

from Herod is set up against Salome's hope to marry Silleus after divorcing her second husband, Constabarus, who has weakened his political standing by protecting the sons of Herod's enemy.

6. *The Lady Falkland: Her Life* by one of her daughters, reprinted in Cary, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, 183–275. Hereafter cited as *Life*.

7. Whereas the issue of divorce in Cary's life and work is largely unexplored, the critiques of divorce in Milton's writings cited herein include: Lana Cable, "Coupling Logic and Milton's Doctrine of Divorce," *Milton Studies* XV, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh, 1981), 143–59; Olga Lucia Valbuena, "Milton's 'Divorsive' Interpretation and the Gendered Reader," *Milton Studies* XXVII, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh, 1992), 115–37; Gladys J. Willis, *Penalty of Eve: John Milton and Divorce* (New York, 1984); and Annabel Patterson, "No meer Amatorious Novel?" in *Politics, Poetics and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose*, ed. David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge, 1990) 85–101.

8. Cardinal Jacques Davy du Perron, *The Reply of the Cardinal of Perron, to the Answere of the King of Great Britaine*, trans. E. Cary (Douay, 1630).

9. See Marie B. Rowlands, "Recusant Women 1560–1640," *Women in English Society 1500–1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London, 1985), 149–80; Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, Conn., 1983), 164–85; John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (London, 1975), 108–81.

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11. Wallace MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I* (London, 1993), 334–36.

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15. Charlotte F. Otten, ed., "Introduction to Part Seven," in *English Women's Voices, 1540–1700* (Miami, 1992), 277–88.

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18. George Lillie Craik, *Romance of the Peerage*, vol. 1 (London 1848), 408–18; Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660–1857* (Oxford 1993), 9–26.

19. Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530–1987* (Oxford, 1990), 302.

20. John Milton, *An Apology for Smectymnus*, reprinted in *The Prose Works of John Milton* (London, 1834), 95.

21. Mary Nyquist, "Textual Overlapping and Dalilah's Harlot-Lap," *Literary Theory / Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore, 1986), 341–72.

22. Robert Southwell, *An Epistle of Comfort to the Reverend Priestes* (Paris, 1604), 168–72.

FABLE AND OLD SONG: SAMSON AGONISTES AND THE IDEA OF A POETIC CAREER

Ann Baynes Coiro

IN THE LAST DECADE of the seventeenth century, John Philips, a precocious and delicate classical scholar at Winchester School, took pleasure in sitting in his room and reading Milton while someone combed his long hair.¹ The result of this sensuous reading was an intimate verbal recall of Philips's "darling" Milton, and thus his two famous parodies of Milton, *The Splendid Shilling* and *Cyder* (published in 1701 and 1707 respectively).² Philips's two poems, now only footnotes in literary history, were often reprinted and often read throughout the eighteenth century.³ Addison, Pope, and Johnson weighed in with serious and thoughtful comments about these Miltonic burlesques, poems they clearly felt had real importance; Thomson, Cowper, and Crabbe each cited Philips as a significant influence on his poetry.⁴ Philips's happy and useful versions of Milton were also extremely popular beyond the literary establishment. Much of that popular and literary significance lies in the linguistic vehicle that carried Milton out into dialogue with eighteenth-century poetry and literary culture.⁵ It was through *parody* that Philips insinuated the diction and rhythm of Milton's blank verse into the minds of the generations following Milton's death, rendering the powerful innocuous and the dangerous cozily safe.⁶

By earlier Restoration standards of burlesque, Philips's loving imitation was pale stuff befitting a sickly schoolboy. Giddy with returning, with the longed-for rehearsal of the Stuart past, Restoration culture was structured around repetition. But Restoration repetition was ironic, often inverting and debunking what it remembered. Shakespeare got remembered, romance got remembered, court manners got remembered—but differently. Noble sentiments and moral certitudes got the same treatment the old gods received—mouthed and mocked. Travesty, satire, and maniacally clever parody were the very stuff of a restored literary landscape. Even the form the Restoration favored, the couplet, structurally remembers; it is a unit of closely packed reiterating sound built with the potential to balance, compare, and undermine.

It is in this restored, repeating, parodic community that Milton publishes or republishes all of his poetry. It has long been suggested that Milton's great poems of the 1660s and 1670s are aware of the Restoration world in which they first appeared, but the critical emphasis has been (from the moment of their first publication) almost exclusively on the poems' *political* references. I suggest that Milton in publishing *Samson Agonistes*, the most politically agonized of the late poems, is acutely aware as well of the Restoration *literary* moment in which he is releasing his austere Greek tragedy, and that he participates in that culture through parody. The poetry Milton repeats and parodies in *Samson Agonistes* is his own. Before John Philips had the pleasure of having his long hair combed while he internalized the sounds and learning of Milton, John Milton read back and then projected the future of his own poetic career in the voice of Samson and the voices that surround him and remain behind after his death.

I

Samson Agonistes has been the occasion for a great scholarly and critical debate for many years precisely because it sounds like Milton's earlier poetry and because there is in it so much rhyme, versification that Restoration culture vigorously championed and that Milton himself had seemed to repudiate in the headnote to *Paradise Lost*. On the one hand, there are scholars who argue that the poem must have been written much earlier in Milton's career because of these echoes of words and form.⁷ On the other hand, there are scholars who believe *Samson Agonistes* to be the culminating poem of Milton's career.⁸ I place myself very firmly with those scholars who believe that *Samson* is Milton's last great poem; I do so precisely *because* of its evocative recall both of earlier Milton and of post-Restoration critical fashion. *Samson Agonistes* is as moving and agonized a meditation on Milton's poetic career as it is on his political career. Like *Lycidas*, *Samson Agonistes* enacts once more a crisis about the worth of a life of poetry, but made all the more serious and haunting because there will be no "Tomorrow," no "fresh Woods, and Pastures new."⁹

Most critics have seen the final "act" of *Samson Agonistes* as a triumphant, affirming conclusion to the poem.¹⁰ Samson is dead, but he will be cleansed of the blood of his enemies and buried in a "Monument" planted

round with shade
Of Laurel ever green, and branching Palm,
With all his Trophies hung, and Acts enroll'd
In copious Legend, or sweet Lyric Song. (1734-37)

The monument Manoa envisions is the defining convention of English lyric poetry—the lyric monument insuring the laurel crown and everlasting fame. Poetry's memorial property is the mocking, magical curse with which Sidney concludes the *Defense*: "thus much curse I must send you, in the behalf of all poets, that . . . when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph."¹¹ And throughout the Renaissance the promised power of poetry remains its ability to insure immortality.

In the dark uncertain world of *Samson Agonistes*, however, the idea of a lyric entombment is a terrifying thought. Samson's cry out at the end of his first speech, his bitter description of his state,

To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried; but O yet more miserable!
Myself my Sepulcher, a moving Grave,
Buried, yet not exempt
By privilege of death and burial
From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs,
But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of life,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes

(100-09)

evokes the end—and the beginning—of a lyric career. For Milton will become the possession of the world he knows around him in 1671. His poetry will live on after his death, "a moving Grave," captive among his foes.

The modern concept of literary history and literary criticism evolved in the seventeenth century. No place in the pantheon was more proclaimed—nor less respected—than Shakespeare's. Shakespeare was the darling of the critics, but his smudgy innocent face had to be cleaned up on stage by those who knew better. Shakespeare was public property, and he could be chopped up, stolen, or bowdlerized. The idea of Shakespeare haunts, I think, Milton's last poem.

At the very beginning of his poetic career, Milton had used the conceit of poetic immortality to argue that Shakespeare had no need of a stone monument:

Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a livelong Monument.
For whilst to th'shame of slow-endavoring art,
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalu'd Book
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,

Dost make us Marble with too much conceiving;
 And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,
 That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die. (7-16)

As part of the front matter of the 1632 edition of Shakespeare, this praise carries a rather hostile aggression; Shakespeare's easy numbers will enchant his readers so that they will become walking sepulchers, Shakespeare's epitaph written by their fancies on their own minds. But read retrospectively at the end of Milton's career—read not only in the 1673 *Poems* but also in the echoing, allusive words of Samson—"On Shakespeare" demonstrates not so much Milton's anxiety about Shakespeare's influence on him, but his anxiety about his own influence at the threshold of his becoming a great dead poet himself.

Scholarly footnotes reassure us that the startling word *unvalu'd* meant invaluable in the seventeenth century. Over the years of Milton's lifetime, however, the meaning of *unvaluable* was shifting, used to mean both precious and worthless.¹² By the end of the century, the sense of the word as meaning beyond value had become obsolete, collapsed into valuelessness. Both meanings play in the poem simultaneously, and the second, the valueless reading, weighs more heavily in 1673, a reading consistent with Milton's fears about his own work being read by careless readers, or readers who would use his writing for their own conceiving, a powerful fear that enveloped him more strongly still after years of writing polemical prose.

