thou must converse,
 Ruling them by perswasion as thou mean'st;
 Without thir learning how wilt thou with them,
 Or they with thee hold conversation meet?
 How wilt thou reason with them, how refute
 Thir Idolisms, Traditions, Paradoxes?
 Error by his own arms is best evinc't.
 Look once more ere we leave this specular Mount
 Westward, much nearer by Southwest, behold
 Where on the Aegean shore a City standu
 Built nobly, pure the air, and light the soil,
Athens the eye of Greece, Mother of Arts
 And Eloquence, native to famous wits
 Or hospitable, in her sweet recess,
 City or Suburban, studious walks and shades;
 See there the Olive Grove of Academe,
Plato's retirement, where the Atlic Bird
 Trills her thick-warbl'd notes the summer long,
 There flowrie hill Hymettus with the sound
 Of Bees industrious murmur oft invites
 To studious musing; there Ilisus rouls
 His whispering stream; within the walls then view
 The schools of ancient Sages; his who bred
 Great Alexander to subdue the World,
Lyceum there, and painted Stoa next:
 There thou shalt hear and learn the secret power
 Of harmony in tones and numbers hit
 By voice or hand, and various-measur'd verse,
Aeolian charms and Dorian Lyric Odes,
 And his who gave them breath, but higher sung,
 Blind Melesigenes thence Homer calld,
 Whose Poem Phoebus challeng'd for his own.
 Thence what the lofty grave Tragoedians taught
 In Chorus or Iambic, teachers best
 Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd
 In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
 Of fate, and chance, and change in human life;
 High actions, and high passions best describing:
 Thence to the famous Orators repair,
 Those ancient, whose resistless eloquence
 Wielded at will that fierce Democratic,
 Shook th' Arsenal and fulmind over Greece.

To Macedon, and Artaxerxes Throne;
 To sage Philosophy next lend thine ear,
 From Heav'n descended to the low-rooft house
 Of Socrates. see there his Tenement,
 Whom well inspir'd the Oracle pronounc'd
 Wisest of men; from whose mouth issu'd forth
 Mellifluous streams that waterd all the schools
 Of Academics old and new, with those
 Sirnam'd Peripatetic, and the Sect
Epicurean, and the Stoic severe;
 These here revolve, or, as thou lik'st, at home,
 Till time mature thee to a Kingdoms waight;
 These rules will render thee a King compleat
 Within thy self, much more with Empire joind.¹

XXV

11. 48-50

To whom our Saviour sagely thus repli'd.
 Think not but that I know these things, or think
 I know them not; not therefore am I short
 Of knowing what I ought: he who receives
 Light from above, from the fountain of light,
 No other doctrin needs, though granted true;
 But these are false, or little else but dreams,
 Conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm.
 The first and wisest of them all professd
 To know this onely, that he nothing knew;
 The next to fabling fell and smooth conceits;
 A third sort doubted all things, though plain sense;
 Others in vertue plac'd felicity,
 But vertue joind with riches and long life;
 In corporal pleasure hee, and careless ease;
 The Stoic last in Philosophic pride,
 By him calld vertue; and his vertuous man,
 Wise, perfet in himself, and all possessing
 Equal to God, oft shames not to preferr,
 As fearing God not man, contemning all
 Wealth, pleasure, pain or torment, death and life,
 Which when he lists, he leaves, or boasts he can,
 For all his tedious talk is but vain boast,
 Or subtle shifts conviction to evade.
 Alas what can they teach, and not mislead;

