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PROTEAN VICISSITUDE
AND MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

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Preface

In Francis QUARLES' book of emblems, under a motto from Deut 32:29, there is an inscription in a form of a dialogue between two allegorical sisters, Flesh and Spirit. On the emblem accompanying the inscription, we see them seated in an avenue of trees, each equipped with an optic glass, Flesh being naked and facing the reader, while Spirit is clothed and facing the horizon. The prospect of the latter's optic glass (seen also by the viewer/reader) is the skeletal figure of Grim Death with a palm branch in his left and a two-edged sword in his right hand, and a typological scene of the last judgement with Christ seated in the middle of a rainbow, a trumpeting angel on both his sides. The inscription provides additional details of Spirit's view:

I see a Brimstone Seat of boyling Fire,
And Fiends, with knotted whips of flaming Wyre,
Tort'ring poore foules, that gnash their teeth, in vaine,
And gnaw their flame-tormented tongues, for paine;
Looke sister, how the queazie-stomack'd Graves
Vomit their ded, and how the purple waves
Scal'd their consumelesse bodies, strongly cursing
All wombs for bearing, and all paps for nursing (1635, 178)

The other sister, abashed at such "showes t' affright" offers her own "glasse-Triangular" for the prospect there "will ravish eyes" of

World in colours; colours that distaine
The cheeks of Proteus, or the silken Traine
Of Floras Nymphs; such various sorts of hiew,
As Sun-confronting Iris never knew...

But Flesh is admonished by her sister Spirit for doting “on goods that perish with thy Glasse! / Nay, vanish with the turning of a hand!.” Moreover, Flesh’s prospect is insubstantial, it is of “things that have no being”, hence Spirit’s final advice (summing up the moral of the emblem): “Foresight of future torments is the way / To baulk those ills which present ioyes bewray; / As thou hast fool’d thy selfe, so now come hither, / Break that fond glasse, and let’s be wise together” (1635, 178).

I have given a detailed description of this emblem because it seems to me a fitting illustration of present day Milton scholarship. On the one hand, one could cast in the role of Flesh critics like Lucy Newlyn, John Rumrich and Peter Herman (to mention just a few) who emphasize the conflicting, inconclusive, polysemous and paradoxical, indetermined nature of Milton’s works, while, on the other hand, one could see Stanley FISH cast in the role of Spirit denying substantiality to these qualities, for he sees Milton’s poem being “engaged in an act of containment”, that is, “in a forcible undoing and dispelling of energies (of thought, action, language) that are protean in their resourcefulness” (2001, 11). Also, while critics cast in the role of Flesh see ambivalence, open-endedness, the very variability of Milton’s works as their chief engaging features, Fish, perfectly epitomizing the allegorical sister Spirit, dismisses them, because “conflict, ambivalence, and openendedness [...] are not constitutive features of [Milton’s] poetry but products of a systematic misreading of it” (2001, 14) or, to recourse to the emblem above, of using the wrong optic glass. Consequently, just as Flesh finds her sister’s prospect bleak in Quarles’ emblem, many critics find Fish’s reading to be of equally pallid effect (notwithstanding its popularity), indeed to the point of suspecting Fish’s

reader (and by extension Fish himself) of masochistic tendencies, hence, echoing Flesh's question: "Can thy distemper'd fancie take delight / In view of Tortures?" (QUARLES 1635, 178; FORSYTH 2003, 72; KERRIGAN & RUMRICH & FALLON 2007, 278). FISH in the preface to the second edition of his seminal work on Milton, *Surprised by Sin* (1997, first published in 1967), while addressing the charges against his bleak prospect, admits to selling short the "forces of difference" (1997, lxvi) for which he tries to find a more substantial place in his second monograph on Milton, *How Milton works* (2001). However, it is here that he alots them a role of mere temptations, of values that need to be dispelled because they can seen as values only by a "systematic misreading" of the poem (2001, 14), hence, Fish's argument proves to be just as "suffocating" as the structure of his argument in *Surprised by Sin*.

Therefore, in my dissertation, I hope to find a place for "the forces of difference" in Milton's works, and particularly in *Paradise Lost*, that would prove more liberating than Fish's constraining notion which allows these differences mere cameo roles that are bound to consume themselves in Milton's poetry and prose. In doing so, I also strive to decline the notions of incertitude and indeterminacy pervasive in Milton studies today (especially in the strand opposing Fish) and, instead, will interpret the multiple levels of meaning present in Milton as functions of fecundity rather than tokens of incertitude. On the one hand, variety forms the basis of reasoning — "Reason also is choice" and choice being possible only where there is a variety of options to choose from — and can be seen, indeed, as the habitat of temptation but certainly not restricted to it. Because, on the other hand, variety also functions as a token of divine creation, the abundance of which ascertains for Milton God's benevolence and generosity, and functions as a source of delight and pleasure.

In mapping out the constituent role of protean vicissitude in Milton's epic, I am relying on Michel JEANNERET's general study of

Renaissance's "transformist sensibility" (2001) and on Richard WASWO's study of relational semantics of language in Renaissance (1987). Although none of them addresses Milton in their work, they both give a conspicuous treatment of Erasmus, which I hope to exploit by showing a connection between Erasmus and Milton, establishing the latter firmly in the intellectual milieu of Erasmian Christian humanism as opposed to the more recent scholarship emphasizing the poet's Puritanism.¹ The distinction between humanism and Puritanism has been largely neglected because of their many overlaps, and a comparison of Milton and Erasmus hardly ever made because of Milton's alleged Ramism that all but erased Erasmus from the considerations of Miltonists. Even in the unlikely cases when Erasmus and Milton are brought together their comparison serves to reveal distinctions rather than similarities,² which I hope to turn the other way around, especially by pointing at the similarity of their use of language as a means to move their audience. Also, a distinction between humanism and Puritanism does hold when it comes to the question of theodicy that puts Milton among the humanists.³ Lest someone be tempted to perceive my dissertation as engaging in theological issues, let me disclaim from the

¹ For example, in a recent scholarly edition of a Blackwell *Companion to Milton* (CORNES 2003) humanism is only sparingly mentioned, while there is chapter length study allotted to the subject of Puritanism (KEEBLE 2003, 124-140).

² A telling example of this is Thomas O. SLOANE's study on "Rhetorical Selfhood in Erasmus and Milton" (2004), in which he compares Erasmus' and Milton's dealings with potentially irreligious influence of the revived classics as manifested through their notions of rhetorical *ethos*. Sloane's argumentation draws a marked difference in their interpretation of Christ's character, which I wish, on the contrary, to establish as their similarity (see by the end of chap. 1). At present, it is important to note, that, although, Sloane emphasizes Christian humanism as the common ground of Erasmus and Milton, his remarks on Ramism — to which he uncritically attaches Milton and that "had long replaced Erasmianism" (2004, 121) in the educational system the blind poet attended — present yet another insurmountable divide between the two Northern humanists. For the sake of brevity, I refer to P. Albert DUHAMEL's convincing argument on Milton's disagreement with Ramistic beliefs (1952) in opposing Milton's adherence to Ramism overstressed even in present day Milton scholarship.

³ As John Rumrich notes, "Milton's identification with the Arminian dissent from orthodox Puritan determinism recapitulates Erasmus's humanist aversion to Lutheran bondage of the will" (2006, 150n40). Rumrich here refers to Dennis Danielson's book length study on literary theodicy (1982), in which he very briefly summarizes the debate on free will between Erasmus and Luther as hinging on the issue of theodicy (66-68). However, Danielson fails to establish any connection between Erasmus and Milton, reserving all his argument for the comparison between the poet and the Dutch Reformed pastor, Jacobus Arminius

outset: despite occasional remarks of theological nature, the present dissertation is primarily a work of philology and cultural history.

In the first chapter, I will delineate the currents of contemporary Milton scholarship and the role Fish played and is still playing in it. This is necessary because for the last half century Milton studies have been under the overwhelming influence of Stanley Fish, so much so, that a recent multi-author collection on authorship, text and terrorism by prominent Milton scholars, edited by Michael LIEB and Albert C. LABRIOLA, was entitled *Milton in the Age of Fish* (2007). This is not to say that Fish is unanimously accepted as defining both the content and the parameters of contemporary Milton scholarship (see FORSYTH 2003, 72), however, it has become almost impossible to launch a Miltonic subject without first addressing FISH and the “Miltonic Paradigm” set forth in his *How Milton Works* (2001, 22). In addressing Fish’s paradigm, I will also address Peter C. Herman’s criticism of it, for it offers a conspicuous departing point for my own dissertation. Since by claiming constituent role for protean vicissitude I seem to go against FISH’s own claim that Milton’s poems and prose are engaged “in the forcible undoing and dispelling of energies [...] that are protean in their resourcefulness” (2001, 11), chapter two will account for the flexibility with which Proteus and the adjective *protean* were used in the Renaissance.⁴ The copious occurrence of this “proverb of versatile mutability” is the more interesting when related to Milton who only seldom alluded to Proteus and never used the adjective *protean*. In chapter three I will outline the Renaissance language issues as pertaining to the notion of change and its bearing on the concept of creative reading and the perception of Renaissance works as susceptible to change themselves. I

⁴ I am deliberately choosing to use the general although contested term *Renaissance* instead of *Early Modern* mainly because of the metaphors of parturition I will employ in my study. In delineating the historical boundaries of my study, the Renaissance spans a period from the end of the 15th century to the middle of the seventeenth century – Erasmus marking its beginning and Milton its end – , thus, coinciding with the definition of Jules Michelet as far as its historical span is concerned.

particularly focus on Erasmus' treatment of language as praxis, and how this reverberates in Milton. Building both on Waswo and Jeanneret, I aim to present Milton as a poet of protean vicissitude who, like so many Renaissance thinkers, "gave positive value to change and celebrated the alteration of things and the flux of contingencies as a promise of renewal without denying that they are symptoms of sin, stigmata and mortality" (JEANNERET 2001, 3). The mythological figure of Proteus (to be discussed in chapter 2), with his susceptibility to change, will provide a narrative framework to the concept of vicissitude reemerging in my discussion since Proteus was equally regarded as a portentous sign and as a sign of positive flexibility. But equally important to my thesis is a frequently neglected aspect of the Proteus' myth, namely that the old man of the sea also speak unambiguous truth. In the third, last chapter of my dissertation I will offer close reading of passages from *Paradise Lost* that exhibit protean fluctuation, and thus resist stability and fixed meaning, and point to the role this plays in Milton's design of his epic and its reception. The chapter will itself exhibit a shift from thematic treatment towards a more formalist one, thus, premeditating the conclusion of my dissertation that delineates a shift in Milton scholarship towards the auditory features of the poem.

1 Not so much a Theory as a Historiography of Milton Controversies

*[T]here is no new thing under the sun.
Is there any thing whereof it may be said,
See, this is new? it hath been already of old
time, which was before us.*

Ecclesiastes 1, 9-10

1.1 “Fishie fume[s]” and Milton Controversies

In the last two decades Milton scholarship has enjoyed an unprecedented diversity and a great variety of approaches, resulting in a change of how Milton is perceived: from a poet who portrays “for us only his certainties, never his doubts” (WORDEN 1990, 243) Milton became the champion of unresolved choices, of indeterminacies and incertitude.¹ The commencement of this change is hard to pinpoint. In 1987 Mary NYGUIST and Margaret FERGUSON were still able to claim, that “Milton continues to enjoy the status of the most monumentally unified author of the canon” (xii). Notwithstanding the poet’s status, the scholarship was far from being

¹ Even a superficial glance at the subject of recent publications confirms this change. See for example R. A. Shoaf’s *Milton, Poet of Duality* (Univ. Press of Florida, 1993), Dayton Haskin’s *Milton Burden of Interpretation* (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), John P. Rumrich’s *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge UP, 2006, first publ. in 1996), John T. Shawcross’s *The Uncertain World of ‘Samson Agonistes’* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), and Peter C. Herman’s *Destabilizing Milton: „Paradise Lost” and the Poet of Incertitude* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), to mention but a few.

unified or uniform. The tendency of Milton criticism to fall into opposing camps appeared whenever the debate was over principles that were “ostensibly formal, theological, methodological, or overtly ideological” (NYQUIST & FERGUSON 1987, xiv), in other words, covering the whole spectrum of literary approaches. One needs only to remember or, better yet, become acquainted with T. S. Eliot’s criticism of Milton’s poetic style² and the twentieth century’s “Milton Controversy” it launched which persisted well into the 1950s only to be recast, this time from a ideological/theological perspective, with C. S. Lewis and William Empson respectively championing the opposing fractions. There is a seamless continuity between the two controversies. For, although, the attack of the early 20th century Miltonoclast resulted in an ostensible demotion of Milton,³ the reassessment of his power as a poet expanded exponentially from 1940 to 1970, and it was Eliot’s remark on Milton that prompted C. S.

² Eliot’s earliest remarks on Milton are from his essay on Marlowe (1919) and on the Metaphysical poets, Marvell and Donne (both from 1921) (see in ELIOT 1934, 118-125; 281-304). However, his most substantial treatment of Milton is the essay “A Note on Milton Verse” published in *Essays and Studies* (1936) and his lecture on Milton to the British Academy (1947). The essay and the lecture were entitled “Milton I” and “Milton II” respectively and published in Eliot’s collection, *On Poetry and Poets* (1957). [I had recourse to these texts in KERMODE 1980, and an online edition of ELIOT’s *Milton: Two Studies* (1968), and choose to refer to latter for it provided a more complete text.] The gist of ELIOT’s complaint against Milton is that “the sensuous effect of [his] verses is entirely on the ear” (1968, 11). Milton syntax, which Eliot considered to be primarily of musical significance and not beneficial to the development of thoughts, confirmed his theory of the “dissociation of sensibility”, namely, that in England there occurred in the seventeenth century a dislocation of thought and feeling for which Eliot blamed Milton and Dryden (33). In Eliot’s view, Milton, though a great poet, “could only be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatsoever” (31). The attack initiated by Eliot, was abetted by Ezra POUND’S diatribe against “the gross and utter stupidity and obtuseness of Milton” (1991/1934, 103), influenced by Middleton Murry, and lent academic force by A. J. A. Waldock and F. R. LEAVIS, to whom Milton exhibited “certain sensuous poverty” (1936, 47) and “a feeling for words rather than capacity for feeling through words” (51). The ensuing “Milton controversy” was termed by James THORPE “a unique phenomenon in the history of literary criticism” (1951, 19). (For an overview of Eliot’s criticism covering 1919-1947 see BOLLIER 1955, 165-192. For a larger scope of the twentieth century’s “Milton Controversy”, tracing it back even to Milton’s earliest critics, see BERGONZI 1963, 162-180. See also Christopher RICKS’s *Milton’s Grand Style* [1963], especially pages 1-21. More recently, see Beverley SHERRY on the positive effect Eliot’s legacy could and should exhibit on Milton studies by reawakening “today’s largely deaf company of Milton scholars” to the aural powers of his epic [2010, 27-38].)

³ Douglas BUSH, in an impassioned refutation of Eliot’s 1936 essay, notes that the “dethronement of Milton was necessary to the enthronement of Donne” (1945, 3), and indeed from 1920s to the 1960s the popularity of the Metaphysical poets, promoted by Eliot and Leavis, surpassed that of Milton in university teaching and research (SHERRY 2010, 29).

Lewis's defense of Milton's reputation published in *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"* (1942).⁴ While appealing to the decorum of the epic genre and reclaiming for Milton's verse greater visual achievements than Eliot would have admitted, Lewis placed *Paradise Lost* firmly within Christianity's central tradition. In 1961 William Empson challenged this claim rather pointedly in *Milton's God*, and expressed his dissatisfaction with what he called the "neo-Christian" interpretation of Milton. Although both Lewis and Empson addressed formal issues in their arguments, the ideological/theological questions prevailed⁵ and revolved around the figure of Satan and the responses it provoked from the readers. It is at this point that Fish made his memorable foray into Milton criticism.

In the following sections I will introduce Fish's contribution to Milton studies and the major points of criticism directed at him, emphasizing Peter C. Herman's argument delivered in *Destabilizing Milton* (2005) as symptomatic of the latest current of textual indeterminacy within Milton scholarship. Although it would seem logical to follow the chronological pattern of the discussion above, I will instead alternate freely, and at first glance perhaps randomly, between Fish's two major works on Milton, namely, between *Surprised by Sin: A Reader in Paradise*

⁴ C. S. Lewis arguments were first delivered in the Ballard Matthews Lectures at Bangor in 1941 addressing Eliot's strictures of Milton failure in visual imagination, the pursuit of sonority at the expense of thought, and the departure from the conversational language in blank verse (for a detailed account of the points on which Lewis opposed Eliot see HUTTAR 2000, 163-164, 169-170). Huttar suggest that the recantations of Eliot's British Academy lecture of 1947 are influenced by C. S. Lewis, the degree of which has yet to be fully appreciated (2002, 324).