In 1632 the last two lines of Milton's epitaph for Shakespeare would have been conventional, and also gracefully allusive to their subject whose most apparently patriotic play begins:

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
 The brightest heaven of invention!
 A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
 And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
 (*Henry the Fifth*, Prologue 1-4)¹³

By the 1670s the last two lines of "On Shakespeare" resonate disturbingly against English history and Milton's life: "And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie, / That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die." By the time Milton published his great poetic works, a king had played himself as a Shakespearean tragic hero and, by dying a noble and tragic death, had defeated the revolution to which Milton had dedicated his life. By 1670 Milton's foes had made ideologically captive most of Milton's great near-contemporary poets and playwrights: English literature had been made to speak for order and learning and the upper-class status quo. The restoration of the monarchy became, in late Stuart propaganda, the restoration of English culture. John Mil-

ton had promised from his youth to be the great English poet, and he had, he must have known, succeeded in fulfilling that promise. This great gift must have seemed something like the Midas touch, however, a lonely and dangerous power. What would happen to John Milton and his poetry after he died?

Samson Agonistes appears publicly, as does all the rest of Milton's poetry, in the 1670s when, during the last four years of Milton's life he rolled out everything for the first time or again, a great summary of a poet's life: 1671, *Paradise regain'd. A poem. In IV books. To which is added Samson Agonistes. The author John Milton; 1673, Poems, &c. Upon Several Occasions. By Mr. John Milton: Both English and Latin, &c. Composed at several times. With a small Tractate of Education To Mr. Hartlib; 1674, Paradise Lost. A Poem in Twelve Books. The Author John Milton. The Second Edition. Revised and Augmented by the same Author.* This concentrated block of publication is remarkable. It has been cogently argued that the 1671 volume is meant to be read together, *Paradise Regained* leading into *Samson Agonistes*.¹⁴

I make a much broader claim: that these four years produce the poetic *Works* of John Milton, everything which he wished preserved carefully annotated, arranged, and published, and all of the poetry should be read together in order to understand the full resonating impact of these texts in those years. For *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* it is the first appearance. The *Paradise Lost* of 1674 is, in significant ways, a new poem as well, different from the original 1667 version; this twelve-book version of the epic, with the arguments arranged at the head of each book and with Marvell's brilliant (and brilliantly parodic) prefatory poem, is the version we now regard as definitive. In striking and dramatic ways, the 1673 edition of the *Poems* is also a crucially different book of poetry from the book Milton had published in 1645. It is different in composition, for some poems have been added, and it has been linked with *Of Education*. But Milton's reissuing of these poems makes a statement at once forceful and difficult to read. The 1645 collection is in itself a biographical puzzle.¹⁵ It makes an apparently strong statement of cultural obedience and cultural conformity. Its title page contains a vivid set of ideological markers. The large, italicized "Printed by his true Copies" indicates Milton's involvement in and approval of the publication. The publisher is Humphrey Moseley, the most tasteful and respectable of high culture purveyors in the years of the war and Interregnum when publishing poetry usually meant allegiance to the king. Indeed, on the title page a royal connection is explicitly made: "The Songs were set in Musick by Mr. Henry Lawes Gentleman of the Kings Chappel, and one of His Majesties Private Musick." It is also made very clear, with italics and capitals, that this book has been "Printed and published according to ORDER" (just months after the publication of *Areopagitica*). The only potential indication of any tension in this

conservative presentation is the Latin epitaph from Virgil's seventh eclogue: "Baccare frontem / Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua futuro," "wreath my brow with foxglove, lest his evil tongue harm the bard that is to be."¹⁶ Strangely, the evil tongue feared by the Virgilian singer whom Milton quotes is one that overpraises, praises unduly, indicating perhaps how uneasy Milton must have been about what it would mean to gain the approbation of the very people he seems to be seeking to please. Facing the 1645 title page is the wonderfully ugly engraving of Milton by William Marshall, all decorated with shepherds out the window and muses at every corner, and undercut by Milton's Greek epigram mocking the inept engraver.¹⁷ Although Milton was thirty-seven years old when the first edition of the *Poems* was published, the frame around the portrait records Milton's age as twenty-one, indicating that the rather wizened fellow in the picture is a college student.¹⁸

When the great revolutionary or, alternately, the great reprobate John Milton chooses to republish this book of English and Latin verse at the end of his life, the new edition must be read differently and autobiographically (indeed, Milton insists upon such a reading, carefully dating many of the poems, often indicating his age when he wrote them). The 1673 title page is stripped of all the old markers, and the goofy portrait by William Marshall is gone, its accompanying Greek joke poem moved back with Milton's Latin poems, losing its punch line without its picture. The new, more somber, and more handsome (indeed, more youthful-looking) engraving is dated 1671 and records the poet's age in that year, sixty-three.

More than the portrait, however, is touched by age and change. Like "On Shakespeare," all the lyric poems of 1673 are touched by the events of Milton's (and Britain's) life that have intervened between their first publication(s) and this late one. And whereas the *Poems* of 1645 was a promise of things to come, the *Poems* of 1673 is at once a memorial of occasions past and Milton's lyric monument, the poet's life in the future. In a way, the evil tongues of overpraise cannot touch him now, for he has truly accomplished great things. But, in another way, the evil tongues of overpraise remain the most dangerous threat to Milton's poetry—able, perhaps, to ruin "The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song."¹⁹

II

In ways strange, lovely, and sad, *Samson Agonistes* uses Milton's own earlier poetry, both *Paradise Lost* and the *Poems*, so that the tragedy is embedded with allusions to Milton the Poet. *Paradise Lost* and, even before their second publication in 1673, the lyric poems are retrospectively at play in the late

drama. The eerie self-reference that produces a ghostly "Milton" on the imaginative stage of *Samson Agonistes* shadows the poem politically, theologically—and always also poetically.

The cadence of Samson's first sentence, for example, pulls us rhythmically into the plot of *Samson Agonistes*, into the unusual poetry of the "dramatic poem," and into the great rolling past of Milton's writing. That sentence begins "A little onward lend thy guiding hand / To these dark steps, a little further on." This request echoes back to each of the invocations in *Paradise Lost*, but with a moving difference. The voice of Samson speaks into a blank to someone we can never identify and asks a favor touched with the pathos of helplessness and need. The narrator of *Paradise Lost*, although "fall'n on evil days, / . . . In darkness, and with dangers compast round, / And solitude" (25–28), is significantly never really solitary, but always in conversation and companionship: "yet not alone, while thou / Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn / Purples the East" (VII, 28–30). In the narrator's dawn there is someone there, someone he can name, if only provisionally. In Samson's dawn there is mercifully "The breath of Heav'n fresh-blowing, pure and sweet, / With day-spring born" (10–11), but the guiding hand is to us as unknown as the source of Samson's rousing motions will later be. The epic narrator at least presumes that his inspiration and his guiding companion come from God; we are never to know what person to imagine with Samson on his imaginary stage here in the morning sunlight, nor are we ever to be privy to the thoughts that lead him to his catastrophic resolve.²⁰

Paradise Lost begins with the great and confident invocation to "Sing," to fly as free as angels. There is no flight imaginable in Samson's first words, no wings, but only steps descending to the bank of a stream. The narrator of *Paradise Lost* is exuberantly free to move in spite of his blindness:

Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
Clear Spring, or shady Grove, or Sunny Hill,
Smit with the love of sacred Song; but chief
Thee *Sion* and the flow'ry Brooks beneath
That wash thy hallow'd feet, and warbling flow,
Nightly I visit. (III, 26–32)

He is free to move for he moves in the realm of song. Samson can move freely only in the circular rhythm of work, "Eyeless in *Gaza* at the Mill with slaves" (41).

Samson asks to go "A little onward," "a little further on." The simple internal rhyme "little" "little" picks up nothing but shame and delusion as it

reverberates back through Milton's work. Almost without exception in his earlier work, Milton's *littles* are satanic or related to intellectual weakness or to death.²¹ Most memorable perhaps are the startling trimeters of "On Time": "So little is our loss, / So little is thy gain," but *little* surely pervades our aural memory of Milton. At the moment when Satan recognizes "myself am Hell" and disdains submission, for example, he uses it in thinking of both those he has already ruined and those he will: "Ay me, they little know / How dearly I abide that boast so vain, / Under what torments inwardly I groan" (IV, 86–88) and moments later "Ah gentle pair, yee little think how nigh / Your change approaches" (IV, 366–67).

Or again, in *Lycidas* *little* is associated with withering contempt. St. Peter excoriates those who

Creep and intrude and climb into the fold[.]
Of other care they little reck'ning make,
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest;
Blind mouths!