1. Paradise Regained, iv. 221-284.

Ignorant of themselves, of God much more,
 And how the World began, and how man fell
 Degraded by himself, on Grace depending?
 Much of the Soul they talk, but all awrie,
 And in themselves seek vertue, and to themselves
 All glory arrogate, to God give none,
 Rather accuse him under usual names,
 Fortune and Fate, as one regardless quite
 Of mortal things. Who therefore seeks in these
 True wisdom, finds her not, or by delusion
 Farr worse, her false resemblance onely meets,
 An empty cloud. However many books
 Wise men have said are wearisom; 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 Childern gathering pibles on the shore.
 Or if I would delight my privat hours
 With Music or with Poem, where so soon
 As in our native Language can I find
 That solace? All our Law and Story strew'd
 With Hymns, our Pealms with artful terms inscrib'd,
 Our Hebrew Songs and Harps in Babylon,
 That pleas'd so well our Victors ear, declare
 That rather Greece from us these Arts deriv'd;
 Ill imitated, while they loudest sing
 The vices of thir Deities, and thir own
 In Fable, Hymn, or Song, so personating
 Thir Gods ridiculous, and themselves past shame.
 Remove thir swelling Epithetes thick laid
 As varnish on a Harlots cheek, the rest,
 Thin sown with aught of profit or delight,
 Will farr be found unworthy to compare
 With Sions songs, to all true taste excellling,
 Where God is prais'd aright, and Godlike men,
 The Holiest of Holies, and his Saints;
 Such are from God inspir'd, not such from thee;
 Unless where moral vertue is exprest
 By light of Nature not in all quite lost.
 Thir Orators thou then extoll'st, as those
 The top of Eloquence, Statists indeed,
 And lovers of thir Country, as may seem;
 But herein to our Prophets farr beneath,

As men divinely taught, and better teaching
 The solid rules of Civil Government
 In thir majestic unaffected stile
 Then all the Oratory of Greece and Rome,
 In them is plainest taught, and easiest learnt,
 What makes a Nation happy, and keeps it so,
 What ruins Kingdoms, and lays Cities flat;¹
 These onely with our Law best form a King.

XXVI

11. 106-109

All is best, though we oft doubt,
 What th' unsearchable dispose
 Of highest wisdom brings about,
 And ever best found in the close,
 Oft he seems to hide his face,
 But unexpectedly returns
 And to his faithful Champion hath in place
 Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns
 And all that band them to resist
 His uncontrollable intent;
 His servants hee with new acquist
 Of true experience from this great event
 With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
 And calm of mind all passion spent.²

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1. Paradise Regained, iv. 285-364.
 2. Samson Agonistes, 1745-1758.

Prose

I

Then amidst the Hymns, and Halleluiahs of Saints some one may perhaps bee heard offering at high strains in new and lofty Measures to sing and celebrate thy divine Mercies, and marvelous Judgements in this Land throughout all AGES; whereby this great and Warlike Nation instructed and inur'd to the fervent and continuall practice of Truth and Righteousnesse, and casting farre from her the rags of her old vices may presse on hard to that high and happy emulation to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian People at that day when thou the Eternall and shortly-expected King shalt open the Clouds to judge the severall Kingdomes of the World, and distributing Nationall Honours and Kewards to Religious and just Common-wealths, shalt put an end to all Earthly Tyrannies, proclaiming thy universal and milde Monarchy through Heaven and Earth. Where they undoubtedly that by their Labours, Counsels, and Prayers have been earnest for the Common good of Religion and their Country, shall receive, above the inferiour Orders of the Blessed, the Regall addition of Principalities, Legions, and Thrones into their glorious Titles, and in supereminence [89] of beatifick Vision progressing the datelesse and irrevoluble Circle of Eternity shall clasp inseparable Hands with joy, and blisse in over measure for ever.¹

II

Wee all know that in private and personall injuries, yea in publique sufferings for the cause of Christ, his rule and example teaches us to be so farre from a readinesse to speak cvill, as not to answer the reviler in his language though never so much provok't. Yet in the detecting, and convincing of any notorious [1] enimie to truth and his Countries peace, especially that is conceited to have a voluble and smart fluence of tongue, and in the vaine confidence of that, and out of a more tenacious cling to worldly respects, stands up for all the rest to justifie a long usurpation and convicted Pseudepiscopcy of Prelates, with all their ceremonies,

¹ CH, iii. 78-79.