⁵ This shift is presaged by ELIOT when stating (in "Milton II") that "of no other poet is it so difficult to consider the poetry simply as poetry, without our theological and political dispositions, conscious or unconscious, inherent or acquired, making an unlawful entry" (1968, 26). The alignment of Milton to an unproblematic, centrist orthodoxy is also noted by Eliot, albeit ironically, when C. S. Lewis opposition to Saurat's claim of Milton theological eccentricity and unorthodoxy acquits Milton of heresy "even from a point of view so orthodox as that of Mr. Lewis himself" (27). EMPSON predates this shift when stating that the controversy (i.e. the one sparked by Eliot) "had become plainly theological" by the time Eliot "was committed to accepting Milton as a Christian poet" in 1947 (1981, 26). Moreover, he adds, that "the eminence of Mr Eliot tempts one to blame him for the whole neo-Christian movement" although asserting that "on the issue of Milton he [Eliot] is very unsmirched" (ibid).

Lost (1967) and *How Milton Works* (2001)⁶. I will do this partly because the two works are complementary in revealing Fish's thesis on the "Miltonic Paradigm" and partly because I hope to show this way the change that occurred both in Fish's thinking on Milton and in Milton criticism in general.

1.2 "Nor... do I repent or change": Fish on Milton

In the acknowledgements of *How Milton Works*, FISH starts with a blunt confession:

It may seem strange to acknowledge that one's thoughts have not changed much in more than a quarter-century, but since one of my theses is that Milton himself changed very little, except to offer slight variations on a few obsessions that were his from the very beginning, I am comfortable with the notion that I keep discovering the same patterns and meaning over and over again. (2001, vii)

The bulk of the essays collected in the volume certainly seems to confirm Fish's declaration of *semper eadem*, since ten of its fifteen chapters have been previously published— some more than forty years ago – and are augmented here with five new essays, an introduction and an epilogue. One can hardly read John LEONARD's remark without a hint of irony: "There is more than enough fresh material here (over 250 pages out of a total of 616) to suggest development of Fish's views on Milton" (2002). His peers readily accepted Fish's claim, if only to throw it back at his face. Even those supporting Fish without reserve, claim that the change in his interpretative stance is merely a superficial appearance.⁷ Charles Peirce's

⁶ The second edition of *Surprised by Sin*, with a substantial preface addressing the objections to it, was published in 1998. In a way, the preface to the second edition anticipates much of the argument of *How Milton Works* published only three years later. All references to the previous work will be from the second edition.

⁷ "At least on the surface, there appears to be a movement from the 'affective stylistics' of the earlier book to something like the 'modes of production' in the most recent book. But to suggest

observations in the article “Fixation of Belief” would seem to offer an explanation why many Milton scholars find Fish’s statement of no change so provocative and derisive: his obvious satisfaction with the hermeneutics postulated in *Surprised by Sin* and reaffirmed in *How Milton Works* makes him appear in a “calm and satisfactory state”, which he has no wish to avoid or change, especially since no “irritation of doubt” has caused him to “inquire” the veracity of his notions (HOUSER & KLOESEL 1992, 114). In other words, no one has of yet successfully challenged Fish, a fact acknowledged both by his critics and by Fish himself.⁸ One might also note, how the notion of *change* is intimately related here, as I see it, to the notion of novelty, *newness*. For, if one is looking for something new, previously not existent and, in terms of argument, for something that has not been argued for before, Fish indeed appears without change. However, etymologically *change* has nothing to do with things “not existing before, now made, or brought into existence, for the first time” or “not known previously” (*OED* s.v. *new*). The very possibility of change presupposes the existence of a thing (or things, hence, entailing variety) that is put in the place of another thing, change being “the act or fact of changing; substitution of one thing for another; succession of one thing in place of another” (*OED* s.v. *change*). Consequently, I would argue, that there *is* an apparent change in Fish’s interpretative stance, which also explains the

that such a movement represents a change in Fish’s way of reading Milton is to misconstrue what the new book is about, as well as the nature of the relationship between the first book and the second” (LIEB 2002, 252)

⁸ John RUMRICH readily admits that although of late there have been those who challenged Fish’s main argument (put forth in *Surprised by Sin*), “no one has successfully refuted [it], not on its own terms” (1996, 5). FISH, of course, is too shrewd to let this pass without a gloating remark, hence, Rumrich’s report is “rueful” in comparing Fish’s influence to a “triumphant” paradigm (Fish’s use of adjective!) and yet “unaware apparently of the (Kuhnian) irony involved in trying to dislodge or ‘uninvent’ something by conducting a book length argument on its terms” (1998, xiii).

objection Peter C. Herman poses to Fish while emphasizing the “incertitude” of *Paradise Lost*.⁹

The change is twofold. On the one hand it affects the very questions Milton criticism aims to answer, and on the other hand, it affects the approach of the critics (including Fish’s) to these questions. While delineating the currents of contemporary Milton criticism or, rather, the continuity of the twentieth century’s “Milton Controversy” to the present (via or through Fish), I already mentioned a shift in topics from stylistic, formalist to the theological, ideological. One must however note, that these shifts are not exclusive, and that these changes do not radically dispose of certain topics from the landscape of Milton criticism or make certain questions irreversibly irrelevant.¹⁰

In the brief preface to the first edition of *Surprised by Sin* (1967), FISH identified two strands of criticism of *Paradise Lost*: “one concerned with providing a complete reading of the poem (in so far it is possible), the other emphasizing a single aspect of it, or a single tradition in the light of which the whole can be better understood” (1998, lxxi). Fish, for his part, attempted to participate in both strains of criticism, although “somewhat uneasily” and unlike the Fish of later years, and claimed no reconciliatory role for his contribution. Thirty years later, a second edition of his book demanded a new preface, and we might add, a new and more assertive Fish. And he certainly seems to have met the demand. This time, he identified his contribution as fulfilling a “need” in Milton scholarship, a “way in breaking out of the impasse created by two interpretative traditions” (x): 1) one encompassing authors from Addison to C. S. Lewis and with a

⁹ Herman thesis of “poetics of incertitude”, as put forth in his *Destabilizing Milton: Paradise Lost and the Poetics of Incertitude* (2005), has engendered much of what I have come to think of as protean vicissitude and its role in Milton. Although my notions will considerably differ from that of Herman, I will refer to his work profusely in the introduction, partly, because his arguments are symptomatic of the topics that preoccupy present day Miltonists, and, partly, because I wish to establish a point of departure for my further argument.

¹⁰ William KERRIGAN, John RUMRICH and Stephen M. FALLON, for example, recount and group Milton Controversies around the characters of Satan, God and Eve (2007, 275-282).

“‘dazzlingly simple’” premise, namely, that all turns on obedience or disobedience of God; 2) the other following the interpretative tradition of Blake and Shelley, and including authors such as A. J. A. Waldock and William Empson, and perceiving disobedience to God as a positive act enabling human search for (self)knowledge. In his own words:

I was able to reconcile the two camps under the aegis of a single thesis: *Paradise Lost* is a poem about how its readers came to be the way they are; its method... is to provoke in its readers wayward, fallen responses which are then corrected by one of several authoritative voices (the narrator, God, Raphael, Michael, the Son).... The advantage of this thesis, at least with respect to what was then called the ‘Milton Controversy,’ is that it achieved the full enfranchisement of all combatants; everyone is partly right and everyone’s perspective is necessary to the poem’s larger strategy. (1998, x-xi)¹¹

As I have already stated, Fish joined Milton criticism when the figure of Satan loomed large in the discussions of Miltonists. Many readers of *Paradise Lost* perceived (and are still perceiving) a tension between the mythopoeic grandeur of Satan (especially in the first two books of the epic) and his discursive condemnation by the narrator. Fish claimed (and is still claiming) that the tension was deliberate, a result of the poet’s strategy to bring the readers to an understanding of their sinful nature (when sympathizing with Satan) and encouraging them to participate in its reform (by acknowledging the sympathy and accepting its condemnation by the narrator). William KERRIGAN, in *The Sacred Complex*, sees “the psychological elegance” of Fish’s argument in that “the pious reader can

¹¹ FISH starts by reporting the immediate reception of his book as being that of praise and information “that each of them [those Miltonists who wrote to him] had been about to write a book or essay making essentially the same argument” (1997, ix). As in explanation to this, he adds: “When a worker in a discipline manages to ‘advance the conversation’, the step he or she has taken will almost immediately be seen by his or her peers as inevitable” (ibid). I remark on this only because it offers an amusing parallel to the reception of Satan’s invention of “devilish Engines” by the fallen angels: “Th’ invention all admir’d, and each, how hee / To be th’ inventor miss’d, so easie it seemd / Once found, which yet unfound most would have thought / Impossible” (PL 6.498-501).

entertain potentially rebellious attitudes knowing that, as a sign of his fallenness, these attitudes already confirm the doctrinal argument of the poem and therefore have a piety all their own” (1983, 98-99).¹²

However, by the mid 1990s the questions of Milton studies have been reformulated although still falling back on the ones stipulated earlier. The controversy is no longer about whether Milton is a good or a bad poet, or rather, if his influence is for the better or worse for making God bad (see EMPSON 1981/1961, 13), nor is it simply the question of whether or not Satan steals the hero’s role of *Paradise Lost* (depending on whether one sees the mythopoeic grandeur of Satan as decisive of that role or as misleading and in need of correction by a narrative voice). The most recent tendency in Milton criticism, as FISH himself notes, is to present Milton either as “an absolutist poet with focused vision and a single overriding message” or “a more tentative, provisional poet alert to the ambiguities and dilemmas of the moral life” (2001, 5), the latter alternative increasingly becoming the vogue of present day Milton scholarship. Fish, naturally, is quick to dismiss the latter. In his words, “conflict, ambivalence, and open-endedness [...] are not constitutive features of the poetry but products of a systematic misreading of it” (14).

Not that Fish denies the presence of conflict, ambivalence and open-endedness in Milton’s work. He admits that they are there, but not as

¹² But he also notes the “price” one must pay for such elegance, namely, “the sacrifice of metaphors to resurrect unity” (1983, 99). It is perhaps not redundant to quote Kerrigan’s observation in full, as it harmonizes with the objections of other Fish critics I am about to refer to later in my dissertation (31n21): “Entering the similes of evil with Fish, we discover, in the end, a duplication of discursive meaning. Although the experience of finding this redundancy may have, as Fish claims, great pedagogical force, the overall effect of his reading is to promulgate a tyrannical notion of aesthetic unity at the expense of introducing, without overt recognition, a new and unheard-of flaw in the poem: the alarming idea that its mythopoesis is not generative but repetitive, that its similes, metaphors, and symbols tell us nothing about Christianity that the dogmatizing and sermonizing passages of the poem have not told us already. Fish is the brilliant Augustine of Milton studies, and he has taught us much: there can be little doubt that some of the similes have been designed as didactic redundancies. But what if Fish, and Augustine too, are killing the spirit of the letter in order to preserve the letter of the spirit?” (ibid).

qualities Milton admires, but as “vehicles of our instruction and the habitation of temptation”, a temptation to “take them seriously for themselves rather than as instruments of a supreme pedagogical intention” the lesson of which “can be taught only in the discursive forms the letter provides” (14-15).

Hence, Fish’s interpretation introduced in *Surprised by Sin* – negotiating between the rhetorical appeal of Satan and the corrective syntax of the epic and/or voice of the narrator – this time promises to resolve the tension between Milton the absolutist poet and Milton the champion of inconsistency and doubleness. But more importantly, this recourse to resolving the contradicting issues perceived in Milton’s works is what Herman calls the dominant paradigm of Milton studies.

1.3 “Inspir’d with contradiction”: Herman and the paradigm of Milton studies

Peter C. HERMAN defines the paradigm predominantly governing Milton studies as consisting of three propositions, namely, (1) Milton is a poet of absolutist, unqualified certainty; (2) *Paradise Lost* coheres; and (3) the critic’s task is to make the poem cohere (2005, 7). Operating with Kuhnian terms, he claims that these propositions constitute the “object of further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions” and adds that since *normal science* (a specific and important Kuhnian term I am about to revisit) consists of “extending the knowledge of those facts that the paradigm displays as particularly revealing... by further articulation of the paradigm itself” (6). Consequently, the works of scholars that do not fit these parameters “will meet a wall of resistance” (ibid). Incertitude and contradiction, confusion and vacillation are hence anomalies (results that do not fit the ruling paradigm), and are either suppressed or explained away. To demonstrate Joseph WITTREICH’s observation, namely, that “there

was from the very outset an effort to anathematize as misleading and incompetent any interpretations that were heretical or simply unorthodox” (1987, 5), Herman evokes the controversy between Richard Bentley and Zachary Pearce from the 1730s.¹³

Bentley wrote his emendations of *Paradise Lost* from a premise that a corrupt editor had taken liberties with the poem entrusted to him without Milton’s assent. Whether Bentley believed his own hypothesis or not, he is certainly guilty of what he accused the anonymous editor: taking liberties with the text of the poem (albeit with an emending purpose). His first and most known opponent (among the many to follow) was Zachary Pearce, deemed by many critics since as a too polite opponent. EMPSON, for example, claims that because of Pearce’s lack of rudeness, Bentley and Pearce “seem very alike, both in their merits and their emendations” (1966, 123). HERMAN, on the other hand, claims them similar because they share, as he says, “the same discomfort with unorthodoxy and unresolved contradiction” (2005, 13) which Herman identifies as the animating power behind their treatment of *Paradise Lost*.

For example, one such contradiction irritating Bentley is Milton’s famous description of Hell flames that issue forth “no light, but rather darkness visible / Serv’d onely to discover sights of woe” (1.63-64):

¹³ Richard Bentley, Regius Professor of Divinity and Royal Librarian, a distinguished classical scholar and the most turbulent Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, wrote *Milton’s “Paradise Lost.” A New Edition* in 1732. The chief positive result of his work was the close defensive examination of subsequent editors, especially Zachary Pearce’s *A Review of the Text of Milton’s “Paradise Lost”: In which the Chief of Dr. Bentley’s Emendations are Considered* (1732). Interestingly enough, while Pearce’s work was profusely used in Thomas Newton’s acclaimed, annotated edition of *Paradise Lost* (1749), it is Bentley’s work that generated study after study of Milton criticism. See for example: William Empson, “Milton and Bentley. The Pastoral of the Innocence of Man and Nature” in *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with Chatto & Windus, 1966), 121-155; Joseph M. Levine, “Bentley’s Milton: Philology and Criticism in Eighteenth-Century England”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50:4 (1989), 549-568; William Kolbrener, “Those Grand Whigs, Bentley and Fish” in *Milton’s Warrign Angels: A Study of Critical Engagements* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 107-132; and John Hale, “Paradise Purified: Dr Bentley’s Marginalia for his 1732 Edition of *Paradise Lost*” in *Milton as Multilingual. Selected Essays, 1982-2004* (Tirril Hal, Tirril: Humanities-Ebboks.co.uk, 2007), 198-198.

Darkness visible and *Darkness palpable* are in due place very good Expressions: but the next Line make visible here a flat Contradiction. *Darkness visible* will not serve to *discover Sights of Woe* through it, but to cover and hide them. Nothing is visible to the Eye, but so far as it is Opake, and not seen through; not by transmitting the Rays, but by reflecting them back. To come up to the Author's Idea, we may thus, *No Light, but rather A TRANSPICUOUS GLOOM*. *Gloom* is equivalent to Darkness, yet so as to be in some measure *transparent*.

(Sig. B3v; in HERMAN 2005, 13)

Hence, Bentley's treatment of a perceived "flat contradiction" (i.e. an anomaly of the paradigm already stated) is its suppression or elimination, in this case by replacement. Pearce, on the other hand, seeing no contradiction at all, resorts to explaining it away:

Dr. B. says that the next Line makes *visible* here a flat contradiction; for *darkness visible* will not serve to discover sights of woe thro' it, but to cover and hide them. But I cannot agree with him: M. seems to have us'd these words to signify *Gloom*: Absolute darkness is strictly speaking invisible; but where there is a Gloom only, there is so much Light remaining as serves to show that there are Objects, and yet that those Objects cannot be distinctly seen: In this sense M. seems to use the Strong and Bold Expression *darkness visible*: Instead of which the Dr. wou'd give us, a *TRANSPICUOUS Gloom*; But *Gloom* includes in it (as the Dr. himself owns) a notion of *transparency* or *transpicity*, i.e., of so much Light as serves to discover objects, thro' it; and therefore *transpicuous* wou'd be a superfluous Epithet to *gloom*.

(Sig. B5r; in HERMAN 2005, 13).

Herman finds Pearce's objection to Bentley's offered replacement of "darkness visible" with "transpicuous gloom" particularly noteworthy because it stresses its redundancy. Gloom already implies transparency (rendering transpicuous "a superfluous epithet to gloom"), and as for

Milton's "strong and bold" expression *darkness visible*, gloom is meant by it in the first place, hence, there is no contradiction to begin with. In a sense, Herman, who proposes incertitude as the main feature of *Paradise Lost*, finds Pearce's solution to contradiction even more offensive than Bentley's because it denies the very grounds to questions of contradiction and incertitude, rendering thus all solutions directed that way superfluous. By extension, Pearce treatment relegates Herman's proposition to redundancy too.