(115–19)

In its first appearance and perhaps even more so in its second publication in the *Poems* of 1645, *Lycidas* records a nervous crisis about the worth of a life dedicated to poetry. *Little* in *Lycidas* is painfully associated with poetry. In the Trinity manuscript, these same bad shepherds

when they list, thire leane and flashie songs
grate on thire scrannel pipes of wretched straw.
the hungrie sheepe looke up, and are not fed
but swolne with wind, and the rank mist they draw
rot inwardly, and foule contagion spred
besides what the grim wolfe with privie paw
dayly devours apace, and ~~nothing~~ said.

little²²

The impact of *little* in the manuscript's version is arguably more repellent than the later printed version's *nothing*, for it is a gesture toward action, a recognition of its necessity, but a retreat to selfish apathy. The association between these privileged, educated, and "corrupted" clergymen and poetry is disturbing. It returns us again to the striking phrase "Blind mouths," which could be taken as a terrible proleptic epithet for Milton the blind poet.

Indeed, *Lycidas* exemplifies one of the ways in which Milton uses his poetry to defeat or complicate time through self-allusion: each time it appears in his lifetime the poem is differently freighted. In the 1638 memorial volume for King it is the work of a university poet writing a classically modeled elegy, as he had been taught; in 1645, with its explanatory heading, it is the one radical note in what appears to be an otherwise conventionally royal-

ist book of poems; in 1673 it is, in retrospect, the fulfilled promise of a Virgilian *cursus* toward epic.

In 1638, then, "blind mouths" is a powerful poetic invention. In 1645 it is a cut against all kinds of lax corruption. But it may be a horrifying private cut against himself as well, for it is probable that the symptoms of his coming blindness began several years earlier and that the publication of the 1645 *Poems* marked the end of one part of his life as a poet.²³ To the 1673 volume of *Poems* are added the sonnets on his blindness, among the few poems written during the decade and a half between the first edition of *Poems* and the Restoration. They make the bruising personal reference of "Blind mouths" explicit. One of the most distorting misperceptions about Milton is that he was a proud and self-congratulatory man. From *Lycidas* on and especially in *Samson Agonistes*, the opposite seems true, for we see a man willing to consider that great as he is, he may be abusing his talents to the wrong end.

The last time *little* appears in *Lycidas* it is again in the context of poetry, at the end of the catalog of classically allusive flowers, and it is painfully dismissive of poetic convention and the depth of comfort poetry can bring: "For so to interpose a little ease, / Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise" (152–53). As Samson moves "A little onward," "a little further on" the effect is deeply poignant and predictive of the future tragedy—and in that tragedy are implicated all the reverberating memories of Milton's poetry. Even the compelling and unusual form of Samson's opening monody is a reprise of the difficult and brilliantly sustained technical form of *Lycidas*.²⁴ From its opening lines, then, *Samson Agonistes* is a haunted work, inhabited by voices of the past.

Repetition is crucial to Milton's poetics, especially in the sustained and apparently unrepeating music of blank verse. Most of the technical effects of Milton's poetry are very simple, which is why Milton's epic became almost at once astonishingly popular, vast lengths of it memorized by generations of English-speaking people.²⁵ The simplicity and the totality of Milton's repeating language may also account for the difficulty critics have had hearing it; yet, as Edward Le Comte proved exhaustively, "Milton's work abounds in autoplagerisms."²⁶ At the level of sound, Milton uses alliteration and assonance with such steady and substantive effect that *Paradise Lost*, for example, can murmur and moan and exalt even apart from the meaning of its words: "Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit / Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste / Brought Death into the World, and all our woe" (I, 1–3). And repetition repeats and repeats at the level of single words, of phrases and inverted phrases, and of syntactic structure. The word *system* comes into the English language during Milton's writing life, and it is, per-

haps, an apt term to describe the complex patterning and echoing of Milton's works. That poetic system has seemed to many poets and readers after Milton to have captured the language and rhythms of English poetry for himself.²⁷

At the end of Milton's career, *Samson Agonistes* meditates on the sonorous theater of Milton's achievement, but with a deep fear that the elaborately repeated, and so repeatable, system will go on, but without its meaning. No voice in *Paradise Lost* repeats more simply and continuously (at the level of word, syntax, and sound, especially assonance) than the Son's. "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life / I offer, on mee let thine anger fall; / Account mee man" (III, 236–38). As the sacrificial image of God, he without desire or need, he who praises by obeying, the voice of the Son comes close to converging into one held and repeating, resonant note. The Son's repetition is a mantra of perfection. The fragmentary, fallen, human repetition of poetic language, however, can become tautology, a refrain that allows truth to be scattered rather than gathered together.

Regina Schwartz has argued that the repetition of *stories* is crucial to the structure and meaning of *Paradise Lost*.²⁸ Her reading of Miltonic repetition is triumphantly celebratory; for Schwartz, Miltonic repetition is an act of ritual commemoration. It is only Satan who succumbs to pathological repetition, a grinding return to the same mistakes. But *Samson Agonistes* troubles our sense of repetition as affirming and celebratory. Samson himself has a tragic compulsion to repeat destructive actions. He is a riddler and a clown. Throughout his life he has foolishly done things over and over again until they brought about tragedy. The abiding mystery of the poem is whether Samson's destruction of the temple is a type of Christ or the brute repetition of a fool.

Perhaps the poetic device most reliant on repetition is rhyme, where the repetition of like sounds studs line ends with a rhythmic, sometimes hammering insistency, or—when used at intermittent line ends or inside lines—weaves music and an elusive sense of *déjà vu*. Again, it is a repetitive device for remembering. One of the arguments advanced by Milton critics for the early dating of *Samson Agonistes* is the striking prevalence of rhyme in the dramatic poem. Allan Gilbert, for example, argued that the composition of the poem must have preceded the composition of *Paradise Lost* because of the epic's headnote arguing for the "ancient liberty" of unrhymed verse and the "bondage of Riming": "Rime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer Works especially, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meter." Milton added this headnote to *Paradise Lost* in 1668, a year after its initial publication—one could imagine begrudgingly—in order to explain this revolutionary verse to conventional readers.²⁹

When in 1671 he published *Samson Agonistes* with its disruptive, sporadic, sometimes outrageously shocking rhymes ("God of our Fathers, what is man! / That thou towards him with hand so various, / Or might I say contrarious" [667–69]), Milton must have been aware of the intertextual commentary he had then set up with his own critical annotations. Actually, the drama's encounter with rhyme goes far beyond line ends. *Samson* is a tragedy of bondage and of circular repetition. It is deliberately, tragically haunted by memories and sounds. It is a dark vision not only of the failure of the English revolution but also of the possibility that Milton's poetry will fail as well—will fall into the bondage of the vulgar, will be worshiped like Dagon as a false idol, beautiful in form and effect, but emptied of its power to change.

Any absolute deductions based on Marvell's brilliant poem "On Mr. Milton's *Paradise Lost*" are chimerical. Nevertheless, Marvell chose to begin his praise of the great poem with an image of Samson as a destroyer, as one who brings down the temple in an act of terrible revenge that could reduce sublime religion to old lyrics. And he ends his poem with an image of another destroyer, the bumbling pack-horse Dryden who plods along his daily popular rounds jingling with rhyme. Marvell's subtly glancing, elliptical mockery seems always just about to touch Milton, and nowhere nearer than here. For Mr. Milton's *Samson Agonistes* is touched everywhere with rhyme. The toiling packhorse Samson circles the mill in constant repetition and so, finally, does his tragedy circle strangely with the "bondage" of rhyme. Marvell and Milton, hyperaware of the meaning of their formal choices, mean much when they rhyme. It means even more in the context of drama, for it is in that realm that Dryden will want to tag Milton's sublime points, it is in that realm that Milton saw the degradation of tragedy into an absurd mixed form of tragicomedy bouncing along in rhymed couplets, and it is in that form that Milton chose to write *Samson Agonistes* with the strong, disturbing rhythm of rhyme, that "troublesome and modern bondage." And in *Samson Agonistes* bondage is a key concept and a key term. Samson, chained in degrading bondage himself, sounds very much like his author when he uses the word in condemning those who refused the chance of freedom from oppression that Samson had offered them:

But what more oft in Nations grown corrupt,
And by thir vices brought to servitude,
Than to love Bondage more than Liberty,
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty. (268–71)

It is weird and chilling that the Chorus is prompted by these words to remember the victory of Jephtha over the Ephraimite Hebrews who would not

help him in his battle against the Ammonites. Jephtha was able to recognize and slaughter the members of this other tribe of Israel because of their accent, their inability to pronounce correctly:

Thy words to my remembrance bring

.....

Jephtha, who by argument,
Not worse than by his shield and spear
Defended *Israel* from the *Ammonite*,
Had not his prowess quell'd thir pride
In that sore battle when so many died
Without Reprieve adjudg'd to death,
For want of well pronouncing *Shibboleth*.