Liturgies, and tyrannies which God and man are now ready to
explode and hisse out of the land; I suppose and more then
suppose, it will be nothing disagreeing from Christian meek-
ness to handle such a one in a rougher accent, and to send
home his haughtinesse well bespurred with his owne holy-water.
Nor to do thus are we unauthoritid either from the morall
precept of SALOMON to answer him thereafter that prides him
in his folly; nor from the example of Christ, and all his
followers in all Ages, who in the refuting of those that re-
sisted sound Doctrine, and by subtile dissimulations corrupted
the minds of men, have wrought up their zealous souls into
such vehemencies, as nothing could be more killingly spoken:
for who can be a greater enemy to mankind, who a more dan-
gerous deceiver then he who defending a traditionall corrup-
tion uses no common Arts, but with a wily Stratagem of yeelding
to the time a greater part of his cause, seeming to forgo all
that mans invention hath done therein, and driven from much
of his hold in Scripture, yet leaving it hanging by a twin'd
thread, not from divine command but from Apostolicall pru-
dence or assent, as if he had the surety of some rouling
trench, creeps up by this meanes to his relinquish't fortress
of divine authority againe: and still hovering between the
confines of that which hee dares not bee openly, and that
which he will not be sincerely, traines on the easie Christian
insensibly within the close ambushment of worst errors, and
with a slye shuffle of counterfeit principles chopping and
changing till hee have glean'd all the good ones out of their
minds, leaves them at last, after a slight resemblance of
sweeping and carnishing under the sevenfold possession of a
desperate stupidity. And therefore they that love the soules
of men, which is the dearest love, and stirs up the noblest
jealousie, when they meet with such collusion, cannot be
blamed though they bee transported with the zeale of truth to
a well heated fervencie: especially, seeing they which thus
offend against the soules of their brethren, do it with de-
light to their great gaine, ease, and advancement in this
world, but they that seeke to discover and oppose their false
trade of deceiving, do it not without a sad and unwilling
anger, not without many hazards, but without all private and
personall spleene, and without any thought of earthly reward,
when as this very course they take stops their hopes of
ascending above a lowly and unenviable pitch in this life.
And although in the serious unceasing of a grand imposture
(for to deale plainly with you Readers, Prelatry is no better)
there be mixt here and there such a grim laughter, as may
appeare at the same time in an austere visage, it cannot be

tax of levity or insolence: for even this veine of laughing (as I could produce out of grave Authors) hath oft-times a strong and sinewy force in teaching and confuting; nor can there be a more proper object of indignation and scorne together then a false Prophet taken in the greatest dearest and most dangerous cheat, the [3] cheat of soules: in the disclosing whereof if it be harmful to be angry, and withall to cast a lowring smile, when the properest object calls for both, it will be long enough ere any be able to say why those two most rationally faculties of humane intellect anger and laughter were first seated in the brest of man. Thus much (Readers) in favour of the softer spirited Christian, for other exceptioners there was no thought taken. Onely if it bee ask't why this close and succinct manner of coping with the Adversary was rather chosen, this was the reason, chiefly that the ingenious Reader without further amusing himselfe in the labyrinth of controversall antiquity, may come the speediest way to see the truth vindicated, and Sophistry taken short at the first false bound.¹

III

Concerning therefore this wayward subject against prelaty, the touching whereof is so distastfull and disquietous to a number of men, as by what hath been said I may deserve of charitable readers to be credited, that neither envy nor gall hath enterd me upon this controversy, but the enforcement of conscience only, and a preventive fear least the omitting of this duty should be against me when I would store up to my self the good provision of peacefull hours, So lest it should be still imputed to me, as I have found it hath bin, that some self-pleasing humor of vain-glory hath incited me to contest with men of high estimation, now while green yeers are upon my head, from this needlesse surmisall I shall hope to disswade the intelligent and equal auditor, if I can but say successfullly that which in this exigent behooves me, although I would be heard only, if it might be, by the elegant & learned reader, to whom principally for a while I shal beg leav I may addressse my selfe. To him it will be no new thing though I tell him that if I hunted after praise by the ostentation of wit and learning, I should not write thus out of mine own season, when I have neither yet compleated to my minde the full circle of my private studies, although I complain