For the same reason, HERMAN finds no solace in the fact that recent critics have started to foreground Milton's contradictions, because "more often than not they also seek to eliminate the 'apparent conflict' between incertitude and the dominant paradigm of Milton studies through the principle of *discordia concors*" (2005, 15). Fish, of course, is no exception. For although he admits "radical openness and indeterminacy" a marked appearance in Milton's works "at almost every juncture" (presenting the reader with "important interpretative decisions at once demanded and rendered radically indeterminate") his ultimate conclusion will boil down to the possibility of "thinking about his [Milton's] project" in a way "that accommodates and even reconciles its diverse impulses" (FISH 2001, 500).

Yet, Fish is not simply an influential proponent of the paradigm governing Milton studies. In Herman's view (if not words), Fish is a protean shape-shifter, or rather a paradigm-shifter, who applies different rules of criticism to different interpretative communities. To demonstrate Fish's method of analysis in *Surprised by Sin* and in *How Milton Works* Herman cites a sample analysis from Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?* The sample is provided by Fish to demonstrate his erstwhile claim, i.e. that meaning is not the property of the text, but is emerging gradually in the

interaction between the text (conceived of as a succession of words)¹⁴ and the developing response of the reader:

Satan, now first inflam'd with rage, came down,
The Tempter ere th' Accuser of man-kind,
To wreck on innocent frail man his loss
Of that first Battle, and his flight to Hell. (4.9-12)

The “meaning” experienced by the reader, when reading this passage from *Paradise Lost*, develops like this:

One of the things a reader does in the course of negotiating these lines is to assume that the referent of “his” in line 11 is “innocent frail man.” Within this assumption the passage would seem to be assigning the responsibility for the Fall to Satan: Satan, inflamed with rage, comes down to inflict the loss of Eden on a couple unable to defend themselves because they are innocent and frail. This understanding, however, must be revised when the reader enters line 12 and discovers that the loss in question is Satan’s loss of Heaven, sustained in “the first battle” with the loyal angels. It is that loss of which Adam and Eve are innocent, and the issue of the Fall is not being raised at all. But of course it has been raised, if only in the reader’s mind, and in the kind of analysis I am performing, that would be just the point. (1980, 4)¹⁵

However, Fish is not merely demonstrating his method, but renouncing it too. In the introduction to *Is There a Text in This Class?* Fish states that he could not write the majority of the essays collected in the

¹⁴ The whole method was first introduced, although less theoretically, in *Surprised by Sin* in 1967 (see FISH 1997, 23).

¹⁵ The remaining part of the method’s description (not quoted by Herman) nicely demonstrates how FISH understands the workings of a Miltonic text: “The understanding that the reader must give up is one that is particularly attractive to him because it asserts the innocence of his first parents, which is, by extension, his innocence too. By first encouraging that understanding and then correcting it, Milton (so my argument would go) makes the reader aware of his tendency, inherited from those same parents, to reach for interpretations that are, in the basic theological sense, self serving” (1980, 4). So, it is not merely an attraction to Satan’s figure and/or an attachment to his rhetoric that poses a temptation in need of correction but all interpretations that are self-serving and, hence, Satanic „in the basic theological sense.”

volume if he were to write them now, because “both the form of their arguments and the form of the problems those arguments address are a function of assumptions [he] no longer hold[s]” (1980, 1). And yet, in Herman’s claim, *How Milton Works* is suffused with the analytical method rejected by Fish. Furthermore, “Fish does not cite ‘Interpreting the Variorum’ anywhere in *How Milton Works*; nor does he mention another essay that directly challenges this book’s thesis of Miltonic certitude” (Herman 2005, 17). The reason for this Herman sees in the fact that Fish in writing *How Milton Works* was not addressing the interpretive community of New Historicists, deconstructionist, etc. but the interpretative community of Milton studies and, hence, shaped his argument according to its standards.

What Herman seems to forget is that FISH already made a point of this in his preface to the second edition of *Surprised by Sin* in 1998: “[I]n ‘Interpreting the Variorum’ (1976), and then in *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980)... I acknowledged the mistake of thinking that my ‘method’ was recovering an experience rather than producing one” (1998, xiv). In a gesture typical of Fish, he offers a retraction only to revoke it the following sentence:

I realized that instead of saying to readers “this is the way you have always read even if you were unaware of it,” *I was saying and had always been saying* “read it this way – within the assumption that the poem’s method is to involve you in its plot by confronting you with interpretative crises – and see if this way of reading makes better sense of the poem than the way of reading (and there always has to be one) within which you were proceeding before.” (xiv – *italics mine*)

In a strangely fishy argument, this even makes sense of Fish’s claim to no change in *How Milton Works*. For if he is saying what he had always been saying, the continuity of his saying it does not preclude the

unchangeability of the meaning of what he has been saying all this time. If we allow for Fish's thesis, that meaning is not something fixed and the property of what he is saying but an event negotiated between what he said and his audience (readers), he can indeed say that he "abandoned the posture of a scientist bent on describing facts to which he made no positive contribution" and, instead, "embraced the role of agent-of change, resting [his] case on the decision of [his] peers as to whether or not the change [he] urged was beneficial" (1997, xiv).

Returning our focus to the paradigm governing Milton studies, Herman is not attributing to Fish the invention of a new paradigm but a calculating application of the one already in place (for Herman sees him applying clearly a different paradigm when addressing a non Miltonic audience). In a sense, Fish becomes the Machiavelli (dare I say Satan) of Milton studies striving to achieve for himself the coveted status of Milton illuminati, becoming himself one of the "gods or demigods."¹⁶

Similarly, John P. Rumrich sees Fish primarily not as the initiator of a paradigm, but as the one responsible for the "consolidation and general acceptance of what Empson called the 'neo-Christian' position" (2006, 4). Summarizing the impact of Fish's *Surprised by Sin*, RUMRICH says:

Fish's work appealed to the more restless among its contemporary audience in part because it followed an innovative interpretative strategy – associated with reader-response theory – that placed the reader in the center of the epic action or, rather, placed the center of the epic action in the reader. The consequence was a methodologically radical update of Lewis's reading of *Paradise Lost* as a literary monument to mainstream Christianity. (2006, 4)

¹⁶ Fish referring to Barbara K. Lewalski, C. S. Lewis, E. M. W. Tillyard, etc. (in Herman 2005, 6-7).

However, beyond seeing him as the most successful applicator of the neo-Christian reading, Rumrich perceives Fish also as paradigm in and of himself, because his “dexterous reading of the epic is still basic to our contemporary understanding of Milton’s works” (2006, 3). Rumrich finds this particularly offensive since it confirms Milton’s allegiance to an unproblematic, centrist orthodoxy (4).

So far, I have mentioned at least three different occurrences of paradigm: 1) the overriding paradigm of coherence, perceived by Herman as governing Milton studies (Fish among them), regardless of the position/stance of the critic; 2) the neo-Christian paradigm Empson (and following in his footsteps Rumrich) objected to; and 3) the Miltonic paradigm of Fish, still providing a dominant pattern of interpretation within Milton studies.¹⁷ In order to distinguish between these paradigms, I think it is necessary that we define in the following section the concept of paradigm as clarified by Thomas Kuhn in the postscript to the second, enlarged edition of his groundbreaking *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970).

1.4 “With double sense deluding”: The issue of Kuhn’s paradigm

Both Herman and Rumrich have the work of the historian of science, Thomas Kuhn, in mind when using the term paradigm. Both claim that the paradigm governing Milton studies has inaugurated a period in Milton criticism analogous to what Kuhn describes as “normal science” – a condition in which practitioners expend their labors to extend and deepen a

¹⁷ It is important, however, to note that Fish’s approach proved dominant only in American universities. According to Neil FORSYTH, the “British Miltonists have been [...] immune to Fish” (2003, 72). The objection raised by British critics like Lucy Newlyn, John Carey and A. D. Nuttall has by now found its American proponents in John P. Rumrich and Peter C. Herman (both under discussion in my thesis). For details see Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), pp. 10-11; John Carey, “Milton’s Satan” in Dennis Danielson, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), pp. 131-146; A. D. Nuttall, “Everything is over before it begins,” in *The London Review of Books*, 21 June 2001, pp. 19-21.

working paradigm rather than rehash fundamental issues that it resolves (see HERMAN 2005, 6-7; RUMRICH 2006, 1-2). The main difference between Herman and Rumrich is that the first sees this paradigm in work since the very beginning of Milton criticism (or at least from the beginning of the eighteenth century, as illustrated by the debate between Bentley and Pearce), while the latter confines the working of the paradigm to the impact of Fish's work on Milton studies (regardless of the fact whether critics working in this field are oblivious to, or selectively critical of the "paradigm" set forth by Fish).

Alongside the dominant paradigm, Herman also perceives a paradigm shift commencing a period of "extraordinary research" – yet again a Kuhnian term –, characterized by "proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression on explicit discontent... and debate over fundamentals" (KUHN 1970, 91; HERMAN 2005, 20). This "extraordinary research" is initiated, according to Herman, by the influx of "guerilla Miltonists" – "outsiders" in Fish's terms – who are not Miltonists per se.¹⁸ This again seems to reaffirm the modeling of Milton studies to the pattern of the Kuhnian "normal science" for, as Herman also quotes, "the men who achieve these fundamental inventions of a new paradigm have been either very young or very new to the field whose

¹⁸ Herman has particularly David Norbrook, Leah Marcus, Michael Wilding, Richard Halpern, David Aers and Bob Hodge in mind, all of whom fall under censure in Fish's "Milton's Career and the Career of Theory." They are "not Miltonists per se" in a sense that none of them wrote a dissertation on Milton, hence, "none had to accept, as a condition of earning a doctorate, the tenets of this particular interpretative community" (HERMAN 2005, 20). Herman, citing Lee Patterson, compares Milton studies to that of medieval studies, which remained for a long time "an alien enclave within the community of literary criticism", because of the particular difficulty it poses for those who strive to earn its membership: it requires, as does Milton studies, "a long apprenticeship and values work of an intimidating technicality" (19). It is interesting to note, that while Herman lauds the paradigm shifting influx of these, so called, "guerilla Miltonists" he is exhibiting the same restrictiveness he criticizes in the mainstream Milton studies, i.e. "Master Miltonists who have endured a long and arduous apprenticeship acquiring this knowledge are unlikely to admit anyone who has not undertaken the same rigorous training to their community" (19). This is obvious from the way these non per se Miltonists appear in Herman's book: they are merely listed as such, and given a footnote per person (with the exception of Norbrook who features more prominently in Chapter 4, "'New Laws, New Counsels': The Problem of Politics in *Paradise Lost*").

paradigm they change”, primarily because “being little committed by prior practice to the traditional rules of normal science, [they] are particularly likely to see that those rules no longer define a playable game and to conceive of another set that can replace them” (KUHN 1970, 90; HERMAN 2005, 19).

However, both Herman and Rumrich seem to forget that Kuhn himself makes a clear distinction between what he calls normal science and social science. The former for Kuhn signifies the realm of natural science, whereas the latter signifies the realm comprising sociology, history, philosophy, music, graphic arts, as well as literature and theology (at least, these are his most common examples when distinguishing between the two). As I see it, the most significant difference Kuhn makes between the two sciences — especially when comparing natural science to those of music, the graphic arts and literature — is that the practitioners of the latter disciplines gain their knowledge by exposure to the works of other artist, principally earlier artists, as opposed to a student of natural sciences, who “relies mainly on the textbook until, in his third or fourth year of graduate work, he begins his own research” (KUHN 1970, 165). Even in fields of social science where textbook literature has a greater significance (Kuhn here mentions history, philosophy) the elementary course “employs parallel readings in original sources, some of them the ‘classics’ of the field, others the contemporary research reports that practitioners write for each other” whereas a student of natural science would not be required to read such works at all. As a result,

the student in any of these disciplines [i.e. literature, philosophy, etc.] is constantly made aware of the immense variety of problems that the members of his future group have, in the course of the time, attempted to solve. Even more important, he has constantly before him a number of competing and incommensurable solutions to these problems, solutions that he must ultimately evaluate for himself. (KUHN 1970, 165)

Hence, the “proliferation of competing articulations” could only be a symptom of “extraordinary research” within normal, i.e. natural science, and not, for example, Milton studies where it would occur as part of a standard procedure. Also, the recent reevaluation of William Empson’s work on Milton — seen by Herman as a recourse to a solution “at least partially anticipated during a period when there was no crisis in the corresponding science” (KUHNS 1970, 70) and, hence, indicating the shift of paradigm governing Milton studies (HERMAN 2005, 20-21) — is but a natural occurrence in the literary discipline, as described by Kuhn, where previous works will surface in the attempt of the practitioner in the field to “ultimately evaluate [them] for himself.” No such recourse is needed in natural sciences, for according to KUHNS, a student of physics would not need to read the works of Newton, Faraday, Einstein, or Schrödinger, because “everything he needs to know about these works is recapitulated in a far briefer, more precise, and more systematic form in a number of up-to-date textbooks” (1970, 165).

Kuhn allows an exception when listing famous classics of science serving as textbooks for upcoming generations of scientists, but limits this occurrence prior to the early nineteenth century when the function provided by the classics was taken over by emerging and increasingly popular textbooks. Herman in his argument lists the very same classics enumerated by Kuhn — Aristotle’s *Physica*, Ptolemy’s *Almagest*, and Newton’s *Principia* — whose role goes beyond the outlining of their author’s thinking about the universe, for in KUHNS words, they “serve for time implicitly to define the legitimate problems and methods of a research field for succeeding generations of practitioners” (1970, 10; see also in HERMAN 2005, 6). In doing so, Herman compares their influence to that of the works of “gods and demigods” of Milton studies (i.e. C. S. Lewis, Barbara K. Lewalski, E. M. W. Tillyard) “whose insight mere mortals — mere workers in the vineyards of Milton scholarship — must seek to reproduce and extend

with greater clarity and precision” (7). Again, Herman makes a serious omission that renders his comparison inappropriate given the line of his argument. While the insight of the distinguished classics of Milton studies allows, according to Herman, for mere repetition (reproduction and extension), the essential characteristics that enabled “for time” the classics mentioned by Kuhn to fulfill the function of later textbooks is (1) a sufficiently unprecedented achievement that would attract an enduring group of adherents; and more importantly (2) a open-endedness that would leave “all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve” (KUHNS 1970, 10). Herman does not conceive of such open-endedness, for his main objection to the paradigm governing Milton studies is its impetus towards closure, its compulsory reconciliation of contradictions, and its preventing “the reader from ever raising certain questions.”¹⁹ In other words, the works of the Milton illuminati may be path-breaking, but the paths they break “point in certain directions, not others, and these borders mark the limits of acceptable inquiry” (HERMAN 2005, 7).

There is another problematic aspect of applying Kuhn’s terminology to Milton studies that I wish to reflect on. As KUHNS acknowledged in the Postscript to the second edition of his book, “[s]everal of the key difficulties of my original text cluster about the concept of paradigm” (1970, 174). Namely, one of his critics noted that “the term is used in at least twenty-two different ways” (181).²⁰ Kuhn dismisses most of these differences as due to stylistic inconsistencies, but allows for two very different usages of the term that require separation. Since the term *paradigm* has assumed a life of its own and a wider application initially anticipated by Kuhn, he distinguishes the two distinct meanings of the term

¹⁹ HERMAN is here quoting C. S. Lewis (see 2005, 7).

²⁰ The critic in question is Margaret Masterman and her article “The Nature of Paradigm” in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970), pp. 59–89.

by naming them “disciplinary matrix” and “exemplar.” The first would denote that which the members of a particular community of specialists share and which “accounts for the relative fullness of their professional communication and the relative unanimity of their professional judgment” (182). Kuhn finds that the term paradigm is inappropriate for this use, and opts for the term “theory”; however, the limited connotations of the latter impel him to suggest instead another term, namely, that of “disciplinary matrix.” “[D]isciplinary’ because it refers to the common possession of the practitioners of a particular discipline; ‘matrix’ because it is composed of ordered elements of various sorts, each requiring further specification” (182). The aforementioned “exemplar” is one of the elements of the “disciplinary matrix” for which, according to Kuhn, “the term ‘paradigm’ would be entirely appropriate, both philologically and autobiographically” (whatever the later means). By “exemplars”, as the true notion of paradigm, Kuhn initially means the “concrete problem-solutions that students encounter” from the start of their education (187). Consequently, the

student discovers [...] a way to see his problem as *like* a problem he has already encountered [...] The resultant ability to see a variety of situations as like each other [...] is, I think, the main thing a student acquires by doing [or in case of a literary student, by reading] exemplary problems [...] After he has completed a certain number, which may vary widely from one individual to the next, he views the situations that confront him as a scientist in the same gestalt as other members of his specialists’ group. For him they are no longer the same situations he had encountered when his training began. He has meanwhile assimilated a time-tested and group-licensed way of seeing. (189)

Thus, from the three distinct applications of the term paradigm to Milton studies as listed earlier (see end of section 1.3.), I believe Fish’s Miltonic paradigm to be the *paradigm/exemplar* that has become *the* way of

seeing problems within Milton studies, especially among the American scholars. FISH himself offers his reading of Milton as an example: “‘read it this way [...] and see if this way of reading makes better sense of the poem than the way of reading (and there always has to be one) within which you were proceeding before’” (1997, xiv). RUMRICH, of course, sees his example to be for the worst, not in terms of “the insights that over the last three decades the paradigm made possible” but because he thinks it “seriously mistaken and, what is worse, a pedagogical disaster” (2006, 3) for treating the readers of *Paradise Lost* as continually falling victim to the booby traps within the text.²¹

For the other two applications of the term discussed earlier — i.e. the overriding paradigm of coherence governing Milton studies, and the “neo-Christian” one — two other components of the Kuhnian “disciplinary matrix” are of interest.