(277–89)

Because the two concluding lines are odd—an octosyllabic line rhymed with a pentameter line—they call a rather flirtatious attention to themselves and drag the second rhyme out into extreme emphasis. But what the underscored rhyme is doing is giving the secret away, slowly and deliberately pronouncing *Shibboleth*, and so melting tribe into tribe, leaving Samson even more alone. More effectively than Dalila's scissors, rhyme can take away secret power. It spells out the incantation; it is a form of parody.

The ending of Samson's first speech, the speech made alone except for the silent guiding hand, is one of the most beautiful passages of poetry in the English language. It is richly and densely rhymed:

O loss of *sight*, of thee I most complain!
Blind among enemies, O worse than *chains*,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!
Light the prime work of God to me is extinct,
And all her various objects of *delight*
Annull'd, which *might* in part my grief have eas'd,
Inferior to the vilest now become
Of man or worm; the vilest here excel *me*,
They creep, yet *see*; I dark in *light* expos'd
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,
Within doors, or without, still as a fool,
In power of others, never in my own;
Scarce *half* I seem to *live*, *dead* more than *half*.

(67–79; italics mine)

And as Samson's painful cry grows so agonized that the line-lengths of the poetry become spasmodic, the rhyme accelerates with his suffering:

O *dark, dark, dark*, amid the blaze of *noon*,
Irrecoverably *dark*, total Eclipse

Without all hope of day!
O first created Beam, and thou great Word,
"Let there be *light*, and *light* was over all";
Why am I thus bereav'd thy prime decree?
The Sun to me is *dark*
And silent as the *Moon*,
When she deserts the *night*,
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.
Since *light* so necessary is to *life*,
And almost *life* itself, if it be true
That *light* is in the Soul,
She all in every part; *why* was the *sight*
To such a tender ball as th' *eye* confin'd?
So obvious and so easy to be quench't,
And not as feeling through all *parts* diffus'd,
That she might look at will through every pore?
Then had I not been exil'd from *light*;
As in the land of *darkness* yet in *light*
To *live* a *life* half *dead*, a living *death*,
And *buried*; but O yet more miserable!
Myself my Sepulcher, a moving Grave,
Buried, yet not exempt
By privilege of *death* and burial
From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs,
But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of *life*,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes.

(80–109; italics mine)

In the critical work that discusses the presence of rhyme in *Samson Agonistes* much is usually made of the fact that the Chorus uses rhyme, and in ways often sententious and sometimes offensive.³⁰ Yet before the Chorus ever speaks, Samson himself has established the pattern.

The ambiguity of presence in *Samson* is part of its nature as a nonvisual drama. Presumably this long, painful speech is a soliloquy, or a speech heard only by the guiding hand. Samson breaks off when he hears footsteps. It is the Chorus, who stop close enough to observe him carefully. They speak about Samson at length in poetry that rhymes very little for the first thirty-five lines.³¹ But then, very strangely, the Chorus begins to imitate the words Samson spoke before they entered:

Which shall I first bewail,
Thy Bondage or lost Sight,
Prison within Prison

Inseparably dark?
 Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)
 The Dungeon of thyself; thy Soul
 (Which Men enjoying sight oft without cause complain)
 Imprison'd now indeed,
 In real darkness of the body dwells,
 Shut up from outward light
 To incorporate with gloomy night;
 For inward light, alas,
 Puts forth no visual beam.
 O mirror of our fickle state,
 Since man on earth unparallel'd!

.....
 For him I reckon not in high estate
 Whom long descent of birth
 Or the sphere of fortune raises;
 But thee whose strength, while virtue was her mate,
 Might have subdu'd the Earth,
 Universally crown'd with highest praises.

(151-75)

The echoes are at the level of rhyme, rhythm, language, and sense. The O's, the sight-light-night cluster, the Prison within Prison, "Inseparably dark," which mimicks but truncates "Irrecoverably dark," the varying line lengths, and the moral of the Chorus's speech are all strongly marked repetitions of Samson's speech. Yet they have not really heard Samson, except perhaps in the way he hears them now. After the elaborately rhymed conclusion of the Chorus's speech (abc abc), Samson says: "I hear the sound of words, thir sense the air / Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear" (176-77).

This is one of those moments when *Samson Agonistes* seems intentionally funny; the Chorus does turn out to be longer on sound than on any sense but the most conventional. Significantly, Samson's comment concludes a moment in the dramatic poem that Milton and his readers would have recognized as a classical requirement, described—and so to some Restoration minds prescribed—by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. *Samson Agonistes* is very self-consciously a Greek tragedy; it is also consciously and wittily *not* one (indeed, one might say, it is a parody of a Greek tragedy). This, the first extensive speech of the Chorus, is what Aristotle called the *parode*; its meaning in Greek is literally "entrance from the side."³² That it is also a *parody* of Samson's opening speech is intentional and an enactment of one of the dramatic poem's central concerns: the One who can be appropriated by the Many, the tragic hero whose afterlife is interpretation and imitation.

Just as Samson describes, the windy Chorus has repeated and disjointed what Samson has said. And what they can pick up on is rhyme, that most

repeatable of speech formations; and what they do with it is make it orthodox and a grating reminder.³³ The formal nature of beauty makes it memorable and repeatable; that is its ritual power. In the hero's prologue to *Samson Agonistes* and the parode, we see beauty repeated in ways that might seem innocuous and amusing, but that become in the poetics of *Samson Agonistes* "Inseparably dark."

Milton's poetry is amazingly resonant aurally, and Milton seems intensely aware of the sounds and echoes of himself. Sonorous memories of Milton are troped to the level of subtext in *Samson Agonistes*, the drama meant to be heard in one's head. When Samson cries,

Ease to the body some, none to the mind
 From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
 Of Hornets arm'd, no sooner found alone,
 But rush upon me thronging, and present
 Times past, what once I was, and what am now, (18-22)

we hear Satan, and surely too we hear the autobiographical poet. When the Chorus tries to comfort Samson by saying, "Just are the ways of God, / And justifiable to Men" (293-94) we hear the narrator of *Paradise Lost* (and echoed by the Chorus, the autobiographical poet). When his father tries to comfort him and Samson accepts his guilt, "Sole Author I, sole cause" (376), we hear God the Father placing responsibility on Adam and Eve, "Authors to themselves in all" (III, 122), and Eve accepting the responsibility, "sole cause" (X, 935). When Samson laments his enslavement to Dalila "O indignity . . . / servile mind / Rewarded well with servile punishment!" (411-13), we hear Satan's fury at the creation of Adam and Eve, "O indignity! / Subjected to his service Angel wings" (IX, 154-55). When Samson reaches his nadir after his father leaves to ransom him, the Chorus advises: "Many are the sayings of the wise / In ancient and in modern books enroll'd, / Extolling Patience as the truest fortitude" (652-54); and we hear Milton's long-ago advice to himself in the voice of patience, "They also serve who only stand and wait," now a saying of the wise in a modern book, his *Poems*.

Moreover, in the formal eccentricities of *Samson Agonistes* are recognizable the experiments of that modern book's "On Time," *Lycidas*, and "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity." As far as we know, there was only one early poem that Milton did not include in the 1645 *Poems*, his first original poem in English, "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough." Its absence is not altogether surprising since "Fair Infant," jammed with poetic devices and elaborate cleverness, is, as a poem of comfort to his older sister, an oafish failure. Two years after the publication of *Samson Agonistes* Milton did, however, include the poem in the *Poems* of 1673, with an annotation indicat-

ing that he had written it when he was seventeen years old. By publishing "Fair Infant" Milton would make visible the machinery that undergirds his career as a poet. The earliest English poem is a workshop of Miltonic devices: assembled with alliteration and assonance, written in a complex stanza form, its elaborate conceits are predictive of Milton's vividly narration-driven poetry. Above all else, the impression the early poem conveys aurally is of overwhelming internal and external rhyme.

But in 1671 Milton has already publicly remembered the poem in the voice of Manoa, the father, as he mourns the death of his son. "Fair Infant" begins:

O fairest flower no sooner blown but blasted,
Soft silken Primrose fading timelessly,
Summer's chief honor if thou hadst outlasted
Bleak winter's force that made thy blossom dry;
For he being amorous on that lovely dye
That did thy cheek envermeil, thought to kiss
But kill'd alas, and then bewail'd his fatal bliss.

Manoa uses the same metaphor of loss, his lament a précis of the early family poem. When the father hears of his son's death, he frames his grief in a touchingly intimate echo:

What windy joy this day had I conceiv'd
Hopeful of his Delivery, which now proves
Abortive as the first-born bloom of spring
Nipt with the lagging rear of winter's frost. (1574-77)

Even Manoa's "windy joy" is imaged in young Milton's mythological invention of the wind-lover whose kiss brings death rather than joy.