not of any insufficiency to the matter in hand, or were I ready to my wishes, it were a folly to commit any thing elaborately compos'd to the careless and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times. Next if I were wise only to mine own ends, I would certainly take such a subject as of it self might catch applause, whereas this hath all the disadvantages on the contrary, and such a subject as the publishing whereof might be delayd at pleasure, and time enough to [36] pencill it over with all the curious touches of art, even to the perfection of a faultlesse picture, whenas in this argument the not deferring is of great moment to the good speeding, that if solidity have leisure to doe her office, art cannot have much. Lastly, I should not chuse this manner of writing wherin knowing my self inferior to my self, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand. And though I shall be foolish in saying more to this purpose, yet since it will be such a folly, as wisest men going about to commit, have only confest and so committed, I may trust with more reason, because with more folly to have courteous pardon. For although a Poet soaring in the high region of his fancies with his garland and singing robes about him might without apology speak more of himself then I mean to do, yet for me sitting here below in the cool element of prose, a mortall thing among many readers of no Emphyreall conceit, to venture and divulge unusual things of my selfe, I shall petition to the gentle sort, it may not be envy to me. I must say therefore that after I had from my first yeeres by the ceaselesse diligence and care of my father, whom God recompence, bin exercis'd to the tongues, and some sciences, as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers both at home and at the schools, it was found that whether ought was impos'd me by them that had the overlooking, or betak'n to of mine own choise in English, or other tongue, prosing or versing, but chiefly this latter, the stile by certain vital signes it had, was likely to live. But much latelier in the privat Academies of Italy, whither I was favor'd to resort, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, compos'd at under twenty or thereabout (for the manner is that every one must give some proof of his wit and reading there) met with acceptance above what was lookt for, and other things which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them, were receiv'd with written Encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps, I began thus farre to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not lesse to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study (which I take

to be my portion in this life) joyn'd with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die. These thoughts at once possess me, and these other. That if I were certain to write as men buy Leases, for three lives and downward, [37] there ought no regard be sooner had, then to Gods glory by the honour and instruction of my country. For which cause, and not only for that I knew it would be hard to arrive at the second rank among the Latines, I apply'd my selfe to that resolution which Ariosto follow'd against the persuasions of Bembo, to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end, that were a toylike vanity, but to be an interpreter & relater of the best and sagest things among mine own Citizens throughout this Iland in the mother dialect. That what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I in my proportion with this over and above of being a Christian, might doe for mine: not caring to be once nam'd abroad, though perhaps I could attaine to that, but content with these British Ilands as my world, whose fortune hath hitherto bin, that if the Athenians, as some say, made their small deeds great and renowned by their eloquent writers, England hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskillfull handling of monks and mechanicks.

Time serves not now, and perhaps I might seem too profuse to give any certain account of what the mind at home in the spacious circuits of her musing hath liberty to propose to her self, though of highest hope, and hardest attempting, whether that Epick form whereof the two poems of Homer, and those other two of Virgil and Tasso are a diffuse, and the book of Job a brief model: or whether the rules of Aristotle herein are strictly to be kept, or nature to be follow'd, which in them that know art, and use judgement is no transgression, but an enriching of art. And lastly what K. or Knight before the conquest might be chosen in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian Herog. And as Tasso gave to a Prince of Italy his choise whether he would command him to write of Godfreys expedition against the infidels, or Belisarius against the Gothes, or Charlemain against the Lombards; if to the instinct of nature and the imboldning of art ought may be trusted, and that there be nothing advers in our climat, or the fate of this age, it haply would be no rashnesse from an equal diligence and inclination to present the like offer in our own ancient stories. Or whether those Dramatick constitutions, wherein Sophocles and Euripides raigne shall be found

more doctrinal and exemplary to a Nation, the Scripture also affords us a divine pastoral Drama in the Song of Salomon consisting of two persons and a double Chorus, as Origen rightly Judges. [38] And the Apocalyps of Saint John is the majestic image of a high and stately Tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solem Scenes and Acts with a sevenfold Chorus of halleluja's and harping symphonies: and this my opinion the grave authority of Barus commenting that booke is sufficient to confirm. Or if occasion shall lead to imitat those magnifick Odes and Hymns wherein Pindarus and Callimachus are in most things worthy, some others in their frame judicious, in their matter most an end faulty: But those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition may be easily made appear over all the kinds of Lyrick poesy, to be incomparable. These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God rarely bestow'd, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every Nation: and are of power beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and publick civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune, to celebrate in glorious and lofty Hymns the throne and equipage of Gods Almightyesse, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his Church, to sing the victorious agonies of Martyre and Saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious Nations doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ, to deplore the general relapses of Kingdoms and States from justice and Gods true worship. Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in vertu amiable, or grave, whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of that which is call'd fortune from without, or the wily subtleties and reflexes of mans thoughts from within, all these things with a solid and treatable smoothnesse to paint out and describe. Teaching over the whole booke of sanctity and vertu through all the instances of example with such delight to those especially of soft and delicious temper who will not so much as look upon Truth herselfe, unlesse they see her elegantly drest, that whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they would then appeare to all men both easy and pleasant though they were rugged and difficult indeed. And what a benefit this would be to our youth and gentry, may be soon guest by what we know of the corruption and bane which they suck in dayly from the writings and interludes of libidinous and ignorant Poetasters, who having scars ever heard of that which is the main con-[39]