1.5 “Jarr not... but well consist”: The primary value of consistency

Since KUHN’s “disciplinary matrix” denotes theory in a broader sense (1970, 182) and since principle of exclusion is a significant feature expected of theories, the components of Kuhn’s “disciplinary matrix”, which I am about to discuss here, do have an exclusive quality. Because of this quality, they will seem applicable to Herman’s notion of paradigm governing Milton studies which excludes all research not in conformity with its premises.

²¹ Summarizing the effect of Fish’s reading RUMRICH says: “...*Paradise Lost* instructs rather easily duped and forgetful readers by repeatedly convicting them of sin or by obtruding measures of their crookedness” (2006, 7). In other words, Fish suggests an interpretative framework for *Paradise Lost* which requires a reader “fit” enough to follow Milton’s poem, and yet gullible enough to fall again and again for the temptation present in Satan’s figure and/or his rhetoric, or in the protean multiplicity of the poem “without learning his lesson, as if reading were less a process of illumination than an obsessive-compulsive ritual” (KERRIGAN & RUMRICH & FALLON 2007, 278). See also KERRIGAN 1983, 99 (cited on 17n12). FORSYTH even goes as far as to claim that such way of reading can appeal only to masochistic readers („A poet who keeps luring his readers into mistakes and then saying ‘Gotcha!’ is unlikely to appeal to any but masochistic students” [2003, 72]).

Shared commitments to certain beliefs. The shared commitments supply the group of specialist with “preferred or permissible analogies and metaphors”, hence, they “help determine what will be accepted as an explanation and as a puzzle-solution; conversely, they assist in the determination of the roster of unsolved puzzles and in the evaluation of the importance of each” (182).

Values. Values are more widely shared components of a disciplinary matrix, usually shared even among different communities, and Kuhn imputes them particular importance “when members of a particular community must identify crisis or, later, choose between incompatible ways of practicing their discipline” (185). I have already attempted to show how differentiating between the workings of natural sciences and social sciences has an important bearing on the application of Kuhnian terms to Milton studies. Kuhn here, as always, talks primarily about natural science, where the occurrences of incompatible ways of practicing a discipline are signs of crisis as opposed to social science where competing and incommensurable solutions to problems are constantly present and compel the practitioner of that discipline to evaluate them for her/himself (165). But even within natural sciences (the focus of Kuhn’s study) values, despite their exclusive quality, may be shared by practitioners who differ in their application. And this is especially so in case of values that are synonymous with the quality Herman focuses on, namely, coherence. As Kuhn says:

[J]udgements of simplicity, consistency, plausibility, and so on often vary greatly from individual to individual. What was for Einstein an insupportable inconsistency in the old quantum theory, one that rendered the pursuit of normal science impossible, was for Bohr and others a difficulty that could be expected to work itself out by normal means... In short, though values are widely shared by scientists and though commitment to them is both deep and constitutive of science, the application of values is sometimes considerably affected by the features of

individual personality and biography that differentiates the members of the group. (1970, 185)

As I see it, the overriding paradigm described by Herman to govern Milton studies is in fact a value component of its disciplinary matrix. And since consistency is a primary value (KUHNS 1970, 186), striving for it is not an exclusive feature of Milton studies, nor is it a conspiratorial procedure of its elite to exclude all unorthodox readings. As a matter of fact, Herman unwittingly applies the same premises he is criticizing in his book. In *Destabilizing Milton* HERMAN'S key expression is *incertitude* because he believes that "in the aftermath of the Revolution, the critical sensibility that Milton championed throughout his career led him to engage in a wholesale questioning of just about everything he had argued for in his earlier prose works, and *he does not come to a conclusion*" (2005, 21 – italics by the author). He puts a great emphasis on Milton not coming to a conclusion, as if that alone would go contrary to the premises of coherence he finds so barring and limiting. And yet, while he might reject the task "to make the poem cohere", he also arrives at a coherent conclusion although on a larger scale. Namely, Herman makes coherence between Milton and the poem or, rather, between what Milton experiences in the wake of the Revolution and what he expresses in his poem. "[P]rompted by his vast disillusionment caused by the Restoration, Milton extends this [i.e. caustic] skepticism even to God, and questions what he had previously held to be unquestionable, that is, divine justice" (23). Herman perhaps leaves the perceived controversies within the poem intact and unresolved, but he is still attempting to find an explanation for their presence outside the poem, and by that he is striving at coherence just as Bentley and Pearce were striving at.

Let us indulge in bit longer consideration of a telling example. When defining the "poetics of incertitude" as the most significant feature of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, HERMAN sees Milton's penchant for "or" as a

connective to be decisive of his “strategy of inventing comparisons that invite multiple and contradictory interpretations rather than guiding the reader to a precise ‘quality’” (2005, 27), its omnipresence suggesting that “Milton conceives of his narrative in terms of choice – in terms of A *or* B, this *or* that” (44). Herman is quick to enlarge the scope of possibilities laying in the connective “or” for it “complicates or deconstructs the notion of stable binary opposition because the word can mean *both* similarity as well as difference... [and] can also mean ‘and’” (44). To illustrate Milton’s strategy in using similes interlarded with *ors*, Herman cites a number of metaphoric passages from the First Book of *Paradise Lost* (1.196-200; 1.300-313; 1.767-777; 1.594-600). One of them, the Vallombrosa simile, will serve the purpose of illustration:

... he [Satan] stood and call’d
 His Legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans’t
 Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks
 In Vallombrosa, where th’ Etrurian shades
 High overarch’t imbower; or scatterd sedge
 Afloat, when with fierce Winds Orion arm’d
 Hath vext the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves orethrew
 Busiris and his Memphian Chivalry,
 While with perfidious hatred they pursu’d
 The Sojourners of Goshen, who beheld
 From the safe shore thir floating Carkases
 And broken Chariot Wheels, so thick bestrown
 Abject and lost lay these, covering the Flood,
 Under amazement of thir hideous change. (1.300-313)

There is a staggering complexity to these lines that has made it an oft cited example of Miltonic similes.²² For the present purposes, however,

²² Harold Bloom’s “Milton and his Precursors” (originally published in *A Map of Misreading* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975] and reprinted in BLOOM, ed. *Milton* [2004]) gives an elaborate reading of the simile in light of Milton’s “transumptive allusions.” He calls the fallen-leaves part

I will limit my exploration to the “contradiction” in it, as perceived and expounded by Herman. The simile compares Satan’s legions, the “Angel Forms” laying entranced in Hell, to fallen leaves (“Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks / In *Vallombrosa*”), to storm-scattered seaweed (“scattered sedge / Afloat”) and to the Egyptian army drowned in Red Sea (“floting Carcases / And broken Chariot Wheels” of “*Busiris* and his *Memphian* Chivalry”). The last two comparisons align with the expectation of the readers, that is, emphasizing the helplessness and defeat of the fallen angels (simultaneously making a forward and backward chronological move, for the fallen angels point toward the defeat of the “*Memphian* Chivalry”, while the latter, in its role of a comparison, points back and, at the same time, ahead prefiguring the ultimate destruction of the rebel angels). However, by specifying the strewn autumnal leaves as being that of a lovely, shady place near Florence, in Vallombrosa, Milton invites, in Herman words, “an open-ended conversation between positive and negative resonances” (2005, 32). For although the image of fallen leaves is traditionally employed in epics for the numberless dead²³, and the name “Vallombrosa” etymologically (valley of shadow) alluding to a well know passage in Psalm 23 (“the valley of the shadow of death”), Herman, in order to sustain the contradiction, is strenuously emphasizing the positive connotations of Vallombrosa²⁴ by referring to Milton’s positive experiences while in Italy. The strenuousness of his effort is evident in

“the subtlest [transumption of the passage 1.283-313], and the one most worthy of Milton’s greatness” because Milton “tropes here on the tropes of Isaiah, Homer, Virgil and Dante, and with the Orion allusion on Job and Virgil. The series is capped by the references to Exodus and Ovid, with the equation of Busiris and Satan. This movement from fallen leaves to starry influence over storms to the overwhelming of a tyrannous host is itself a kind of transumption, as Milton moves from metonymy to metonymy before accomplishing a final reduction” (2004, 15). A cluster of essays on Vallombrosa can be found in *Milton in Italy* (1991) edited by Mario A. Di CESARE: MULDER 61-70; HARRIS 71-95; HUTTAR 95-112; CHANEY 113-46. See also FISH 1997, 36; FORSYTH 2003, 100-103; and SHERRY 2010, 231-233.

²³ Homer, *Il.* 6.145-50; Vergil, *Aen.* 6.310-319; Dante *Inf.* 3.100-120. See also Isaiah 34:4.

²⁴ Forsyth also notes the possibility of ambivalence in the name “Vallombrosa” but concludes that the dominant mood of the simile “is still perhaps one of nostalgic regret for the passing of summer (the angels’ time in Heaven)” (2003, 102).

referring to Roland Mushat Frye for support of Vallombrosa's "quite positive" reputation (2005, 32). However, all we gather from FRYE is that the "trees in Vallombrosa in Milton's time were not deciduous" as evinced by Della Bella's engraving of Vallombrosa (1637) picturing nothing but evergreen trees (1978, 94). Therefore what matters, in Frye's words, "is surely not Milton's fidelity to the regional botany of Vallombrosa, but rather his evocation in a lovely musical phrase of an effective visual image redolently appropriate to his epic sense" (94). Unlike Herman, Beverley Sherry's kin ear catches the musicality of the phrase, for "'Vallombrosa' resonates especially, phonetically and semantically, with 'Autumnal Leaves', and is a key word, with its even rhythm, vowels, and liquid and voiced consonants" (2010a, 232).²⁵ Indeed, the very problem with Herman's reading of *Paradise Lost* is that he ignores it as a poem and instead treats it, as Sherry notes, "not unlike a document in prose" (2010a, 231). The lack of the ability and/or willingness to listen to the poem, on the one hand, hinders Herman in hearing the "sound of sense" Sherry is talking about, but, on the other hand, the mere reading (and by reading here I mean silent reading) of it allows for the leisure of "excursions down the back alleys of an image" (Adams 1955, 122) that will supply Herman with the contradictory notions necessary to support his claim of poetic incertitude. As Richard WASWO notes in *Language and meaning in the Renaissance*:

The interpreter's liberty to select and impose [...] contexts, consciously or unconsciously, is of course greater in case of writing than in speech, where a concrete situation and the presence of the speaker impose constraints and provides opportunities that do not exist in reading. (1987, 15)

I believe Waswo's observation to be true even in a case when a poem is read aloud (although not necessarily performed or dramatized), and

²⁵ Sherry in her article "Milton, Materialism, and the sound of *Paradise Lost*" imputes fundamental importance to the vocal and aural qualities of words, saying, that in "the cosmos which he depicts, Milton emphasizes the corporeality of sound and thus implicitly encourages us to hear and speak the poem" (2010a, 224) instead of just read it.

the chief interpretative constrain being that of time (the duration of it in the recital), which simply proves to be insufficient for such divergent reflections as Herman offers in his reading.²⁶ Of course, he is far from deliberately imposing any of the contexts/notions he comes across this way, for that would be succumbing to the practice of criticism he is criticizing in his book. And yet, staying open to all interpretative possibilities will impeach Herman's claim, namely, that Milton deliberately – for strategy implies deliberation – uses comparisons that invite contradictions which, consequently, plunge the readers of *Paradise Lost* into the same wholesale questioning (of just about everything, at least in regard to the poem's meaning) that Milton as a poet experiences in the aftermath of the English Revolution. For in the case of the fallen-leaves simile, open-endedness would mean allowing the name "Vallombrosa" to have positive and negative connotations, or simply an aural and/or ornamental²⁷ role in the epic. In all instances, except for the first, the contradiction so crucial to Herman's thesis would cease to exist, for although he confines the contradiction to be within the very name of Vallombrosa, what sets it apart as a possible locus of contradiction is the rest of the extended simile, namely, its definitively helpless (storm scattered seaweeds) and negative (the "*Memphian Chivalry*") elements.

²⁶ Nor would it suffice to develop a reader's experience as complex as Fish describes in his method. Waswo's observation aligns with Walter J. Ong's observation put forth in his seminal work on *Orality and Literacy* (1982) where he emphasizes the relationship of "study" to writing/reading (in which context we must see reading as an "abstractly sequential, classificatory, explanatory examination of phenomena or of stated truth" and not so much as an oral performance of a written material [2005, 8]). I will return to the implications of both Waswo's and Ong's observation in the Conclusion.

²⁷ The aural function of the Vallombrosa name is convincingly demonstrated by Sherry (2010a). Robert Martin Adams argues that certain images employed by Milton might be seen as serving simply a decorative end, although, he does argue for this in opposition to Empson whom he finds (quite contrary to Herman) ignoring certain elements of Milton's similes not serving his purpose. I find Adams' observation particularly pertinent to Herman's reading of *Paradise Lost*: "Every successful excursion down the back alleys of an image implies a long series of unsuccessful or incongruous ones. If no image can serve a simply decorative end until we have exhausted all its conceivable thematic implications, reading an epic will be like panning for gold in thin territory, our chief emotional response will be profound boredom and occasional mild surprise" (122).

Milton in the *Art of Logic* warns against interpreting metaphors too liberally or, as Adams says, exhausting “all its conceivable thematic implications” (1955, 122):

Warning, however, should be given that the likes whether of short or full form are not to be urged beyond the quality which the man making the comparison intended to show as the same in both [...] whence came the saying of the schools: “Nothing similar is identical; likeness does not run four feet; every likeness hobbles.” (195; in HERMAN 2005, 26)

HERMAN, despite quoting this caution, maintains that “Milton embraces the very capacity to generate multiple and contradictory meanings that he warns against in the *Art of Logic*” (2005, 26)²⁸ which would of course illustrate Milton’s own inconsistency. However, there is a great defect to Herman’s thesis in general, namely, its referential nature and I will explain this by precluding my own thesis.