Manoa is perhaps the most densely allusive character in the drama, even more so than the blind prisoner. He is a man of the marketplace, who wants to arrange a financial deal for his son's release, a man who loves his son but cannot fully comprehend the depth of his son's commitment to a sense of divine mission. *Samson Agonistes* is insistently suggestive of an autobiographical reading, and Manoa is an image of Milton's "Father" in the mortal sense and also, as John Guillory has argued, in the divine sense of the word.³⁴ Manoa's first response to grief is to recall this (still in 1671) private family poem, parodying in emotionally authentic terms a poem that in its original is itself only a parody of consolation. A figure who is a dramatic version of Milton's own father re-speaks a family poem to mourn the death of a son who is a dramatic version of the poet who wrote the poem he imitates. In many ways, *Samson Agonistes* is a dramatic poem about Milton the poet, and in such acts of repetition and self-parody lie much of the intellectual and emo-

tional force of the drama. Milton's nephew and pupil, Edward Phillips, the next child born to Milton's sister after the death of the "Fair Infant," gave a curious etymology for the name "Samson" in his 1658 dictionary *A New World of Words*; he said the name means "there a second time."³⁵ There is no philological basis for Phillips's suggested meaning; but in his uncle's great poem there is a poetic one.

III

Samson Agonistes is a Restoration drama. Its headnote addresses in compressed form the central issues of neoclassical criticism: classical precedent and the degree to which it must be an overriding dictate; the mixture of forms, tragedy with comedy; the unities.³⁶ Its subject is wildly heroic. *Samson Agonistes* is also a parody of Restoration drama. In ways that Milton—whose *Paradise Lost* is constructed of an endless series of mirror images—would have understood, on the Restoration literary market where he traded the complicated wares of Truth, parody trumps parody. John Dryden perpetrated one of the more infamous parodies of literary history by putting *Paradise Lost* into couplets for the operatic stage (though the rendition was never performed). And in the process of wrestling with and trying to tame Milton's work, Dryden was significantly influenced by Milton.³⁷ Dryden probably influenced Milton as well; the "Preface" to *Samson Agonistes* is Milton's condensed "Essay of Dramatick Poesy" and *Samson's* metrical complexity demonstrates what rhyme could really do to elevate—and deflate—a tragedy. Furthermore, *Samson Agonistes'* Chorus is influenced by Italian opera, as is so much of Restoration drama, beginning with Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes* (performed in its first version in 1656). Davenant, who would go on to be a crucial figure in government control over the Restoration stage, seems to have worked with some degree of government approbation under the Protectorate as well, reintroducing drama to England in a play of rhymed verse of varying line lengths, with a chorus at the end of each entry reciting commentary that approaches burlesque in its pompous underscoring of the moral point. The music for *The Siege of Rhodes* was provided by Henry Lawes.³⁸ The parallels with *Samson Agonistes* are clear.³⁹

In 1653 Davenant submitted a proposal to the Council of State for a state-supported theater that would present broad-stroke, spectacular performances of noble sentiments that could be used to reach and manipulate the common people into tractable behavior.⁴⁰ The rousing spectacle should be underscored by a chorus reiterating the moral: "the interlocution, between the changing of the *Scenes*, should be in praise of Valor, Vigilance, Military Painfulness, Temperance, and Obedience to Authority; which will not, like

the softer arguments of Playes, make the people effeminate, but warme and incite them to Heroicall Attempts, when the State shall command them; and bring into derision the present Vices and Luxury." Milton had suggested something very similar a decade earlier in *Reason of Church Government*: "it were happy for the commonwealth if our magistrates, as in those famous governments of old, would take into their care . . . the managing of our public sports and festival pastimes. . . . Whether this may not be, not only in pulpits, but after another persuasive method, at set and solemn panegyries, 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."⁴¹ The new Protectorate government seems to have been impressed enough with Davenant's proposal to allow him to arrange a series of pieces, including *The Siege of Rhodes*, but to have given their permission in such a way that the performances would be expensive and relatively private, and therefore not available to the "people."

The Restoration government took the same approach much further; theater was at once strongly supported and tightly controlled (with Davenant one of its crucial point men). And it was very clearly intended to be a venue for the privileged upper classes; there should be none of Shakespeare's groundlings mingling in the theater with Charles II and his mistresses. Milton's *Samson Agonistes* is pointedly a rebuke of Restoration theater; it must also be a chastening lesson to himself on the ways that the power of art can shift back and forth between the hands of the good and the evil.

Nicholas José has noted that the Philistine assembly-place Milton imagines in *Samson Agonistes* recalls with scorn the largely upper class and self-satisfied theater of the Restoration:⁴²

The building was a spacious Theater
Half round on two main Pillars vaulted high,
With seats where all the Lords and each degree
Of sort, might sit in order to behold. (1605-08)

Most Restoration plays characteristically support monarchy and condemn usurpers; the tragedy of the death of a king was monotonously reinterpreted and replayed as tragicomedy, with the usurpers overthrown and the monarch triumphant.⁴³ *Samson Agonistes* is the countersong to such imperial self-congratulation, and so is a Restoration play and a parody of a Restoration play. It can be argued on several levels of irony that *Samson's* contemporary dramatic analog is Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, whose parody goes behind the scenes of bombast instead of tearing down the scenes.

What could Milton have thought about the logic of history that made him a Restoration writer? What penalties could he imagine would be levied

on his poetry? I have been suggesting that the doubts Milton had about literary fame in *Lycidas* are multiplied and urgent in *Samson Agonistes*; that Samson's shamed need to embrace silence because

I
God's counsel have not kept, his holy secret
Presumptuously have publish'd, impiously,
Weakly at least, and shamefully: A sin
That Gentiles in thir Parables condemn
To thir abyss and horrid pains confin'd (496-501)

is a fear that Milton cannot completely forego, especially since by speaking God's truth he may have allowed its parodic debasement, have "op't the mouths / Of Idolists, and Atheists" (452-53). I am suggesting that he shared his friend Marvell's fear that he could "ruin" for he knew himself

strong
The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song
(So *Sampson* grop'd the Temple's Posts in spite)
The World o'erwhelming to revenge his sight.
("On Mr. Milton's *Paradise Lost*," 7-10)

It is clear how intensely aware Milton is of *Samson Agonistes* as a meta-drama about art itself and its workaday uses. Harapha mocks Samson's God for delivering him to his enemies and permitting them

To put out both thine eyes, and fetter'd send thee
Into the common Prison, there to grind
Among the Slaves and Asses thy comrades,
As good for nothing else. (1160-63)

Milton had lashed out with revulsion several times during his career at the thought of a teeming unfit audience, as in, for example, Sonnet XII, which begins

I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs
By the known rules of ancient liberty,
When straight a barbarous noise environs me
Of Owls and Cuckoos, Asses, Apes and Dogs.

Samson Agonistes dramatizes such a concern for the taint of the Philistine. Samson's very presence on the textual stage is possible because he has temporary "leave" to retire "from the popular noise" (15-16); his continual shame is that he breached his "fort of silence" and thus entered the "common Prison" with the slaves and asses who circle there in miserable work.

Occasioned by the public's misunderstanding of his divorce tracts, Son-

net XII was written soon after Milton published his elegant *Poems*. It was no doubt pleasing to him that John Rouse, the Librarian of the Bodleian at Oxford University, requested copies of his prose pamphlets for inclusion in the library, as well as his *Poems*. But somehow his *Poems* got lost, and Rouse had to ask Milton for another copy. With that second copy Milton sent a handwritten Latin ode that was then printed as the *final* poem of the 1673 volume.⁴⁴ It is a troubling poem, and more troubling in its placement as the closing poetic act of the 1673 volume.

"Ad Joannem Rousium Oxoniensis" is actually addressed to the book itself and mourns the loss of the first copy and the salvation of the second.

Quin tu, libelle, nuntii licet mala
Fide, vel oscitantia,
Semel erraveris agmine fratrum,
Seu quis te teneat specus,
Seu qua te latebra, forsau unde vili
Callo tereris institoris insulsi,
Laetare felix; (37-43)

[But, my little book—even though, thanks to a messenger's dishonesty or drowsiness, you have wandered from the company of your brothers—whether some den or some dive imprisons you now, where perhaps you are scraped by the dirty, calloused hand of an illiterate dealer—still you may rejoice for you are fortunate.]⁴⁵

Milton blames the messenger who allowed the book to be tainted by the common marketplace. But sanctuary for the second copy is offered by Rouse and his exclusive Oxford library:

Quo neque lingua procax vulgi penetrabit, atque longe
Turba legentum prava facesset;
At ultimi nepotes,
Et cordatior aetas
Iudicia rebus aequiora forsitan
Adhibebit integro sinu.
Tum livore sepulto,
Si quid meremur sana posteritas sciet
Rousio favente. (79-87)

[where the insolent noise of the crowd never shall enter and the vulgar mob of readers shall forever be excluded. But our distant descendants and a more sensitive age will perhaps render a more nearly just judgment of things out of its unprejudiced heart. Then, when envy has been buried, a sane posterity will know what my deserts are—thanks to Rouse.]