sistence of a true poem, the choys of such persons as they ought to introduce, and what is morall and decent to each one, doe for the most part lap up vitious principles in sweet pills to be swallow'd down, and make the tast of vertuous documents harsh and sowr. But because the spirit of man cannot demean it selfe lively in this body without some recreating intermission of labour, and serious things, it were happy for the Common wealth, if our Magistrates, as in those famous governments of old, would take into their care, not only the deciding of our contentious Law cases and brauls, but the managing of our publick sports, and festival pastimes, that they might be, not such as were autoriz'd a while since, the provocations of drunkennesse and lust, but such as may inure and harden our bodies by martiall exercises to all warlike skill and performance, and may civilize, adorn and make discreet our minds by the learned and affable meeting of frequent Academies, and the procurement of wise and artfull recitations sweetned with eloquent and gracefull inticements to the love and practice of justice, temperance and fortitude, instructing and bettering the Nation at all opportunities, that the call of wisdom and vertu may be heard everywhere, as Salomon saith, She crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets, in the top of high places, in the chief concourse, and in the openings of the Gates. Whether this may not be not only in Pulpits, but after another persuasive method, at set and solemne Panegories, in Theaters, porches, or what other place, or way may win most upon the people to receiv at once both recreation, & instruction, let them in authority consult. The thing which I had to say, and those intentions which have liv'd within me ever since I could conceiv my self any thing worth to my Countrie, I return to crave excuse that urgent reason hath pluckt from me by an abortive and foredated discovery. And the accomplishment of them lies not but in a power above mans to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavour'd, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost averre of my self, as farre as life and free leasure will extend, and that the Land had once infranchis'd her self from this impertinent yoke of prelaty, under whose inquisitorius and tyrannical duncery no free and splendid wit can flourish. Neither doe I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few yeers yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be rays'd from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which [40] flows at wast from the pen of some vulgar Amorist, or the trencher fury of a riming parasite, nor to be obtain'd by the invocation of

Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternall Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his Altar to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affaires, till which in some measure be compast, at mine own peril and cost I refuse not to sustain this expectation from as many as are not loath to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them. Although it nothing content me to have disclos'd thus much before hand, but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingnesse I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no lesse hopes then these, and leave a calme and pleasing solitarynes fed with cherful and confident thoughts, to imbarke in a t'roubl'd sea of noises and hoare disputes, put from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightfull studies to come into the dim reflexion of hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk, and there be fain to club quotations with men whose learning and beleif lies in marginal stuffings, who when they have like good sumpters laid ye down their hors load of citations and fathers at your dore, with a rapsody of who and who were Bishops here or there, ye may take off their pack-saddles, their days work is don, and episcopacy, as they think, stoutly vindicated. Let any gentle apprehension that can distinguish learned pains from unlearned drudgery, imagin what pleasure or profoundnesse can be in this, or what honour to deal against such adversaries. But were it the meanest under-service, if God by his Secretary conscience injoynt it, it were sad for me if I should draw back, for me especially, now when all men offer their aid to help ease and lighten the difficult labours of the Church, to whose service by the intentions of my parents and friends I was destin'd of a child, and in mine own resolutions, till coming to some maturity of yeers and perceaving what tyranny had invaded the Church, that he who would take Orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withall, which unlesse he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either strait perjure, or split his faith, I thought it better to preferre a blamelesse silence before the sacred office of speaking bought, and begun with servitude and forswearing.¹