1.6 “Grateful vicissitude”: Finding a place for the “forces of difference”

FISH concluded his second preface to *Surprised by Sin* by sketching the possible avenues left open in his argument, although, confessing that he is unable to think of any that would cause the structure of his reading to tremble (for it would require “objections as massive [...] as the structure itself” [1997, lxvi]). What he can think of, however, “is a way of characterizing [his] reading of the poem that finds place (of sorts) for what

²⁸ I find this somewhat ironic, because Herman claims that the recent reevaluation of Empson’s controversial *Milton’s God* (in works of Rumrich, Victoria Silver and Michael Bryson) is a sign of the paradigm shift he lauds (2005, 20-21). The irony lies in the fact, that Empson’s main argument in *Milton’s God* was directed against the „neo-Christian” bias of scholars, whom he blamed for “overstatement of Milton’s orthodoxy and understatement of the sincerity of his epic theodicy” (Rumrich 2006, 1). That is, Empson took Milton and his intention of “justifying the ways of God to man” at face value (“If you realize that Milton was really worried about the official subject of his poem, you find the poetry very genuine” [Empson 1981, 287]), something that Herman obviously is not prepared to do when it comes to Milton’s *Art of Logic*.

it seems to exclude or sell short, the force of difference” (lxvi). As a matter of fact, Fish’s own effort in *How Milton Works* was to find such place for diversity in his Miltonic paradigm, but for most of his critics, it proved to be just as “suffocating” as the structure of his argument in *Surprised by Sin*. As already noted, Fish is quite happy to acknowledge the presence of those “forces of difference” in Milton’s work but only if subject to an “act of containment” (lxvi):

[W]hy, one might ask, is the poetry so full of what it finally asks us to affirm against? The answer is that the lesson he would teach us – that we must forsake the letter for the spirit – can be taught only in the discursive forms the letter provides. Those forms are at once the vehicles of our instruction and the habitation of temptation – that is, of the temptation to take them seriously for themselves rather than as instruments of a supreme pedagogical intention [...] There is, then, a double game going on in the poetry and the prose, but it is a doubleness impelled by the desire for its own erasure. (FISH 2001, 15).²⁹

²⁹ In this Fish reaffirms the thesis he calls “The Aesthetic of the Good Physician” described in *Self-Consuming Artifacts. The Experience of the Seventeenth-Century Literature* (1972). Whether Fish’s method produces or recovers the experience he is talking about does not matter here. What counts, is that the text offering a dialectical literary presentation (and Fish believes *Paradise Lost* to be such a text) is “the vehicle of its own abandonment” once the reader comes to the point where she/he is “beyond the aid that discursive or rational forms can offer” (1972, 3). Hence, the title of his study (*Self-Consuming Artifacts*) is intended in two senses: “the reader’s self (or at least his inferior self) is consumed as he responds to the medicinal purging of the dialectician’s art, and that art, like other medicines, is consumed in the working of its own best effects. The good physician aesthetic, then, is finally an anti-aesthetic, for it disallows to its productions the claims usually made for verbal art – that they reflect, or contain or express Truth – and transfers the pressure and attention from the work to its effects, from what is happening on the page to what is happening in the reader. A self-consuming artifact signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points *away* from itself to something its forms cannot capture. If this is not anti-art, it is surely anti-art-for-art’s sake because it is concerned less with the making of better poems than with the making of better persons” (3-4). In *How Milton Works* Fish describes this self-consumption (building on Freud’s hypothesis that “all instincts tend towards the restoration of an earlier stage of things” [1961, 31]) as a striving that aspires to “an end to striving, an end to the accidental variations that mark its regrettable busyness, an end to the departure from a still center that remains the only true source of life.” If only one substitutes “for Freud’s organicist vocabulary the vocabulary of theology, and for his materialist story the story of creation, sin, redemption, and reunion” one comes to a perfect description of Milton’s thought and work, says Fish (2001, 2). I am under the impression that Fish’s thesis bears a resemblance to Barth’s obsession with the pointing figure of John the Baptist on the *Crucifixion* scene of Matthias Grünewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece, for Barth’s exegesis on Romans can,

Many of his critics before and after have objected to this notion by pointing to the conflicting, inconclusive, polysemous and paradoxical nature of Milton's work. Fish refuses them as decisive qualities of Milton's work because it would mean reinstating and reinvoking "the dualism Milton so often rejects" and forgetting "the first principle of Milton's thought – that God is God and not one of a number of contending forces" (14). In addition, Fish also criticizes in "Why Milton Matters; Or, Against Historicism" (2005) the predominant interest of present Milton scholarship in the "constant adjustment of his [Milton's] political thought in early modern Britain and Europe" – an interest shared by Herman himself. Fish, on the one hand, admits that this scholarship is "best because it is scrupulous, well informed, wide-ranging, illuminating, full of insights, pathbreaking", but on the other hand, he claims that "in the exercise of those virtues the authors of this scholarship pick up the stick from the wrong end" (2005, 1-2). And this is what he means by picking up the stick from the wrong end:

If what is important is Milton's place in the history of political thought, the form taken by his political reflections will be a matter of (at most) secondary interest. If you think of Milton as being in competition with Thomas Hobbes, John Harrington, John Locke, John Lilburne, William Prynne – a competition he would most likely lose – the fact that he wrote in verse will no doubt be noted, but will not take center stage, and the history of poetic convention – along with the imperatives for performance encoded in those conventions and the meaning-making recipes they provide – will first become background and then, after a while, fade from sight; and fading with them will be any recollection of why – as an

indeed, be seen as an example of a theological substitution of Freud's organicist vocabulary Fish recommends in grasping Milton: "[T]emporal things deliver their message precisely as they withdraw and decrease and die in the presence of that eternity in which every finite thing is comprehended. [...] The temporal holiness of the saints is the service that they render to the eternal holiness of God; it is, as Grünewald has depicted it, the witness of John the Baptist to that which lies beyond the line of death" (BARTH 1968, 131).

instance of what general purpose – Milton wrote these things in the first place. (2-3)³⁰

It is also worth noting, that proponents of such historicist reading are also the ones arguing for textual indeterminacy, and yet the sheer referentiality of their reading – things that Milton wrote matter because they point to some or several historical and/or political significances – is what limits and undercuts the open-end quality of Milton’s writing despite their efforts to advance multiple references. How so? Let us proceed from what WASWO, in *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, tells about our assumptions on how language means. Such assumptions are our most basic assumptions “for they impose themselves on everything language talks about” (1987, 21). First of all, he distinguishes two distinct sets of assumptions: the dualistic and the monistic. A dualistic assumption separates the meanings and the use of words by locating the meaning in the things the words “represent” or “refer to.” Hence, the language presents us “with a self-contained exterior world before which it is obliged to become transparent, as if thought existed apart from its expression, as if facts existed apart from values, as if our minds existed apart from our bodies” (21). A monistic assumption, on the contrary, identifies meaning with the use of words, consequently the language showing us “the interpenetration between itself and a world before which it can be anything but transparent – as thoughts, facts, and minds are themselves brought into existence by the language that embodies them” (21). In other words, the dualistic assumption is the referential one, and due to its nature, restricts the possibilities of language by making it a container of an independently fixed content. The monistic assumption, on the contrary, regards language as a

³⁰ And yet it is Fish’s *How Milton Works* Beverley Sherry singles out as “typical in its minimal concern for the way Milton works with formal elements of writing” for she claims him preoccupied with “the logic and rigor of Milton’s moral thought” (HALE 2007, 17n11; see also FISH 2001, 577n13). Herman would no doubt see in this another sign of Fish’s protean shifting stance.

creative agent constructing “its own protean meanings” and is what in respect to meaning Waswo calls relational.³¹

What comes as a surprise, is how Waswo’s and Fish’s explanations of dualistic/monistic assumptions — Waswo’s in language, Fish’s in Milton studies — come to have a profoundly different effect.³² In WASWO’s use *monist* becomes a creative characteristic of language assumption, for it refers to the unity of meaning and words:³³ meaning *becoming* something we discern in the use of words and not *being* something that words signify, or refer to, or represent. This way, meaning is not placed outside and independent of words as in a dualistic assumption, but is coextensive with their operation. Consequently, meaning as a reference is a thing; meaning as function is activity and, as such, cannot be static or simple. The benefit of a “monistic language assumption” or “relational semantic” is that it does not sanction “one mode of interpretation that looks beyond the text to achieve closure” but “multiple modes of interpretation that look at the text to discover the plural and perhaps competing networks of relations that determine its meanings at all level” (WASWO 1987, 14). In FISH, however, it is the other way around. Critics like Lucy Newlyn, David Mikics, Catharine Belsey, John Rogers and many others, in Fish’s words, “reinstate and reinvoke” dualism, an assumption or position from which Milton

³¹ Much of the analytic, critical and hermeneutic philosophy of our time is the rejection of the long standing tradition of referential semantics. As WASWO notes, “[t]he motives and consequences of this rejection, as derived in the later work of Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, have... been argued at length by Richard Rorty... and is based on the linguistic insight that a number of contemporary thinkers from quite different traditions share with Saussure: that language does not reflect one world but shapes many, and that meaning is consequently not the discovery of ‘unique referents’ but the examination of ‘current practices’” (1987, 18)

³² Actually, it comes as a surprise only if we consider the word “monism” referentially and not relationally.

³³ It seems glaringly inappropriate to make an observation so steep with referential semantics WASWO is at pains to deconstruct, however, since he readily admits the immense difficulty of the shift from referential to relational semantics – for „it requires us to criticize and find alternatives for the very categories, given to us by language, that we use to talk about language” (1987, 23) – I am content to be merely aware of the referential use of my language. Especially, since I am not about to find such alternative language categories that would allow for a pure relational discourse on language, but, instead, suggesting the complementary nature of referential and relational semantics.

“poetry can be seen as conflicted or tragic or inconclusive or polysemous or paradoxical, words that name literary qualities most of us have been thought to admire” (2001, 14). Fish, on the contrary, sees Milton’s works to be full of moments that “mime the logic of monism”, that is, moments “in which the affirmation of variety is immediately countered by the imposition of unity and the insistence on an underlying sameness” (1997, xxi). And this notion of monism, says Fish, “gives coherence to Milton’s thought and provides some of its most attractive features”, but it is at the same time “the source of the resistance and dissatisfaction felt by so many readers” (mostly of Fish and not necessarily of Milton).

The above instance is a telling illustration of how meaning differs in a different context (etymological/linguistical vs. theological/ideological) in which the word monism/dualism is used. My principal aim in the thesis is to reapply Waswo’s use to Fish’s claim or, rather, to what I see as Milton’s assumption about language, and how he employs vicissitude afforded by language in *Paradise Lost*. This way I hope to find a place for “the forces of difference” in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* that would prove more liberating than Fish’s constraining notion which allows these differences a mere cameo roles that are bound to consume themselves in Milton’s poetry and prose. In this attempt, however, I will decline the notions of incertitude and indeterminacy pervasive in Milton studies today and, instead, will interpret the multiple levels of meaning present in Milton as functions of fecundity rather than tokens of incertitude. For one, I believe this discernment of incertitude in Milton to be partly an abusive projection of our own intellectual instabilities. Milton in particular and the Renaissance in general, saw mobility and stability, openness and closure, diversity and unity as simultaneous postulations and necessarily compensatory principles in light of which it would be naïve to think that a work of art could be absolutely accomplished and rigid in its perfection (given the right way of reading), or absolutely versatile, open to all and any intervention. And two,

although, I see how one might be tempted to see textual indeterminacy as a legitimate protest against a(ny) form of textual overdeterminacy institutionalized by academies, I agree with Waswo, that social and linguistic conventions within which the text is reinvested with meaning renders the notion of textual indeterminacy “oddly perverse.” For, as he says,

[w]ithout relations there can be no semantics; without systems, contexts, and conventions, no meaning. The actual issue in genuine arguments about interpretation is not the “express words” of the text considered in either putative vacuum or a postulated infinity. The real issue is rather how and why we select contexts, employ assumptions, and apply conventions to surround the text with the fictions that enable us, in the ceaseless historical dialogue of glosses on glosses, to construct and reconstruct meaning. (WASWO 1987, 303)

Given that his claim was made almost twenty five years ago only proves how, indeed, the change transpiring “the gated community of Milton criticism” and championing such indeterminacy is late in its coming. Nevertheless, it is not completely blind to its shortcomings, although, exuberant in its zeal. Therefore, far from being a lonely voice trying to achieve a harmony out of cacophonous din of extreme notes of diversity and unity, I will join a chorus of Milton scholars “intermixt with Voice / Choral or Unison” (7.598-599).

2 Proteus, a proverb of versatile mutability¹

For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness.

2 Corinthians 11:14-15

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more [...] I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

1 Corinthians 9:19, 22

2.1 The emblem of depravity

In Shakespeare's Henry VI, the third part, Richard III while still the Duke of Gloucester conceives his hope of become a king from his flair for dissimulation:

Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,
And cry "Content!" to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.

¹ The title of this chapter is borrowed from John GAULE's *The Mag-astro-mancer, or the Magicall-Astrological-Diviner posed and puzzled* (1652, 316; in BURNS 2001, 978).

I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
 I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
 I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
 Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could
 And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
 I can add colors to the chameleon,
 Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
 And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
 Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
 Tut, were I farther off, I'll pluck it down. (III. ii.182-195)

The ambitious villain of Shakespeare's *Histories* likens himself to a great array of prodigies in deceit: from mermaid to basilisk, from Ulysses to Sinon, from chameleon to Proteus, concluding the list with Machiavelli. Two of these – the chameleon and Proteus (the latter being the focus of this chapter) – are of particular interest, partly because of their frequent appearance in Renaissance literature and partly, because, they are not bent on harm unlike the other deceivers from the Duke's list. The old man of the sea, Proteus, does not lure sailors into watery graves, nor does a chameleon possess the lethal gaze of a basilisk. They do not ruin cities like Sinon, nor do they educate princes in deceit, and they certainly share not the repute of Odysseus of being "formidable for guile in peace and war" (Hom.*Od.* 9.21; trans. Fitzgerald). What they have in common, however, is their metamorphic power, their ability to change.

The two most elaborated narratives of the Proteus myth can be found in Homer's *Odyssey* and Vergil's fourth *Georgic*. In the *Odyssey*, book four, we read of Menelaus relating his return from the Trojan War to Telemachus. When thwarted by an angry god at the shores of Egypt, he is advised by Eidothea, the daughter of Proteus, to seek advice from her father to learn the identity of the god he must appease. Not one to volunteer help, however, Proteus must first be sized to be questioned, therefore, Eidothea

divulges to Menelaus “all the wizard wiles of that old man” and how to take hold of him:

First, he will count the seals, and go over them; but when he has told them all off by fives, and beheld them, he will lay himself down in their midst, like a shepherd among his flocks of sheep. Now so soon as you see him laid to rest, then let your hearts be filled with strength and courage, and hold him there despite his striving and struggling to escape. For try he will, and will assume all shapes of all things that move upon the earth, and of water, and of wondrous blazing fire. Yet hold him unflinchingly and grip him more tightly still. But when at length of his own will he speaks and questions you in that shape in which you saw him laid to rest, then, hero, cease from force, and set the old man free, and ask him who of the gods is angry with you, and of your return, how thou may go over the fish-filled sea.

(Hom. *Od.* 4.410-424)

Accordingly, Proteus when captured turns into “all shapes of all things”, first into “a bearded lion, and then into a serpent, and a leopard, and a huge boar; then he turned into flowing water, and into a tree, high and leafy.” At the end, weary of multiple transformations, the old man of the sea returns to his native shape ready to answer Menelaus’ questions (Hom. *Od.* 4.456-461).

In the fourth *Georgic*, Vergil fames Proteus as a seer revered by nymphs and old Nereus for knowing all things: “both those which are / And have been, or which time hath yet to bring.” In this narrative, the “Caerulean Proteus” is bid to show the cause for the sickness of Aristaeus’ bees yet here too force must be applied in order to gain advice: “For save by force / No rede will he vouchsafe, nor shalt thou bend / His soul by praying.” And he is not easy to hold captive either, for “divers forms and bestial semblances” will mock the captor’s grasp. Proteus

will change

To brisly boar, fell tigress, dragon scaled,
And tawny-tufted lioness, or send forth

A crackling sound of fire, and so shake of
The fetters, or in showery drops anon
Dissolve and vanish. But the more he shifts
His endless transformations...

(Verg. *G.* 4.387-414)

the more must the advice-seeker clench his bonds, until Proteus returns to the shape he was first caught in.

Although reluctant to volunteer help or advice, in none of the instances above does Proteus use his power of metamorphosis to do harm; he merely attempts to escape his captors. Nevertheless, in English Renaissance literature – particularly in the diatribes against the theatre – his ability or power is associated with deceit. Therefore, Proteus becomes not merely a name or an attribute of duplicitous characters² but the very synonym of an actor, as in Philip MASSINGER's *Believe As You List* (1631), where these two aspects merge in Titus Flaminius' pondering about the necessity to show himself "a Protean actor varijnge everie shape / With the occasion" (43). But to understand the extent to which the use of the adjective "protean" became pejorative, one needs to see what propelled the outbursts of the English anti-theatrical writers in the Renaissance.³

As the symbol, or, as some would see it, the sheer manifestation of "irrational forces threatening chaos" (BARISH 1981, 115) the theater and its protean actors undermined the belief in absolute sincerity, which in turn was a notion derived from the prevalent concept of absolute identity. In an

² See for example the faithless friend, Proteus, in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1590/1591) or the shifty Sir John Wrotham's claim in *The Life of Sir John Oldcastle* to have "as many shapes as *Proteus* had / That still when any villainy is done, / There may none suspect it was sir John" (I.ii.132-314).

³ The following section of this chapter was first published in a paper entitled "The Antitheatrical Iago" (Kocic 2006, 107-119). Jonas BARISH's *Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981) provides a superbly elaborated documentation and analysis of such prejudice from its Platonical foundations and its significant manifestations among the Greeks to the theatre of Ibsen, Brecht, Pirandello, and Handke. See especially chapter four, "Puritans and Proteans" (80-131). The reason I digress into the topic of antitheatricality to some depth is that it provides a basis for my critical remark on Waswo's notion of "cosmetic" vs. "constitutive" view or mode of language (see section 3.5.).

argument built on religious foundation, William PRYNNE, the contemporary of Milton⁴ and the author of *Histriomastix, the Players Scourge, or Actors Tragedie* (1633), wrote:

For God, who is truth itselfe, in whom there is no variablenesse, no shadow of change no feign, no hypocrisie; as he hath given a uniforme distinct and proper being to every creature, the bounds of which may not be exceeded: so he requires that the actions of every creature should be honest and sincere, devoyde of all hypocrisie, as all his actions, and their natures are. Hence he enjoy[n]es all men at all times, to be such in shew, as they are in truth: to seeme that outwardly which they are inwardly; to act themselves, not others... (in BARISH 1981, 92)⁵

Given this line of thought, “theatrical impersonation impiously subverts one’s God given identity and place in the sexual and social order and counters the biblical mandate to imitate Christ in all things” (WHITE 1993, 140).