Familiar as we are with Milton's desire for a "fit audience, though few," nevertheless the Rouse poem startles with its contempt for the vulgar, ex-

pressed in such self-flattering Latin. One of the remarkable things about the ode is its stylistic exaggeration. Milton himself provided a gloss in 1673 to explain what he was attempting, in which he uses some of the technical terminology also used to describe the verse form of *Samson Agonistes*, and indeed the Choruses are remarkably similar in form to the widely varying line lengths of the Latin ode. *Samson's* Chorus, then, contains in its shape, its movement, a proleptic (vulgar/English) echo of this lastly placed piece of venom against "the insolent noise of the crowd . . . the vulgar mob of readers."

By the end of Milton's career he had to look forward to the judgment of "a more sensitive age," his work long since safely ensconced in the great royalist university. The question *Samson Agonistes* leaves suspended before us is the reception of a turbulent, perhaps heroic life: is there an age with an "unprejudiced heart"? who finally will wreath the tomb? There is an answer dramatized in *Samson Agonistes* by another autobiographical alter ego, a twinning that only seems strange for a moment.

Dalila has been largely excoriated by Milton critics as a clever double-talker who will try any tack to win over her husband. Certainly, the Chorus is driven to vicious rhymed misogyny after she leaves the stage. In this elusively autobiographical drama, however, it can be argued that Dalila is the voice of Milton the Author. Her final speech, after she realizes that Samson will not come home to domestic ease, argues the defiance and triumph of fame:

Fame if not double-fac't is double-mouth'd,
And with contrary blast proclaims most deeds;
On both his wings, one black, the other white,
Bears greatest names in his wild aery flight.

.....

But in my country where I most desire,
In *Ekron*, *Gaza*, *Asdod*, and in *Gath*
I shall be nam'd among the famousest
Of Women, sung at solemn festivals,
Living and dead recorded, who to save
Her country from a fierce destroyer, chose
Above the faith of wedlock bands, my tomb
With odors visited and annual flowers.

.....

At this who ever envies or repines
I leave him to his lot, and like my own. (971-96)

The drama of *Samson Agonistes* ends with two opposed monuments, tombs bedecked with offerings and memory. Fame is indeed double-mouthed and Milton himself, even as he publishes *Samson Agonistes*, flies with the two

wings: the infamy of a political reprobate and the fame of a great writer. After Dalila leaves the stage with these words defying envy and claiming fame and national respect, the Chorus tells Samson "She's gone, a manifest Serpent by her sting / Discover'd in the end, till now conceal'd" (997-98). Dalila has been roundly condemned all along by the Chorus and Samson, but her parting speech seems to have revealed a final evil, until now hidden, and that stinging tail is her desire for Fame and her achievement of it. Wreathed like the serpent in Marvell's "Coronet" is Dalila's wish to be known, to be honored, to be imitated.

The drama ends with the other monument—Samson's—and the drama leaves the reader with a parallel question unresolved: what is "Discover'd in [this] end, till now conceal'd"? Like Dalila, John Milton quickly became a national hero to the point that Samuel Johnson feared he would be accused of being unpatriotic for trying to discuss Milton's poetry with some kind of critical distance.⁴⁶ Milton's political cause remained anathema to most of those who worshiped him as the sublime English poet; but his political cause seemed not to matter. The last semichorus of *Samson*, which begins "But he though blind of sight, / Despis'd and thought extinguish't quite" (1687-88), sings the famous image of Samson as a phoenix rising out of the ashes of destruction (in a strophe insistently, if erratically, rhymed). Its phoenix is taken as an emblem of divine blessing and redemption by most readers of Milton. Yet this complex penultimate verse prompts a sinister memory of Samson's wife:

So virtue giv'n for lost,
Deprest, and overthrown, as seem'd,
Like that self-begott'n bird
In the *Arabian* woods embost,
That no second knows nor third,
And lay erewhile a Holocaust,
From out her ashy womb now teem'd,
Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
When most inactive deem'd,
And though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird ages of lives. (1697-1707; emphasis mine)

The secular (and feminine) phoenix is Fame; crucial to an understanding of what Fame means here is the word *secular*, but the word is volatile. John Carey glosses secular as "lasting for ages," choosing a secondary meaning of the word that became current in the seventeenth century.⁴⁷ Perhaps a more authentic gloss on the word *secular*, however, is provided by Milton himself, in *Paradise Lost*:

at length
Thir Ministry perform'd, and race well run,
Thir doctrine and thir story written left,
They die; but in thir room, as they forewarn,
Wolves shall succeed for teachers, grievous Wolves,
Who all the sacred mysteries of Heav'n
To thir own vile advantages shall turn
Of lucre and ambition, and the truth
With superstitions and traditions taint,
Left only in those written Records pure,
Though not but by the Spirit understood.
Then shall they seek to avail themselves of names,
Places and titles, *and with these to join*
Secular power, though feigning still to act
By spiritual, to themselves appropriating
The Spirit of God, promis'd alike and giv'n
To all Believers. (XII, 504-20; emphasis mine)

The secular phoenix must be understood as flying with the two wings of Dalila's Fame: one black, one white, double-mouthed. Fame, too, carries a Miltonic gloss, most pointedly that of Phoebus in *Lycidas*:

Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to th'world, nor in broad rumor lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging *Jove*;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed. (78-84)

The image of the secular phoenix is as disturbingly ambiguous, then, as everything else in *Samson Agonistes*. There is no doubt at the end that Samson will be a legend, nor that John Milton will be famous. But there is profound doubt about the fate of these written records, and a fear that "names, places and titles" can be appropriated, and joined with "secular power." Rising with the phoenix too is the elusive ghost of intention: Milton's fear, so like Herbert's and like Herbert's never assuaged, that the infection of secular fame is what Milton, Dalila-like, really wanted.

IV

The headnote to *Samson Agonistes* can be read as a lesson by an inveterate school teacher: the poem will teach us 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; happ'ning through the Poet's error of intermixing Comic stuff with Tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath been counted absurd; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people." After years of trying to teach a recalcitrant people, there is a certain sarcastic edge to this lecture. After all, Samson is the performer of a comic interlude, and he goes off the textual stage to perform his holiday tricks with a comic rhyme: "But who constrains me to the Temple of *Dagon* / Not dragging?" (1370-71). And as for the lofty, "fit audience," where within the drama can we find them? Manoa, perhaps, although he is more concerned with family honor than a national legacy. The upper-class Philistines are all dead by the end. The Chorus of Danites are so pedestrian and judgmental that they earn the modern honorific "philistine." The structure of the "spacious Theater" described by the Messenger ensures a further audience:

The building was a spacious Theater
Half round on two main Pillars vaulted high,
With seats where all the Lords and each degree
Of sort, might sit in order to behold,
The other side was op'n, where the throng
On banks and scaffolds under Sky might stand;
I among these aloof obscurely stood.

(1605-11; emphasis mine)

It is the vulgar who survive, and the rhyming Danites. They will be the vast, probably not entirely fit, audience left to bear witness to the "copious Legend" and "sweet Lyric Song."

Samson Agonistes ends with a complexly rhymed fourteen-line lyric spoken by the Chorus, almost a sonnet, except that there are only a few pentameter lines, the majority being octosyllabic:

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 he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event

With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
And calm of mind, all passion spent.

(1745-58)

Its formal beauty and its radiant calm have reassured readers for centuries. Yet its conventional structure and its collective complacency may also be read as profoundly disturbing. The sonnet-like ending is a countersong, an "old Song," a parody. Here the chorus, which echoes a Renaissance tradition, also echoes Milton's own practice; the closing lyric is an imitation. The crowd repeats and in the process empties out passion and finds, comfortably, consolation.

Yet the words "Calm of mind, all passion spent" spoken by the Chorus are not necessarily affirming; they can also suggest a shell of poetry already appropriated by wolves who "the truth / With superstitions and traditions taint." Samson had asked, "Am I not sung and proverb'd for a Fool"? The Fool who teaches Lear does so by mockery and enigma, but his lesson is nonetheless profoundly tragic and cathartic. Whether Milton's last great Fool is on this imaginary stage corruptly to gratify the vulgar, or whether he leaves the groundlings staring at a divine parody in the ruins of the Theater is the drama's mystery. Milton knew that his poems would not stay safely tucked in the sheltering and appreciative Bodleian. They are out under the sky with the throng, the vulgar mob of readers, "promis'd alike and giv'n / To all believers"—Owls, Cuckoos, Asses, Apes, and Dogs though we may be. Infinitely repeatable, Milton's poetics provide a deeply ambiguous guiding hand. Whether we will choose liberty or license in our own parody of Milton is entirely up to us.

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NOTES

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1. *DNB*, vol. 15, p. 1062.

2. That Milton was Philips's "darling" is asserted by George Sewell in the first life of Philips, included in Edmund Cull's 1715 edition of his *Poems*.