1. CM, 233-242.

IV

Tragedy, as it was antiently compos'd, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion: for so in Physic things of melancholic hue and quality are us'd against melancholy, sower against sower, salt to remove salt humours. Hence Philosophers and other gravest Writers, as Cicero, Plutarch and others, frequently cite out of Tragic Poets, both to adorn and illustrate thir discourse. The Apostle Paul himself thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of Euripides into the Text of Holy Scripture, I Cor. 15. 33. and Paraeus commenting on the Revelation, divides the whole Book as a Tragedy, into Acte distinguisht each by a Chorus of Heavenly Harpings and Song between. Heretofore Men in highest dignity have labour'd not a little to be thought able to compose a Tragedy. Of that honour Dionysius the elder was no less ambitious, then before of his attaining to the Tyranny. Augustus Caesar also had begun his Ajax, but unable to please his own judgment with what he had begun, left it unfinished. Seneca the Philosopher is by some thought the Author of those Tragedies (at least the best of them) that go under that name. Gregory Nazianzen a Father of the Church, thought it not unbecoming the sanctity of his person to write a Tragedy, which he entitl'd, Christ suffering. This is mention'd to vindicate Tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common Interludes; hap'ning through the Poets error of intermixing Comic stuff with Tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath bin counted absurd; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratifie the people. And though antient Tragedy use no Prologue, yet using sometimes, in case of self defence, or explanation, that which Martial calls an Epistle; in behalf of this Tragedy coming forth after the antient manner, much different from what among us passes for best, thus much before-hand may be Epistl'd; that Chorus is here introduc'd after the Greek manner, not antient only but modern, and still in use among the Italians. In the modelling therefore of this Poem, with good reason, the Antients and Italians are rather follow'd,

as of much more authority and fame. The measure of Verse us'd in the Chorus is of all sorts, call'd by the Greeks Monostrophic, or rather Apolelymenon, without regard had to Strophe, Antistrophe or Epeod, which were a kind of Stanza's fram'd only for the Music, then us'd with the Chorus that sung; not essential to the Poem, and therefore not material; or being divided into Stanza's or Pauses, they may be call'd Allaeostropha. Division into Act and Scene referring chiefly to the Stage (to which this work never was intended) is here omitted. It suffices if the whole Drama be found not produc't beyond the fift Act.

Of the style and uniformitie, and that commonly call'd the Plot, whether intricate or explicit, which is nothing indeed but such oeconomy, or disposition of the fable as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum, they only will best judge who are not unacquainted with Aeschulus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the three Tragic Poets unequal'd yet by any, and the best rule to all who endeavour to write Tragedy. The circumscription of time wherein the whole Drama begins and ends, is according to antient rule, and best example, within the space of 24 hours.¹

1. Preface to Samson Agonistes.

APPENDIX B

NOTES

Poems

- p. 388. furiosa Tragedia etc. cf. 'Il Penseroso', 97-98.
- p. 390. those new fangled toys etc. Sir Herbert Grierson thinks that 'it was probably of him (Donne) or his imitators he (Milton) was thinking' when writing these lines. Donne's Poetical Works, 1912, ii. vii.
- p. 392. Muse - Milton uses the word in three senses:
 (1) the Muse of classical poetry as in Lycidas, 58,
 (2) the poetic talent or one who possesses it as in 'At a Vacation Exercise' 53, and
 (3) his Heavenly Muse as in the 'Nativity Ode' 15.
- p. 409. Before all Temples etc. cf. 'Impolluted temple of the mind', Comus, 460.
- p. 410. before the Sun etc. cf. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way,
 Before his Works of old
 I was set up from everlasting,
 Or ever the earth was.
 When there were no depths, I was brought forth;
 When there were no fountains abounding with water.

 Before the mountains were settled
 Before the hills was I brought forth:
The Proverbs, viii. 22-25.
- p. 412. In presence of th' Almighty Father, cf. 'And I was daily his delight'. The Proverbs, viii. 30.
- p. 416. collecting toys, cf. '... neither puerile fables nor stories current among children are fit for listening to'. Clement F. Alexandria, Writings, tr. W. Wilson, 1867, i. 469.