One could easily be led to think, that this fear of God’s ordained identity being threatened by protean actors is merely a product of the rising Calvinist doctrine of predestination.⁶ However, it is worth noting that its foundation has been laid on the Aristotelian philosophy of continuity between all living things, according to which plants, animals, and man – i.e. all things which are alive or “ensouled” (*empsychos*) – “belong on a

⁴ But also an opponent. SHAWCROSS in his “Survey of Milton’s Prose Works”, mentions Prynne’s pamphlet, *Twelve Considerable Serious Questions touching Church Government* (September 16, 1644) as being among the first reactions against Milton’s *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) (297). “[T]he late dangerous increase of many Anabaptisticall, Antinomian, hereticall, Atheisticall opinions, as of the soules mortality, *divorce at pleasure*, &c lately broached, preached, printed in this famous City, which I hope our grand Councell will speedily and carefully suppress” (PRYNNE 1644, 7). Milton had reason to believe that Prynne, along with Herbert Palmer and Joseph Caryl, was part of a “Champarty”, or cabal, of erstwhile comrades in Parliament that directed the writing and production of the full-scale anonymous *An Answer to a Book, Intituled, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (Oct 31, 1644) (LUXON, introduction to *Colasterion*). On Prynne’s anti-theatricality see also LEWALSKI 2000, 58.

⁵ The same notion can be traced back to Plato’s *Republic* (434b-d) too, so it cannot be reduced to Christian thought alone.

⁶ Indeed, JEANNERET will compare the distance between Pico della Mirandola’s and Pierre Viret’s notion of protean metamorphosis as being “as great as that from Catholicism to Protestantism, from liberty to predestination” (2001, 165).

continuum, where matter is progressively organized in a hierarchy, with each function higher up the chain presupposing those functions which operate on a lower level” (COTTINGHAM 1998, 238-239).⁷ This notion of Aristotle bequeaths another important concept prevalent in Renaissance, namely, the concept of the unity of soul and body. For in the Aristotelian conception of the soul, which is always lurking beneath the surface of scholastic doctrine, there is “an integral connection between soul and body. Soul is to body as form is to matter,” namely, that “a given set of functions (locomotion, digestion, sensation) depends on the relevant parts of the body being ‘informed’ or organized in a certain fashion”(238)⁸ The following paragraphs will show how these inherited concepts vested in Christian thought played implicitly a cardinal role in the charges of anti-theatrical writers.

For, it is in a rather complex way that “theatrical impersonation impiously subverts one’s God given identity and place in the sexual and social order.” Starting from the external to the internal, there is, first of all, the problem of apparel. The sumptuary laws, dictated by both the national and local government, and legislating what items of dress could be worn by various ranks of people, were enacted in the spirit of the above mentioned notions that demanded a stability of one’s identity as well as the stability of relations among members of different sexual and social orders. And

⁷ There is, by all means, a distinctive Judeo-Christian course of the running argument that explains the hierarchical arrangement of beings with God’s sovereign intention. Thus in the frequently quoted Elizabethan homily entitled “Exhortacion concerning Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates” it reads: “Almightie God hath created and appointed all thinges in heaven, yearth and waters in a moste excellent and perfect ordre... Every degree of people, in their vocacion, calling and office, hath appointed to them their duetie and ordre. Some are in high degree, some in lowe, some kynges and princes, some inferiors and subjects, priestes and laimen, masters and servauntes, fathers and children, husbandes and wives, riche and poore, and every one hath need of other... Where there is no right ordre, there reigneth all abuse, carnall libertie, enormitie, syn and babilonical confusion.” (RAYNOLDS 1997, 147).

⁸ Michael SCHOENFELDT in his *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* also cautions that “the psychological inwardness” often associated “with the most valued works of Renaissance” and stemming from the conception of body-soul unity and humoral theory is “not the dry recounting of Aristotle or Galen that it is often construed to be” – and as my own statement would lead some to think so – “but rather a remarkable blend of textural authority and a near-poetic vocabulary of felt corporeal experience” (2001, 1; 3).

although the concern with the proper standard of dress was by no means confined to the stage alone,⁹ it was there that it rose to alarming heights. As CERASANO notes:

Accounts of the Elizabethan theater are replete with references to the sumptuary laws and the frequent complaints against players who “jett in their silks” thus aping their social betters. Finally the playing companies were capable of purchasing clothing that individual actors were legally prohibited from wearing except on the stage where they impersonated those who had sold them the clothes, thus “borrowing” both robe and title. (1994, 55)¹⁰

The issue at question, however, goes beyond simple borrowing of “robe and title.” Paraphrasing Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-two, Phillip STUBBES writes: “Apparel was giuen vs as a signe distinctiue to discern betwixt sex and sex, & therefore on to wear the Apparel of another sex is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the verities of his own kinde” (1583, 73). It seems that by borrowing an apparel of a different gender one put one’s own gender in jeopardy, for the act meant participation “with the same” with consequential adulteration of one’s own true nature. This opinion was not limited to instances of cross-dressing, for as Peter STALLYBRASS argues: “In their assumption of clothes from court and church, the actors put the *meaning* of these clothes in crisis” because the “clothing *could* carry the absent body, memory, genealogy, as well as literal and material value” (306, 310; in STREET 9).

⁹ Stephen GOSSON’s remarks are of general concern lamenting the vanity of human nature that tends to transgress the limits enforced by sumptuary laws: “How often hath her Maiestie with the graue aduise of her honorable Councell, sette downe the limits of apparel to euery degree, and how soone againe hath the pride of our harts ouerflowed the chanel?”

¹⁰ At this point it is important to note that there is a significant difference between private and public theaters. For while the private theater did not display a capacity to redefine the place or power of their audience (mostly because the court masque was produced and performed by and for aristocracy and state officials, thus being “an exclusive affair designed to entertain, reflect, and consolidate its privileged audience”) the public theater contained a transversal power because it had an extraordinary range of social and cultural references enacted before an audience of heterogeneous social and economic background (RAYNOLDS 1997, 153-4).

But even more disconcerting and dangerous than the “borrowed robes” were the different roles enacted by the actors. The actual danger of becoming what one acts is amply demonstrated in Thomas HEYWOOD’s recount of an incident, when Julius Caesar in the role of Hercules actually killed the actor playing his enemy in the performance of *Hercules Furens*:

[A]lthough he was, as our tragedians use, but seemingly to kill him by some false imagined wound, yet was Caesar so extremely carried away with the violence of his practised fury, and by the perfect shape of the madnesse of Hercules, to which he had fashioned all his active spirits, that he slew him dead at his foot, and after swoong him, terque quaterque (as the poet says) about his head. (1612, 45)

John GREEN, responds to Heywood by concluding that “[t]he form that consists in the Actor, is the parts they play,” (1615, 56; in REYNOLDS 1997, 155), suggesting that the actor in fact becomes the role he plays. Moreover, as Anthony Munday puts it, “are they [players] not commonlie such kind of men in their conversation, as they are in profession? Are they not variable in hart, as they are in their part?” (BARISH 1981, 104). Munday’s rhetorical, and let us add derogatory, questions presume that by playing different roles the actor’s own nature, penetrated by various role-playing, would be lacking the principal virtue lauded throughout the Elizabethan era: constancy. For constancy resembles God, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1.17) and, thus, it serves as a rule of how close or, for that matter, distanced one is from God. To change is to fall, or as BARISH puts it, “to reenact the first change whereby Lucifer renounced his bliss and man alienated himself from the Being in whose unchanging image he was created” (1981, 105).¹¹

¹¹ BARISH, of course, notes that consistency is valued even in ill-doing, just as changeability is despised even in virtue. As he says, “Queen Elizabeth’s motto, *Semper eadem*, speaks only of the certainty with which she can be counted on to remain herself. Not of the nature of that self” (105). One should also note, that constancy is not a uniquely sixteenth-century favorite virtue, for it is precisely the resoluteness of Milton’s Satan not to “repent or change” (*PL* 1.96) that makes him a champion with the poets of Romanticism.

Consequently, the actor “becomes a lively image of fallen man, the one who renews the primal degradation every day of his life, and so places himself beyond the pale” (ibid).

Also, the turbulence of the seventeenth century’s political and religious scenery — with the beheading of a king, the establishment of short lived republic replaced, yet again, with a monarchy — interspersed and spiced with hot religious debates, all made Proteus a frequent character in works of satirist and libelers alike. Here too, Proteus is reprised as an emblem of hypocrisy and timeserving as evinced by pamphlet titles like *The Time-Serving Proteus and Ambidexter Divine, Uncased to the World* (1650) by the author of *Histriomastix*, Prynne¹², and *The Recantation, or a Penitent Proteus* (1663) and *Proteus Ecclesiasticus* (1691) by anonymous libels.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Renaissance sermons, moral tracts and emblem books were also replete with allusions to Proteus. In 1561 Pierre VIRET, a Swiss Reformed theologian and close friend of Calvin and Guillamme Farel, in *Métamorphose chrétienne* put forth a notion of metamorphosis “altogether different from the fabrications of dreamy

¹² The “time-serving Proteus” of Prynne was John Dury (1596-1680), whom Prynne accused of ambidexterity for accepting ministerial orders in the Church of England while already in possession of a foreign Presbyterian ordination, and for shifting his political allegiance back to the Presbyterians only to desert them again for the sake of Independents. Prynne accusation is noteworthy because, in a sense, it echoes the protean charges of Luther directed against Erasmus, principally because the later did not commit to the Protestant cause, or to anything for that matter, and his general dislike of assertion provoked Luther’s utmost disgust. One might say that both men were charged of ambidexterity, and protean side-shifting because of their irenicism — promoting union between Christian fractions — especially since the majority of their respective contemporaries were engaged in polemical discourses preconditioned by taking unambiguous and opposing stances. In an article on John Dury and the politics of irenicism in England between 1628-1643, Antony MILTON suggest that an assumption of ironical “essentialism” — presupposing the association of Christian unity with peace, toleration and ecumenism — “allowed historians”, not without error, “to construct an apostolic succession of moderate, fair-minded people who urged projects for Christian unity, from Erasmus through Cassander and Acontius to Grotius (and, of course, Dury)” (1994, 96). However, TREVOR-ROPER’s remark on the difference between the idealism Dury and Grotius puts a corrective on their shared irenism too, for although they (Erasmus, Grotius and Dury) were all “idealist, but their ideals were not quite the same. He [Dury] wished to achieve not reunion for the peace of the Church [like Grotius, or the union of Christians under the Roman Catholic Church like Erasmus] but union of all Protestants for the holy war: in particular union of Lutherans and Calvinists” (1992, 68). In reference to Milton, it might be worth noting, that Dury was employed by the Council of State to translate Milton’s *Eikonoklastes* (HALL 1829, 103n1)

Philosophers and lying Poets” (Fol. Aii; in JEANNERET 2001, 164). For him metamorphosis was the emblem of the Fall, just as Barish noted in respect to antitheatrical debates, and as such represented the “change of heart, intelligence, and mores in corrupt perverted men” who in turning away of God reenacted Proteus’s metamorphoses turning into a dog, viper, wolf, fox. “[I]n body and sentiments” transformed “into a brutal beast” the man is “in soul and spirit” finally “transfigured into a devil” (113-114; in JEANNERET 2001, 164). Viret in a sense sees the classical myth of Proteus as being a diabolical reworking of biblical history and allegorizes it in order to divulge the proper meaning of metamorphosis containing “neither fable nor fiction” (Fol. Aii.). As many Christian writers before and after him, he thought of pagan writers as presenting us with the true image of our fallen condition without knowing it.¹³

Similarly, Stephen BATMAN in *The Golden Booke of the Leaden Goddes* (1577) stripes the gilding from the ancient myths in order to expose the rottenness underneath:

Some thincke that by Proteus the dyuers affections, of manns mynde are signified: for somewhyle wee take pleasure, for the chiefeste felicitie, when in verye deede it is but a hoggish affection: otherwhyle Anger haleth vs, and maketh vs more lyke Tygres, than man. somtimes Pryde assaulteth vs, and maketh vs more hautie then Lyons: sometime swinish affections, and then we become more Dronken then Hogs.

(Sig. E2; in BARISH 1981, 101).

¹³ We can find instances of this kind of Christian hermeneutics even in Milton. The mid twentieth century shift from formal/stylistic concerns to theological/ideological ones in Milton studies I mentioned in the Introduction can also be traced by the reemergence and popularity of studies in Christian reinterpretations of classical myths in Milton’s work (see among many Douglas Bush’s *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* [1932; rev. ed. 1967]; Merritt Y. Hughes’s “Devils to Adore for Deities” [1967]; John Steadman’s *Milton and the Renaissance Hero* [1967]; Philip J. Gallagher’s “‘Real or Allegoric’: The Ontology of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost* [1976]).

While the protean actor was both blamed for the ability to transform and for becoming the victim (with his unsuspecting audience) of the very same transformations he performed on the stage, in Batman's interpretation the protean individual is merely a passive subject of different affections – pleasure, anger, pride, etc. – that “assulteth” and, consequently, “maketh” the individual like unto different animals. Although the transformations occur, they are no longer within the power and capacity of men as they are of Proteus the sea god. Batman's “dyuers affections of manns mynde” seem to echo BOCCACCIO's reading of Proteus' transformations in *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* [*The Genealogy of Pagan Gods*] as the passions that agitate men: “formas ver, quas sumere consuetum aiunt, et abicere, eas existimo passionnes, quibus aguntur homines” (VII.9; in GIAMATTI 1968, 467).

These passions or affections resurface as monsters rooming and raging about as the results of Adam's fall in Francis QUARLES's *Emblemes* (1635) under the motto *Sic malum crevit unicum in omne malum* [*From one fruit all evil grows*] (fig.1):

See how the world (whose chaste and pregnant wombe,
Of late, conceiv'd, and brought forth nothing ill)
Is now degenerated, and become
A base Adultresse, whose false Births do fill
The Earth with Monsters, Monsters that do roome
And rage about, and make Trade, to kill:
Now glutt'ny paunches; Lust begins to spawn;
Wrath takes revenge; and Avarice, a pawne;
Pale Envy pines; Pride swells; and Sloth begins to yawne.

(10)

Although the passions are not described here as transformations afflicting the humans but as fruits of the seed Adam sowed with his sin, this particular emblem of Quarles is still noteworthy for its source. Quarles



fig. 1: Quarles' *Emblems* (1635), book 1, emblem ii.



fig.2: *Typus mundi* (1627)

borrowed extensively from the anonymous *Typus mundi* (1627), an emblem book made by final-year students at the Antwerp Jesuit college which, nevertheless, came to be used in both Catholic and Protestant circles. In this Jesuit *Typus mundi* the Latin verses (*supscriptio*) were summed up in French and Dutch lines (whereas in Quarles the verses were in English and were followed by a quotation from the Church Fathers and an epigram). The French lines summing up the inscription of the emblem borrowed by Quarles (fig.2) reinstalls metamorphosis as the image of Fall¹⁴ (just as in Viret's description):

O cruel changement! fiere metamorphose!
 La semence d'un fruit, quelle metempsychose!
 Se change en carnaciers animaux; voir en maux,
 Qui vont brisant le monde par mill' & mille fleaux.

[Oh, cruel change! proud metamorphosis!
 The seed of a fruit, what a metempsychose!
 changes into carnivorous animal, even evil
 who will smash the world with thousands of scourges.]¹⁵

There is no mention of Proteus in the emblem in *Typus mundi*, although other mythological personae that brought calamity on humanity (Pandora, Caedmon) are repeatedly likened to Adam. In QUARLES's emblem book, however, Proteus appears in book 3, emblem XIV (1635, 176-179), where he seems to have been equated with a chameleon.¹⁶ The

¹⁴ "Sin, not Time, first wraught the change" (*PL* 9.70).

¹⁵ I am indebted to Professor Anna Kérchy for the translation of the French summary lines.

¹⁶ Proteus, as an emblem of mutability and deceit is often coupled with the chameleon, which is proverbially regarded to have the ability to change its colors into all existing colors except for white, hence, the assumption that it could be anything but honest and true. See for example in STUBBES's *The Anatomy of Abuses* where both Proteus and the chameleon are equated with women who paint their faces: "As in a Camelion are said to be all coulours, save white, so I think in in these people are all things els, save Vertue and christian sobriete. Proteus, that Monster, could never change him self into so many forms & shapes as these women doo: belike they have made an obligation with hel, and are at agreement with the devil, else they would never outrage thus, without either feare of God or respect to their weak Bretheren, whom herein they offen" (Sig. F5v; FURNIVALL 73).

inscription of the emblem is a dialogue between two allegorical sisters, Flesh and Spirit, in which the latter contrast the bleak prospect of death and of last judgment by pointing towards “[t]he world all in colours, colours that distaine / the cheeks of Proteus...; such various sorts of hiew, / As Sun-confronting Iris never knew” (178). Although Proteus here does not necessarily have the pronounced negative connotations as in, say, Phillip STUBBES’s *The Anatomy of Abuses* (“Proteus, the monster” [n44]), still versatility – the very reason of his appearance – does. The objection, here again, stems from the principle of constancy for, as Spirit reproachfully observes, it is foolish “to dote on goods that perish with thy Glasse! / Nay, vanish with the turning of a hand!”