3. There were nine printings of *The Splendid Shilling* either alone or in miscellanies by 1720. There was a fourth edition of *Cyder* by 1728, and the two poems plus Philips's *Blenheim*

were in a tenth edition by 1744. An Italian translation of *Cyder* went through two editions at midcentury. *The Splendid Shilling* was twice translated into Latin, once by Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1747 and once anonymously in a version that was appended to Christopher Anstey and W. H. Roberts's Latin translation of Gray's elegy (1778). When Cowper's *The Task* appeared, *The Gentleman's Magazine's* review concluded: "We do not think the author's rhyme equal to his blank verse, which is indeed of superlative beauty. The pauses and elisions shew the hand of a master; and he is perhaps, without excepting even Philips, the most successful of the imitators of Milton" (LVI [1786], 235).

4. For excerpts of these comments and for a fuller analysis of Philips's influence, see Raymond Dexter Havens, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (New York, 1961), pp. 96–100.

5. In 1791, almost one hundred years after Philips's burlesque georgic appeared, Charles Dunstan published a heavily annotated edition of *Cyder*, with extensive notes showing its relationship to Milton. Four years after his elaborate annotating of the parody's annotations, Dunstan published the first variorum edition of *Paradise Regained* and subsequently published one of the first scholarly studies of contemporary influence on Milton's poetry. Parody and literary criticism are twin muses.

6. On parody, see David Bromwich, "Parody, Pastiche, and Allusion," in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca and London, 1985), pp. 328–44.

7. William Riley Parker, Allan H. Gilbert, John T. Shawcross, and John Carey have been notable proponents for an early dating. Parker first suggested in 1949 that *Samson Agonistes* may have been written earlier in Milton's career ("The Date of *Samson Agonistes*," *PQ* 28 [1949], 145–66). Parker's biography of Milton discusses the drama in the chapter and notes on the years 1645–1648, supporting Parker's supposition with parallel columns of lines from *Samson* and phrases from Milton's prose (*Milton: A Biography* [Oxford, 1968], vol. 1, pp. 313–22; vol. 2, pp. 903–17). Gilbert argues for an even earlier composition in 1640–41 ("Is *Samson Agonistes* Unfinished?," *PQ* XXVIII [1949], 98–106). John T. Shawcross constructed a "Chronology of Milton's Major Poems" (*PMLA* 76 [1961], 345–58) by a statistical stylistic analysis and argued for an early dating; but Ants Oras used a statistical stylistic analysis to rebut Shawcross and argue for a late composition (*Blank Verse and Chronology in Milton* [Gainesville, 1966]). In his widely used Longman edition of Milton's *Complete Shorter Poems* (London and New York, 1968 and 1971), John Carey accepts Parker's argument (pp. 329–30) and groups *Samson* with the pre-Restoration poems.

8. I accept as compelling Mary Ann Radzinowicz's meticulous review of evidence and arguments on the dating of *Samson Agonistes* and accept her conclusion that *Samson* was written late in Milton's career, after *Paradise Lost*. See Appendix C, "The Date of Composition of *Samson Agonistes*," in *Toward "Samson Agonistes": The Growth of Milton's Mind* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 387–407.

9. *The Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), p. 125. Further references to Milton's poetry are to this edition.

10. See Joseph Wittreich's *Interpreting "Samson Agonistes"* (Princeton, 1986), however, for a critique of readings of the poem as orthodox and for a forceful and influential argument about the significance of the poem's multiple contemporary contexts.

11. *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (London, 1965), p. 142.

12. Hughes, Shawcross, Bush, Carey, and Orgel and Goldberg, editors whose texts are commonly used in classroom teaching, each gloss it as priceless or invaluable. See Hughes, p. 63; *The Complete English Poetry*, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York, 1963), p. 62; *The Minor Poems in English*, ed. Douglas Bush (Basingstoke and London, 1972), p. 124; *The Minor Poems and*

"*Samson Agonistes*," ed. John Carey in *The Poems*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London, 1968), p. 123; and *John Milton*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg and Stephen Orgel (Oxford, 1994), p. 231. A *Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton* does cite both meanings as being current (*The Minor English Poems*, vol. 2, part 1, ed. A. S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush [New York, 1972], pp. 210–11).

13. Ed. Hershel Baker, *Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston, 1974).

14. See Balachandra Rajan, "To Which Is Added *Samson Agonistes*," in *The Prison and the Pinnacle: Papers to Commemorate the Tercentenary of "Paradise Regained" and "Samson Agonistes"*, ed. Balachandra Rajan (London, 1973), pp. 82–110; John Shawcross, "The Genres of *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*: The Wisdom of Their Joint Publication," in *Milton Studies* XVII, ed. Richard S. Ide and Joseph Wittreich (Pittsburgh, 1983), pp. 225–48; and Joseph Wittreich, *Interpreting "Samson Agonistes"*, pp. 329–85.

15. See Ann Baynes Coiro, "Milton and Class Identity: The Publication of *Areopagitica* and the 1645 *Poems*," *JMRS* 22 (1992), 261–89.

16. Translation from the Loeb edition by H. Rushton Fairclough, *Virgil*, 2 vols. (Cambridge and London, 1940), vol. 1, p. 51.

17. For a detailed discussion of this frontispiece engraving and the engraving by William Dolle for the 1673 *Poems*, see Joseph Wittreich's entry on "portraits" in *A Milton Encyclopedia*, ed. William B. Hunter Jr. (Lewisburg and London, 1979), vol. 6, pp. 202–09. Wittreich feels that the Virgil epigraph refers to Marshall's portrait, disagreeing with H. F. Fletcher who felt that the epigraph refers with superstitious unease to Humphrey Moseley's glowing preface to the volume (*Poetical Works* [1943], vol. 1, p. 154). I agree here with Fletcher.

18. Milton had met with Marshall to arrange for this engraving. The early date around the portrait is of a piece with the anxiety displayed throughout the 1645 volume about the poet's age. The dating of the poems continually stresses Milton's precocity.

19. All references to Andrew Marvell's "On Mr. Milton's *Paradise Lost*" are to the text in Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York, 1957), pp. 209–10.

20. John Guillery has made a somewhat similar argument in the concluding paragraphs of *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (New York, 1983), pp. 172–78. Guillery, however, assumes that Milton and Samson are the same, and that the poem dramatizes their inability to hear the divine voice. In fact, we have no access to knowledge about that voice. We have no access to any interior workings in the drama. We are left to struggle with silence, including the silence of not knowing whether Samson (or, certainly, Milton) hears a voice, or if he does what its source might be, divine or otherwise.

21. *Little* is used almost exclusively by weak or by diabolical characters. Satan, Chaos, and Death include *little* in their vocabulary as does Eve in her argument for working separately, and again after the Fall. For a complete listing of the word's appearance in Milton's poetry, see William Ingram and Kathleen Swaim's *Concordance to Milton's Poetry* (Oxford, 1972), p. 324. *Little* is a strikingly un-Miltonic word, but it is a word descriptive of the concerns of much contemporary poetry. Of all Milton's contemporaries, perhaps no one wrote littler than Robert Herrick. See, among many examples, the poems "Love me little, love me long," "The Flie," or "A Ternarie of littles, upon a pipkin of Jellie sent to a Lady," one stanza of which reads, for example: "A little streame best fits a little Boat; / A little lead best fits a little Float; / As my small Pipe best fits my little note." Robert Herrick, *The Poetical Works*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford, 1956), pp. 51, 185, and 249.

22. *Facsimile of the Manuscript of Milton's Minor Poems Preserved in the Library of Trinity College Cambridge*, ed. William Aldis Wright (Cambridge, 1899), pp. 30 and 31. In 1638, the line still read *little*, but by 1645 was changed back to the original *nothing*.

23. Parker comes to the pat and, on the evidence, probably inaccurate conclusion that Milton's first awareness of his incipient blindness was in 1644. Parker dates the onset of symptoms using Milton's letter to Leonard Philaras, dated 28 September 1654. Parker quotes Milton as saying that it was "about ten years since I first noticed my sight getting weak and dull" (William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. [Oxford, 1968], vol. 2, p. 894 n. 112). In fact, Milton actually wrote "Decennium, opinor, plus minus est, ex quo debilitari atq": "it is ten years, I think, more or less, since I felt my sight getting weak and dull" (*The Life Records of John Milton*, ed. J. Milton French, 5 vols. [New Brunswick, 1950], vol. 2, p. 107). Parker then goes on to dismiss lightly the memory of Milton's nephew, ward, and student, who was living with Milton all during these years: "Edward Phillips, less accurately, reported that Milton's sight 'had been decaying for about a dozen years' before total blindness." No one but Milton himself, however, can have been in a better position than Phillips to know. Against those who claimed that Milton was struck blind for having written *The First Defense*, Phillips answered that "it is most certainly known, that his Sight, what with his continual Study, his being subject to the Head-ake, and his perpetual tampering with Physick to preserve it, had been decaying for above a dozen years before, and the sight of one for a long time clearly lost" (*The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire [London, 1932], p. 72). This would mean that Milton first manifested symptoms of blindness around 1640, soon after returning from Italy. Phillips was Milton's student and part of his household from late 1639 until 1650. It is perhaps worth noting that Parker rests virtually his whole argument for the early composition of *Samson Agonistes* on a convoluted reading of something Phillips said in his biography of his uncle. In one instance, then, Phillips's testimony can be dismissed out of hand but, in another, given an almost fantastic weight.