- p. 416. rather Greece from us these Arts deriv'd. For representative patristic opinion on this poem see Clement of Alexandria, Writings, ii. 12-15, 47-57, 272-304.
- p. 416. By light of Nature not in all quite lost. Clement's idea of classical wisdom was different: '... the same God that furnished both the Covenants was the giver of Greek philosophy to the Greeks, by which the Almighty is glorified among the Greeks.' Writings, ii. 327. Ch. VI of Clement's Exhortation to the Heathen is entitled 'By Divine Inspiration Philosophers sometimes hit on the Truth'. Writings, i. 69-72. Milton denied divine inspiration to the pagan philosophers. For the Early Fathers' argument in support of Greek philosophy see C. Bigg, The Christian Platonists of Alexandria, 1913.

Prose

- p. 423. Apocalypse of Saint John. For Pareus's argument showing that the work is a tragedy see ch. viii entitled 'Touching the Form of the Revelation' in his Commentary upon the Divine Revelation, tr. Elias Arnold, 1644.

APPENDIX C

CHRONOLOGY OF MILTON'S EARLY COMPOSITIONS

1624		Paraphrases of Psalms CXIV and CXXXVI
1625	March 26	Letter to Thomas Young
"	April	Prolusion V
1626		'ON the Death of a Fair Infant'
"	May	'Elegia prima'
"	September	'Elegia tertia'
"	October	'In Obitum Praesulis Eliensis'
"	"	'In Obitum Procancellarii Medici'
"	November	'Elegia secunda'
"	"	'In Quintum Novembris'
"	"	Latin epigrams on the Gunpowder Plot.
1627		'Elegia quarta'
"		Prolusion IV
1628		Prolusion I
"		Prolusion III
"		'De Idea Platonica'
"	May	'Song on May Morning'
"	"	'Elegia septima'
"	May 20	Letter to Alexander Gill
"	June	'Naturam Non Pati Senium'

- 1628 July Prolusion VI
 " " 'At a Vacation Exercise'
 " July 2 Letter to Alexander Gill
 " July 21 Letter to Thomas Young
 1629 Prolusion II
 " The nightingale sonnet
 1629 April 'Elegia quinta'
 1629 December 25 'Elegia sexta'
 " " " 'The Nativity Ode'
 1630 Poem on Shakespeare
 " Six Italian sonnets
 " 'The Passion'
 1631 January Verses on Hobson
 " April 'An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester'
 " December 9 Sonnet VII ('How soon hath time')
 1632 January (?) Letter to unnamed friend including Sonnet VII
 " 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'
 " Prolusion VII
 " 'Ad Patrem'
 " 'Upon the Circumcision'
 " 'On Time'
 " 'At a Solemn Musick'
 1633 'Arcades'

1634	<u>Comus</u>
1637	'Lycidas'
1638-39	'Ad Salsillum'
1639	'Mansus'
1640	'Epitaphum Damonis'

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Senate House, the 7th July, 1955

No. Misc. 56/13/55

D. CHAKRAVARTI, D.Sc., F.N.I.
Registrar.

J. C. MUKHERJEE, B.A., B.T.,
Assistant Registrar.



All communications to the University should give the Number, Date and Subject of previous correspondence.

From

THE REGISTRAR, CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY.

To

Dr. Rabindra Kumar Dasgupta, M.A., D.Phil.
24, Daryaganj,
Delhi - 7.

Dear Sir,

I am desired to inform you that the Senate, on the recommendation of the Board of Management of Sir Rashbihari Ghosh Endowment as well as of the Syndicate, has been pleased to award to you one Sir Rashbihari Ghosh Travelling Fellowship in Arts for the year 1955 of the value of Rs.2,500/- on the usual terms and conditions in order to enable you to prosecute advanced study and research on Early Bengali Literature in accordance with the scheme outlined in your application for the purpose.

I am to add in this connection that you will have to

P.T.O.

give an undertaking to the effect that you will be able to meet the balance of the cost of your studies abroad out of your own funds and that you will not ask for any further financial assistance from the University.

An extract from the relevant rules is enclosed for your perusal and guidance.

Yours faithfully,

M. Ahmad
Registrar

Encl:- Extract from the relevant rules.

JC.
AS