Summing up all of the previously mentioned features and connotations of Proteus and versatility is a quotation from Robert BURTON’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). “Arrogating” the name of Democritus Junior, Burton addresses the readers/subjects of his discourse to

see a man turn himself into all shapes like a chameleon, or as Proteus, *omnia transformans sese in miracula rerum*, to act twenty parts and persons at once, for his advantage, to temporize and vary like Mercurie the Planet, good with good; bad with bad; having several face, garb, and character for every one he meets; of all religions, humors, inclinations; to fawn like a Spaniel, mentitis & mimicis obsequiis, rage like a lion, bark like a cur, fight like a dragon, sting like a serpent, as meek as a lamb, and yet again grin like a tygre, weep like a crocodile, insult over some, and yet others domineer over him, here command, there crouch, tyrannize in one place, be baffled in another, a wise man at home, a fool abroad to make others merry.

To see much difference betwixt words and deeds, so many parasanges betwixt tongue and heart, men like stage-players act variety of parts, give

good precepts to others, [to] soar aloft, whilst they themselves grovel on the ground. (1800, 52).

In BARISH's reading, "the assumption governing the sequence is that the transformations will be bad" (1981, 102), for it is manifested in self interest, "for advantage" (BURTON 1800, 52). Also, what he terms as a "random semblance of honor" in Burton's text (as in "meeting good with good") amounts merely to a diversion and void of merit for it is immediately followed by "meeting bad with bad". Hence, self-transformation is, in BARISH words, "conceived as a negative process, a shifting about from on undesirable state to another, and a refusal to maintain one's proper identity" (1981, 102).¹⁷ Barish observation is perhaps a bit exaggerated, since Burton concern was not one's proper identity but the observance of men in their ridiculous behaviors (see his choice of pseudonym) and the folly of men to think themselves exempt from the general madness of the human race when in the position of an observer. But in terms of Proteus, Burton's passage confirms its negative connotations and, in addition, the part Barish described as the "random semblance of honour" will prove unwittingly our passage to the realm of natural science and alchemy by introducing, beside the chameleon and Proteus, another emblem of versatility, namely, that of "Mercurie the Planet."

2.2 "One first matter all"

The connection between Proteus and Mercury — and by mercury I also mean quicksilver which according to occult theories was governed under the Planet of the selfsame name (AGRIPPA 2004, 94) — in discourses of

¹⁷ And especially that of Proteus, for the edition Barish is referring to translates "omnia transformans sese in miracula rerum" as "transforms himself [Proteus] into all that is monstrous" (DELL & JORDAN-SMITH 1941, 53)

natural sciences and alchemy is more intrinsic than a random coupling of emblems of versatility. In these discourses Proteus was interpreted as the “first matter” precisely because of his variability and that in seeking various forms he nevertheless continued the same for all the appearances he assumed, and on the other hand, as a metaphor for particular states or forms of matter, especially those that exhibited transformative effect on other substances or transformed themselves by assimilating the properties of other substances. Francis BACON, for example, in *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (1619) claims that the “fable” of Proteus unfolds the secrets of nature and the properties of matter: “For under the person of Proteus, the first matter, which next to God is the ancientest thing, may be represented” while anyone wrestling with him prefigures the “expert minister of nature [that] shall encounter matter by main force, vexing and urging her” to extremes (1854, 297).¹⁸ This he finds particularly important because, as he noted earlier in the *Advancement of Learning* (1605), “as a man’s disposition is never well known till he be crossed, nor Proteus ever changed shapes till he was straitened and held fast; so the passages and variations of nature cannot appear so fully in the liberty of nature, as in the trials and vexations of art” (189). This notion of protean first matter seems to reverberate in *Paradise Lost* 4.472-474 too, where Raphael describes to Adam and Eve the creation of all beings from “one first matter all / Indu’d with various forms, varius degrees / Of substance, and in thing that lie, of life.”¹⁹ As for “Mercury the Planet”, the third on Burton’s list of emblems

¹⁸ On Bacon’s and Cowley’s wrestling with Proteus see PESIC 2001, 428-456. For an elaborate study on the connection between the Proteus myth and the natural knowledge in Early Modern Britain see BURNS 2001.

¹⁹ See also Milton’s contemporary, Sir Thomas BROWN in *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658), chap. V, when recounting the many significant instances of the quincunx pattern in art and nature among others asks: “Why *Proteus* in *Homer* the Symbole of the first matter, before he settled himself in the midst of his Sea-monsters, doth place them out by fives?” (EASON, n.d.). Geroge Sandy too, in an allegorical commentary on his translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (1632) asserts that “Proteus physically is taken for the First Matter” (in BURNS 2001, 974). For a negative link between Proteus and the first matter see Joseph GLANVILL’s *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), attacking the whole idea of *Materia Prima* as a Proteus-like imaginary illusion (2005, 128-130)

of versatility, Elias ASHMOLE in his translation of Jean d’Espagnet’s *Archanum hermeticae philosophiae opus* (1623) identifies “the uncertain Elixir” as the “Philosopher’s Mercury”²⁰ because of its “likeness and great conformity it hath with Heavenly Mercury”, a planet “void of elementary qualities and, hence, stilled “that changeable Proteus” which “puts on and encreaseth the genius and nature of other Planets” (1650, 186-188, see also Burns 2001, 975).²¹ Before him, Heinrich Khunrath, a disciple of Paracelsus, also claimed the “Catholic Mercury” to be “beyond doubt Proteus, the sea god of the ancient pagan sages” for the “virtue of his [Mercury’s] universal fiery spark of the light nature” (JUNG 1953, 56).²²

Hence, when Burton advices his readers to observe men being “good with good; bad with bad; having several face, garb, and character for every one he meets” he is describing the mercurial nature of the human race. For as Paracelsus follower, the German chemist, Johann Schröder said in his *Pharmacopoeia* (1641): “Mercury is a mutable planet, [meeting] good with good, bad with bad, hot with hot, cold with cold...” (1669, 29).²³

Milton, obviously not ignorant of their application in alchemical discourses, also combined Mercury (“Volatile Hermes”) with Proteus in the extended metaphor of the Sun in *Paradise Lost* 3.591-612:

That stone, or like to that which here below
Philosophers in vain so long have sought,
In vain, though by thir powerful Art they binde
Volatile Hermes, and call up unbound

²⁰ As opposed to “perfect Elixir” which Philosophers call “their Mercury, though improperly; for the name of Mercury doth onely properly agree with that which is volatile” (ASHMOLE 1650, 186).

²¹ Elias Ashmole compilled his translation of two Latin alchemical texts, Arthur Dee’s (son of John Dee) *Fasciculus chemicus* (Paris, 1631) and Jean d’Espagnet’s *Archanum hermeticae philosophiae opus* (Paris, 1623) under a pseudonym James Hasolle, published in 1650.

²² Jung here cites from KHUNRATH’S *Von Hylealichen, das ist Pri-materialischen Catholischen oder Allgemeinen Natürlichen Chaos der naturgemässen Alchymiae und Alchymisten* (Magdeburg, 1597). Khunrath grounds his claim on the etymology of Proteus being “quasi το πρωτον” that is “Primum existens” (1708, 134 margin).

²³ “Mercurius est planeta mutabilis, bonus cum bonis, malus cum malis, calidus cum calidis, frigidus cum frigidis...”

In various shape old Proteus from the Sea,
Draind through a Limbec to his Native form.

(3.600-6)

Hence, Thomas NEWTON paraphrases and explains Milton's passage as follows:

Tho' by their pow'rful art they bind and fix quicksilver, and change their matter, unbound, unfix'd, into as many various shapes as Proteus, till it be reduced at last to its first original form. ...] By this i.e. the myth of Proteus] the Ancients understood the first principle of things and the subject matter of nature; and our poet therefore very fitly employs this metaphore or similitude to express the matter, which the chemists make experiments upon thro' all its mutations, and which they drain thro' their limbec or stills, till it resume its native and original form. (1750, 1:605)

This arriving at native or original form or nature "thro' all its mutations" echoes the neoplatonic sentiment expressed by Pico della Mirandola in one of the *Orphic Conclusiones*: "He who cannot attract Pan approaches Proteus in vain" (WIND 1969, 191). Pan representing the sum of all ("pan" being the Greek word for "all"), and Proteus, bound and vexed to extremes unfolding the many "passages and variations of nature" (BACON 1854, 189), are linked in this tradition as embodiments of the unity and multiplicity of nature respectively. Hence, in WINDS words (interpreting the aphorism of Pico), "[i]f man did not sense the transcendent unity of the world, its inherent diversity would also escape him" (1969, 191). Pico's advice to seek the hidden Pan in the ever-changing Proteus, leads us to the interpretation of Proteus as expressing the versatility of human potentiality.

2.3 The dignity of man

It is the "sympathic", accommodating nature of the mercurial shape-shifter Proteus, recounted in the alchemical writings mentioned above, that has

made him into an emblem of man's dignity in PICO della Mirandola's "Oration on the Dignity of Man":

O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of man! To him it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills. Beast as soon as they are born (so says Lucilius) bring with them from their mother's womb all they will ever possess. Spiritual beings, either from the beginning or soon thereafter, become what they are to be for ever and ever. On man when he came into life the Father conferred the seeds of all kinds and the germs of every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear in him their own fruit.... It is man who Asclepius of Athens, arguing for his mutability of characters and from self-transforming nature, on just grounds says was symbolized by Proteus in the mysteries. (959, 225)²⁴

As opposed to all other living beings created by God, who are limited and restricted by laws prescribing their boundaries, Pico sees the special status of man in that he was created free to become whatever he wants (*id esse quod velit*). Proteus, thus, becomes a positive symbol of man's particular status, of his self-transforming power, as opposed to being the emblem of cunning and dubious inconsistency. In Barish's words, changeability of character "is exalted as a good", however, one should be careful not to read Pico's exaltation of the power of change as urging man to practice, as BARISH would have it, "the power to experiment with forms of life, to enhance oneself as well as, no doubt, on occasion to debase oneself" (1981, 110). It is tempting to read Pico in Baconian terms, as does Edgar WIND, and to expound the glory of man in his mutability, who "in

²⁴ "O summam Dei patris liberalitatem, summam et admirandam hominis felicitatem! cui datum id habere quod optat, id esse quod velit. Bruta simul atque nascuntur id secum afferunt, ut ait Lucilius, e bulga matris quod possessura sunt. Supremi spiritus aut ab initio aut paulo mox id fuerunt, quod sunt futuri in perpetuas aeternitates. Nascenti homini omnifaria semina et omnigenae vitae germina indidit Pater; quae quisque excoluerit illa adolescent, et fructus suosferent in illo... Quem non immerito Asclepius Atheniensis versipellis huius et se ipsam transformantis naturae argumento per Proteum in mysteriis significari dixit" (PICO 1990, 6).

his adventurous pursuit of self-transformations [...] explores the universe as if he were exploring himself” (1969, 191). However, this is quite the opposite of what PICO emphasizes about man’s inconstant nature:

But why do we emphasize this [that man is a being of varied, manifold and inconstant nature]? To the end that after we have been born to this condition – that we can become what we will – we should understand that we ought to have especial care to this, that it should never be said against us that, although born to a privileged position, we failed to recognize it and become like unto wild animals and senseless beasts of burden, but that rather the saying of Asaph the prophet should apply: “Ye are all angels and sons of the Most High,” and that we may not, by abusing the most indulgent generosity of the Father, make for ourselves that freedom of choice He has given into something harmful instead of salutary. (1959, 227)

Indeed, man was given “seeds of all kinds and the germs of every way of life”, so he can choose what to sow and what fruits to ripen: if vegetative, he will become like a plant, if sensitive, like a brute, if rational, like a heavenly being, and if intellectual, like an angel and the son of God. This way, in Pico’s words, man “himself molds, fashions, and changes himself into the form of all flesh and into the character of every creature” (226), and precisely because of the vast possibilities inherent in his protean nature, Pico advises “certain holy ambition” to “invade our souls, so that, not content with the mediocre, we shall pant after the highest and (since we may if we wish) toil with all our strength to obtain it” (227).

Therefore, Michel JEANNERET is more to the point, when noting that the key words of these passages are verbs like “to want”, “to wish”, “what he will” and, hence, their dominant idea being that of free will “with absolutely no restrictions” (2001, 148). Not completely created, man will create himself and of his own free will decide his rank in the chain of

beings, the possibilities whereof are enumerated above.²⁵ Endowed with a nature capable to partake of all living beings and to transform into all forms of life, man is the Proteus of ancient mysteries, and Proteus, as all other tales of metamorphosis, “the perfect emblem of the human race” (148).

Another short allegory that postulates man’s ability to transform and “be all things” as the foundation of man’s dignity is the *Fabula de homine* (1518) by Juan Luis VIVES (1492-1540). In it man appears as an actor on a stage set by Jupiter to enhance the solemnity of Juno’s birthday banquet. Man is not the only one to perform on that stage; a number of other (unidentified) actors perform “tragedies, comedies, satires, mimes, farces, and other things of the sort” (1959, 388), but it is man who steals the show and the admiration of the banqueting gods. The spectacularity of his performance is described as follows:

as he [Jupiter] of gods the greatest, embracing all things in his might, is all things, they saw man, Jupiter’s mime, be all things also. He would change himself so as to appear under the mask of a plant, [...] brought into the shape of a thousand wild beast: namely, the angry and raging lion, the rapacious and devouring wolf, the fierce and wild boar, the cunning little fox, the lustful and filthy sow, the timid hare, the envious dog, the stupid donkey. [...] After [...] he returned a man [...] and was finally in every way a political and social being. (1959, 389)

But it is not his ability to resemble plants and beasts, or his own proper shape, what amazes the gods most, but his ability to be remade “into one of their own race, surpassing the nature of man” even to the point of

²⁵ This emphasis on free will is a current in my argument that flows back into the alechemical part of my argument. György E. SZÖNYI in his monograph on John Dee’s occultism (2004) employs the term *exultatio* to describe the program of deification, that is, man’s possible ascent to the rank above him (namely, to the rank of angels and, ultimately, to that of God). Szönyi consciously uses the term *exultatio* ambiguously, in order to emphasize both possibilities of exultation, namely “by accidental circumstances” or by a person’s “own will.” As he claims, “the vague borderline between mysticism and magic can be found in the transitory area leading from passive happening to conscious action” (2004, 37). Therefore, when quoting a section from Pico’s *Oration*, he too (like Jeanneret) stresses man’s free will as the crucial element of initiating upward mobility (34).

transcending “the characters of the lower gods” and impersonating Jupiter “with marvelous and indescribable gestures” (389-390). Witnessing his transformative powers, the gods conclude the man “to be the multiform Proteus, the son of the Ocean” (389). Consequently, Vives’s fable ends with man seated in the company of gods – as the token of their appreciation of his protean powers –, no longer an actor but a spectator of the spectacle in the amphitheatre of the world (392, 387).

Whether Vives was influenced by Pico is of no importance here. The difference in their concept is, however, worth noting. While Pico’s notion of man, as Jeanneret observes, “lies in the complete absence of a defined human nature” and its dignity in its freedom to fashion himself into whatever he likes,²⁶ Vives’s man has definite human properties (all of them positive, by the way), yet capable of assuming all other life conditions. This protean capacity in Vives’s *fabula* is not due to freedom given to man, but due to “wisdom, prudence, memory” – gifts that “had been bestowed upon him by Jupiter out of his treasury and even from his own person” –, and to being “divine and Jupiter like, participation in the immortality of Jupiter” (1959, 388-389). To sum it up, Pico’s man is protean in that he is pure potential, endowed with the possibility to shape his own nature and to become *whatever he will* but not *all*. He must choose and construct the limits of his own nature. And curiously enough, it is Vives’s *fabula* that brings us full circle and back to Pico’s Orphic aphorism²⁷ for in his description man is not so much a particular (shape-shifter) Proteus, but a universal Pan transforming himself into Proteus: “Verily, man, peering oft

²⁶ “[T]he best of artisans [i.e. God] ordained that that creature [man] to whom He had been able to give nothing proper to himself should have joint possession of whatever had been peculiar to each of the different kind of being... Thou [i.e. man], constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. [...] We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer” (PICO 1959, 224-225).

²⁷ “He who cannot attract Pan approaches Proteus in vain” (WIND 1969, 191).

through the mask which hides him” and “revealing himself distinctly in many things, is divine and Jupiter-like” (VIVES 1959, 388).²⁸

2.4 “Proteus is no Proteus compared with you”²⁹

Except the alchemical interpretation, the two distinct notions of Proteus discussed so far – the one manifested predominantly in seventeenth century religious, political and antitheatrical pamphlets, and the other put forth in the writings of Renaissance humanist Pico della Mirandola and Juan Luis Vives – are both present and applied to the life and works of the renowned Dutch Renaissance humanist, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536).