24. Edward Weismiller, "The 'Dry' and 'Rugged' Verse," in *The Lyric and Dramatic Milton*, ed. Joseph H. Summers (New York and London, 1965), p. 135.

25. See Havens, especially pp. 3-43.

26. Edward Le Comte, *Yet Once More: Verbal and Psychological Pattern in Milton* (New York, 1953), p. 10.

27. T. S. Eliot, for example (and most famously), argued for the existence, and negative effect, of the Miltonic system (*Essays and Studies*, 1936; republished as "Milton I" in *On Poetry and Poets* [Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957], pp. 156-64).

28. Regina Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, 1988).

29. Claude E. Wells has shown that within "The Verse" itself there is a complicated and amusing crosshatch of rhyme; "Milton's 'Vulgar Readers' and 'The Verse,'" *MQ* 9 (1975), 67-70.

30. For discussion of *Samson's* rhyme see: the appendix "On the Verse" to F. T. Prince's edition of *Samson Agonistes* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 134-41 and his chapter on the Chorus in *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 145-68; Edward Weismiller, "The 'Dry' and 'Rugged' Verse"; Michael Cohen, "Rhyme in *Samson Agonistes*," *MQ* 8 (1974), 4-6; and Keith N. Hull, "Rhyme and Disorder in *Samson Agonistes*," *Milton Studies* XXX, ed. Albert C. Labriola (Pittsburgh, 1993), pp. 163-81.

31. Within these first lines there is one characteristically clumsy rhyme, however: "Adamantean Proof, / But safest he who stood aloof" (134-35).

32. *Poetics*, chap. 12, in Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941), p. 1466; and see *OED*. According to the *OED* the first use of "parode" in English was in 1869, but the first citation of the word "parody" is for 1598 in Ben Jonson's *Everyman in his Humour*; "V.v. Clem. [reads some poetry] How? This is stolne! E.Kn. A Parodie, a parodie! . . . to make it absurder then it was."

33. Thomas Newton, Milton's eighteenth-century editor, glossed the Chorus here with Horace's commentary and an (apty) rhymed translation:

Actoris partes Chorus, officiumque virile
Defendat; neu quid medios intercinat actus,
Quod non proposito conducat et haereat apte.
Ille bonis faveatque, et concilietur amicis;
Et regat iratos, et amet pacerae tumentes:
Ille dapes laudet mensae brevis; ille salubrem
Justitiam, legesque, et apertis otia portis:
Ille tegat commissa, Deosque precetur et oret,
Ut redeat miseris, abeat fortuna superbis.

The Chorus must supply an actor's part;
Defend the virtuous, and advise with art;
Govern the choleric, the proud appease,
And the short feasts of frugal tables praise;
The laws and justice of well-governed states,
And peace triumphant with her open gates.
Intrusted secrets let them ne'er betray,
But to the righteous God with ardor pray,
That fortune with returning smiles may bless
Afflicted worth, and impious pride depress.
Yet let their songs with apt coherence join,
Promote the plot, and aid the main design.

Paradise Regain'd. . . . To which is added *Samson Agonistes* (London: Printed for J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper, 1752), p. 210.

34. See John Guillory's brilliant essay, "The Father's House: *Samson Agonistes* in its Historical Moment," in *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (New York, 1987), pp. 148-76.

35. E[dward] P[hillips], *The New World of English Words: Or, a General Dictionary: Containing the Interpretations of such hard words as are derived from other Languages; whether Hebrew, Arabick, Syriack, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, British, Dutch, Saxon, &c. their Etymologies and perfect Definitions* (London, 1658), Ll 3r.

36. See Annette C. Flower, "The Critical Context of the Preface to *Samson Agonistes*," *SEL* 10 (1970), 409-28.

37. Anne Davidson Ferry has demonstrated Milton's influence on Dryden in the paired cases of *Paradise Lost* and *Absalom and Achitophel*; and *Samson Agonistes* and *All for Love* (*Milton and the Miltonic Dryden* [Cambridge, Mass., 1968]).

Since the eighteenth century, critics have discerned the influence of *Samson Agonistes* on Dryden's heavily rhymed and pointed *Aureng-Zebe*. Clearly Ferry is arguing that when in 1678 Dryden repudiated rhymed heroic tragedy he turned instead to Shakespeare in the blank verse *All for Love* and to *Samson Agonistes*. It is significant, however, that the first influence of *Samson* on Dryden is in a rhymed heroic tragedy. Milton's poem provides, of course, both the blank verse and rhymed dramatic alternatives to anyone who follows after.

38. The First Part of *The Siege of Rhodes* was entered in the Stationers' Register on August 27, 1656, and published soon after. On September 3, 1656, Davenant sent a copy "hot from the Pres" to Bulstrode Whitelock, one of the Lord Commissioners of the Treasury. Leslie Hotson assumes that it was acted soon after to take advantage of the opening of Parliament and the law courts. See Sir William Davenant, *The Siege of Rhodes. A Critical Edition*, ed. Ann-Mari Hedback (Uppsala, 1973), pp. xiv, lxxii-lxxv.

39. Davenant and Milton appear to have had great respect for each other. Each saved the

other's life when their respective political fortunes were in the wane, and Davenant's son studied with Milton in the late 1660s and early 1670s.

40. See James R. Jacob and Timothy Raylor, "Opera and Obedience: Thomas Hobbes and A Proposition for Advancement of Moralitie by Sir William Davenant," *The Seventeenth Century* 6 (1991), 205-50 for an analysis and transcription of the proposition.

41. *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. Hughes, p. 670.

42. In *Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984) José speculates that Milton could have been referring specifically to Christopher Wren's Sheldonian Theatre, built between 1664 and 1669, the conceptual model for which was an Augustan amphitheater.

43. See Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671* (Cambridge, 1992); Eleanor Boswell, *Restoration Court Stage (1660-1702)* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932); and Jose, pp. 142-63.

44. *Of Education* follows neatly on the Latin poetry, nicely tied in by the scholarly lesson on Latin style at the end of the last poem.

45. The two translated passages are Merritt Hughes's, pp. 147, 148.

46. Johnson repeatedly defends himself against charges of national disloyalty in his series of essays on Milton's versification in *The Rambler* (ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht Strauss [New Haven and London, 1969], vol. 2). As R. D. Havens and Alwin Thaler have shown ("Milton in the Theatre," *SP* 17 [1920], 269-308), Milton's poetry was imitated to an astonishing degree.

47. *Complete Shorter Poems*, p. 398.

LABOR IN THE CHAMBERS: PARADISE REGAINED AND THE DISCOURSE OF QUIET

Peggy Samuels

DURING THE LATE 1650s and early years of the Restoration, "quiet" became the subject of fierce controversy. People on all sides struggled to be possessors of the adjective. "Quiet" functioned as a multi-valent term, a particularly rich nexus of concepts, emotions, and stances existing in tension during this period. For centuries it had referred to "absence of disturbance or tumult" (*OED*, sb. 1, sense 1a) in a political or social sense. That meaning remained one of the primary denotations in the mid-seventeenth century as can be seen in the motto of one of the royalist banners (captured in 1643): "I shall either find [them] or make [them] quiet."¹ Because wielding words in the emergent public sphere constituted an increasingly significant kind of political *action*,² the denotations of quiet as "refraining from speech" and "refraining from action" became closely associated with one another in this period. For the restored monarchy, quiet subjects were primarily those who caused no disturbance, withdrawing from action or speech. The dissenters, however, had several other major strands of meaning for "quiet," including the religious work of freeing the mind from agitation or distress, by creating a "quiet" conscience. Such a use of the term necessarily came in conflict with the royalist meaning during the 1660s as Quakers in particular, but other dissenters as well, claimed that in order to produce a quiet conscience they would need to speak their minds and, as others saw it, trouble the realm.

Such a conflict is of interest to scholars who have been experiencing some perturbation about Milton's "paradise within." While the scholarship of the past two decades has undone the false dichotomy between the poetical and the political Milton, many scholars still seem uneasy about the Son of God in *Paradise Regained*.³ Was Milton promulgating a vision of spiritualized withdrawal from the world, a quiet retreat into a private realm that abandoned both public duty and individual agency? Satan's question, "What dost thou in this world?"⁴ becomes a disturbing suggestion of the Son's extreme otherworldliness. With his refusal to liberate Israelites or Romans (III, 414-