Erasmus, constantly on the move either out of curiosity or need, accepting invitations or eschewing commitments, fleeing wars and plagues and in search for healthier circumstances, often elicited complains from his friends (of which there were many and all over Europe), for they often lost track both of him and his doings. Hence, Ambrosius Leo, in a letter from Venice, 1518, invokes Proteus to describe the many metamorphoses of Erasmus:

You not only changed from an Italian to a Frenchman and from Frenchman into a German [...] but you have turned from a poet into a theologian and effected a transmigration from theologian to Cynic philosopher, and then finally exchanged the Cynic for an orator –

²⁸ Vives’s fable about the man, thus, combines the alchemical notions of first matter and of the power of transformation as the principle of the dignity of man. It might prove fruitful to compare it to Thomas VAUGHAN’s *Coelum Terrae, or the Magicians Heavenly Chaos* (printed with his *Magia Adamica* in 1650), especially where Vaughan expounds the maxim *Qui Proteum non novit, adeat Pana* [He who is not familiar with Proteus, approaches Pan] – i.e. from the definition of the whole can one conceive the particulars. In this sense, it is Pan and not Proteus that becomes Mercury, the interpreter and expositor of particulars: “This *Pan* is their *Chaos*, or *Mercurie*, which expounds *Proteus*, namely the *Particular Creature* commonly call’d *Individualls*; for *Pan* transformes himself into a *Proteus*, that is, into all variety of *Species*, into *Animals*, *Vegetables*, and *Minerals*; for out of the *Universal Nature*, or *first matter*, all these are made and *Pan* hath their *Properties* in himself” (1656, 124)

²⁹ Martin LUTHER in his *De Servo Arbitrio* refuting Erasmus’s discussion on free will (2006, 273).

marvellous metamorphoses, which we thought the property of Proteus and no one else. For I have seen numberless books of yours in print, in which you have rung the changes on the different personalities or characters of which I speak. (ERASMUS 1982, 3:380; in JEANNERET 2001, 153).

The complaint, whether in jest or in earnest, draws on the same notion of constancy I have already expounded in reference to the antitheatrical writers. For not only were men supposed to appear from the outside as they were on the inside (see Othello echoing Iago's famous exclamation "man should be what they seem" [3.3.129-131]) but all of their manifestations, from dressing to writing, from eating to speaking, were supposed to be in conformity with their God given nature. Erasmus himself acknowledges this in *Catalogus lucubrationum* [*The Catalogue of His Works*] (1523), saying that "the man who hopes to win a reputation by what he writes should choose a subject to which he is by nature suited, and in which his powers chiefly lie; all themes do not suit everyone" (RUMMEL 2003, 22). One can also discover this notion in Milton's *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642), when Milton gives voice to his conviction that "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem," that is, "a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praiseworthy" (HUGHES 1957, 694). And while Milton was certainly striving to live up to his expressed opinion, Erasmus was quick to admit that he had not followed his own advice since his subjects were chosen either accidentally or by succumbing to the urgings of his friends.³⁰

³⁰ "I have either stumbled on a subject unadvisedly or chosen one to comply with my friends' feeling rather than my own judgement" (RUMMEL 2003, 22). Of course, one needs only to remember the provenance of Milton's *On Education* to see that he was not exempt of topics forced on him.

As it happens, it was under the pressure of his friends that Erasmus entered the already running debate on free will³¹ which in turn brought on him the most persistent and fiercest charges of Proteus-like evasiveness. At the very beginning of *On the Freedom of the Will, A Diatribe or Discourse [De liber arbitrio diatribe sive collation]* (1524) ERASMUS voices his dislike of assertions: “so far am I from delighting in ‘assertions’ that I would readily take refuge in the opinion of the Sceptic, wherever this is allowed by the inviolable authority of the Holy Scripture and by the decrees of the Church” (2006, 37). Indeed, as its title suggest, Erasmus work is written as a diatribe, a form of deliberative and not epideictic rhetoric, and as such not meant to attack but to discuss. Martin LUTHER, who was all for assertion,³² expresses “sheer disgust, anger, and contempt” for Erasmus’s work precisely because of its lack of it, and wrote in his *The Bondage of the Will [De Servo Arbitrio]* (1525):

I need hardly mention here the good care you take, as you always do, to be everywhere evasive and equivocal; you fancy yourself steering more cautiously than Ulysses between Scylla and Charybdis as you seek to assert nothing while appearing to assert something. How, I ask you, is it possible to have any discussion or reach any understanding with such people, unless one is clever enough to catch Proteus? (2006, 103)

Hence, Luther betook on himself the task of catching and holding fast “that Protean Erasmus” by exposing the many contradictions of the *Diatribe*, for as he claimed, Erasmus has uttered “nothing but sheer

³¹ The subject of free will “has been revived by Calrstadt and Eck, in a fairly moderate debate, and now it has been more violently stirred up by Martin Luther, who has put out an Assertion about “free choice” and although he has already been answered by more than one writer, it seemed good to my friends that I should try my hand and see whether, as a result of our little set-to, the truth might be made more plain” (ERASMUS 2006, 35).

³² LUTHER, in reply to the papal bull of condemnation, wrote the *Assertion Against All Articles Condemned in the Bull of Leo X* (1520/1521) in which he abandoned his previous notions on free will to the point that he regarded it a mere fiction: “I misspoke when I said that free will before grace exists in name only; rather I should have simply said: ‘free will is a fiction among real things, a name with no reality’” (RUPP & WATSON 2006, 19). It is this Assertion that Erasmus, prodded by his friends, wishes to discuss by stating, ironically, his dislike for assertions. For a detailed review of their debate see GILLESPIE 2008, 135-167. See also RUMMEL 2003, 195-215 for the gradual change in their relationship.

contradiction always and everywhere, so that whoever called [him] veritable Proteus or Vertumnus was perfectly right” (2006, 152). As a result, Luther saw in Erasmus’s every reference to the ancients, the authority of the Church Fathers, or to language tropes³³ an attempt of a protean dissembler to hide behind a series of masks ultimately concealing not so much Erasmus, but the devil in the humanist’s mask. Were it not for the devil, and the hostile, derisive tone of Luther, one might note in Luther’s references to Proteus echoes of the Socratic argument from Plato’s *Euthydemus*. In it “Proteus the Egyptian adept” is evoked to compare his abilities of evasion to the illusion-like (“jugglers’ tricks”) of Socrates’ sophist dialogue partners (288b), Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, who must be, therefore, bound by Socrates in order to yield earnest, non-evasive answers (288c). But while in the Platonic dialogue Socrates is the pacifier and the sophist brothers described as eristic (from gr. *Eris* meaning strife), the debate on free will between Luther and Erasmus shows opposite tendencies: Erasmus shunning strife, Luther reveling in it.

Lest I get distracted and lost in the labyrinthine ways of the subject of free will, let me confine the discussion of the debate between Erasmus and Luther to its pertinence on protean versatility as discussed so far. In 1522 a letter written by Luther to Caspar Borner or James Cubito started circulating Europe, and although it was not published under the supervision of Luther it was, nevertheless, intended and regarded an “open” letter. In it Luther states his resolution not to provoke Erasmus, and his readiness to strike back if provoked. Hence, the ensuing debate that erupted between the two in 1524/1525 was already in the making. The importance of the letter, in light of my present discussion, lies in its famous line: “Truth is mightier

³³ “Where you are hard pressed by plain sense, you challenge us to produce the exact words; elsewhere, when you are vanquished by both words and sense, you have a supply of tropes, knotty problems... Now you have recourse to the interpretation of the ancients, now to the absurdities of reason... What can I say? Proteus is no Proteus compared with you” (LUTHER 2006, 273).

than eloquence; the Spirit stronger than genius; faith greater than learning” (LUTHER 1918, 124). It is not merely an expression of Luther’s confidence to withstand Erasmus eloquence, but a devaluation of what Renaissance humanists, Erasmus among them, valued and promoted, namely, the education of men based on the belief of men’s (or at least of children’s) protean malleability. In Erasmus words, reminiscent of Pico’s self-fashioning man, *homines non nascuntur, sed finguntur* – men are not born, but fashioned (see RUMMEL 2003, 72). And while Luther repeatedly emphasized the debased nature of man in his refutation of free will, Erasmus in *On Education of Children [De pueris instituendis]* (1529) invoked the anecdote of Lycurgus and the two dogs demonstrating that “while nature is strong, education is more powerful still” (RUMMEL 2003, 69).³⁴ Hence, the debate between Luther and Erasmus puts forth the symbol of metamorphosis (and its embodiment in Proteus) illustrating the two extreme points of human mobility: not only does it stand for man’s debasement and fall (and ultimately for the devil), but also for man’s possibility for redemption.

For Erasmus’s declaration of men not born but made no doubt echoes Jerome’s statement: *[f]iunt, non nascuntur Christiani* – “[c]hristians are not born, but made.”³⁵ And it is education, “that special task which has been entrusted to us” (CWE 26, 311; in ERASMUS 1985, xxviii) that can, according to Erasmus, perform the fashioning of the Christian, shaping and invigorating the youthful, malleable character, thus, preparing one for understanding Holy Scripture (xxix) and, consequently, for understanding Christ. Erasmus referred to this understanding of Christ in his famous

³⁴ “Here I do not need to remind you of the well-known anecdote told of Lycurgus, who produced two dogs, the first pure-bred, the other a mongrel. The pure-bred dog, however, had been poorly trained and so went straight for the food placed in from of him, whereas the mongrel, who had been well drilled, abandoned his meal and rushed after game” (RUMMEL 2003, 69).

³⁵ From JEROME’s letter to Laeta (known as “A Girl’s Education”, cvii [1933, 340-341]). Jerome himself borrows the expression from Tertullian’s *Apology [Apologeticus]* xviii.4.

phrase *philosophia Christi*,³⁶ which was for him, as J. K. Sowards noted, “not so much revealed as acquired: and it was acquired, like any other philosophy, by study” (xxix). Erasmus’s concept of *philosophia Christi* was also far more pragmatic than philosophic, in that it entailed Christ’s spirit, or *philosophia*, to permeate every aspect of the Christians life, and become a way of life by imitation of Christ. In Milton’s *Of Education* we read of a similar concept: “The end then of Learning is to repair the ruins 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 nearest by possessing our souls of true vertue” (HUGHES 1957, 631). And since Erasmus saw Christ as a Proteus figure, imitating him meant not only becoming Christ-like but Proteus-like too.

2.5 More shapes than one

Erasmus was fascinated by the many different aspects of Christ found in the Scriptures, and regarded 1Cor 9:22 the harmonizing principle of the apparent inconsistencies in Christ’s life and teaching: “Nor does the variety of Christ disturb this harmony, but as a composition of different voices is

³⁶ The expression first occurs in the 1515 revision of Erasmus’ *Adagia*, in “Silenis Alcibiadis” whose popularity warranted a separate edition by Froben the very same year. Erasmus borrows the proverb Silenis Alcibiadis from Plato’s *Symposion* (215b), where Alcibiades compares Socrates to the puzzle-figures of Silenus which from the outside picture Silenus with pipes or flutes but opened up contain images of gods (215b). Erasmus on his part identifies Christ as the most extraordinary Silenus, ugly and unbecoming from the outside, but valuable when opened up: “But is not Christ the most extraordinary Silenus of all? If it is permissible to speak of him in this way – and I cannot see why all who rejoice in the name of Christians should not do their best to imitate it [...] But if one may attain to a closer look at this silenus-image [...] what unspeakable riches you will find there: [...] in such humility, what grandeur! in such poverty, what riches! in such weakness what immeasurable strength! in such shame, what glory! in such labours, what utter peace! [...] this was the only pattern that pleased him, and which he set before the eyes of his disciples and friends – that is to say, Christians. He chose that philosophy in particular, which is utterly different from the rules of the philosophers and from the doctrine of world” (MANN PHILLIPS 1980, 79-80). It is worth noting here, that Jacob Cats’ emblem book entitled *Silenus Alcibiadis sive Proteus* (1618) builds on Erasmus’s connotation in a sense that its emblems are incomprehensible on the first sight offering valuable lessons only when opened up and deciphered, but with an added protean shift, in that Cats uses each and every illustration in the emblem book with three different inscriptions (amorous, moral and pious), thus, transforming the illustration’s role and meaning in the emblem.

rendered more agreeable, the variety of Christ makes harmony more complete. Thus he became all to all, yet, never unlike himself.”³⁷ No doubt, he found in Christ’s varied and yet undivided persona the justification of his own life too, thus, in his response to Ambrosius Leo confidently rejecting the charge of “natural inconsistency” and asserting a constant nature instead: “in all the changes and chances of my fate I have always been the same Erasmus who never changes” (ERASMUS 1982, 3:434; in JEANNERET 2001, 153). Consequently, Erasmus saw Christ as a kind of Proteus “representing the variety of life and teaching”³⁸ and in Paul the most genuine accommodation of *philosophia Christi*. Hence, in comparing the life and teaching of the apostles to the model of their Master, Erasmus exclaims with admiration: “With what subtlety Paul everywhere plays the chameleon, so to speak, and turns himself into all things, so that from everywhere he might gain some to Christ.”³⁹ Of course, in the light of our discussion on Proteus so far, it is not surprising that Erasmus’s contemporaries found both comparisons outrageous⁴⁰ and battered Erasmus with their own (negative) connotation of Proteus instead.

³⁷ In his *Ratio verae theologiae* (1518): “Neque vero confundit hanc harmoniam Christi varietas; immo sicut e diversis vocibus apte compositis concentus suavissimus redditur, ita Christi varietas plenior efficit concentum. Sic omnia factus est omnibus, ut nusquam tamen sui dissimilis esset” (HOLBORN 211:28-31). For a discussion of Erasmus’s fascination with the protean persona of Christ in the light of his concept on individuality see BIETENHOLZ 1966, 79-89.

³⁸ “Adeo cum nostro Christo nihil sit simplicius, tamen arcane quodam consilio Proteum quendam repraesentat varietate vitae atque doctrinae [And although nothing is more ingenuous than our Christ, in a certain secret sense he is a kind of Proteus representing variety of life and teaching]” (see HOLBORN 214:31-33).

³⁹ “Iam paucis, si libet, conferamus, quemadmodum ad magistri formam apostolorum vita doctrinaque respondeat. Quanta vafritie Paulus ubique chamaeleonta quempiam, ut ita loquar, agit et in omnia vertitur, ut undique lucri nonnihil addat Christo” (HOLBORN 223:32-36). Peter BIETENHOLZ notes, referring to a set of Erasmus’s notes to Paul’s speech on the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31), that Erasmus came to appreciate Paul as a holy deceiver under the guidance of Jerome. This is particularly interesting, for Erasmus borrowed the unusual adjective *vafritie* from Jerome’s testimony “that Paul ‘with holy cunning (pia quadam vafricie)’” adjusted the inscription on the altar (Acts 17:23) to suit his purposes (2009, 144).

⁴⁰ For example, Alberto PIO, Erasmus most feared opponent, wrote in his *XXIII libri* the following: “[I]n the *Methodus* [i.e. Erasmus’s *Ratio verae theologiae*] ... how many difficulties you disseminate, how many snares you set, how much you detract from the authority of the Gospel, and, finally, from the deeds and words and Jesus Christ when you discuss the variants and conflicts in the deeds and words of Christ and the contradictions of the Scriptures! How many blasphemies you utter! In particular, in one passage, so great, you say, is this variety and

Now, there is a notable near-absence of Proteus in Milton's oeuvre. He never uses the adjective *protean*, and there are but few references to Proteus, the sea god, in his poems which are otherwise replete with allusions to antique deities. This is not to say that its absence is in and of itself telling, I merely wished to acknowledge the fact. If one were to look for Proteus, the only notable instance of his appearance would be in Milton's speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing, the *Areopagitica* (1644), in which "old Proteus" is invoked in a rather curious way and, yet, so reminiscent of what Erasmus wrote about the protean Christ becoming "all to all, yet, never unlike himself."

The paragraph in the *Areopagitica* introducing Proteus near the end of Milton's argument against the regulation of press, starts off with a statement that might remind some of Luther's exclamation quoted from his "open" Borner/Cubito-letter from 1522 ("Truth is mightier than eloquence; the Spirit stronger than genius; faith greater than learning" [LUTHER 1918, 124]). However, Milton asserts the strength of Truth not against eloquence or education, but against licensing:

For who know not that Truth is strong, next to the Almighty. She needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensing to make her victorious – those are the shifts and the defences that error uses against her power. Give her but room, and do not bid her when she sleeps, for then she speaks not true, as the old Proteus did, who spake oracles only when he was caught and bound, but then rather she turns herself into all shapes except her own, and perhaps tunes her voice according to the time, as Micaiah did before Ahab, until she be adjured into her own likeness. (HUGHES 1957, 747).

Note, how Milton in one swiping move establishes both the difference and the likeness of Truth to Proteus. On the one hand, Truth is unlike Proteus, for she will not speak true if caught and bound by

conflict, 'so much so that although nothing is more ingenious than our Christ, by some secret dispensation he recalls a kind of Proteus because of the variety in his life and teaching'" (195°C; in ERASMUS 2005, 300n1131)

regulation or licensing, quite contrary to the sea god, “who spake oracles [a form of divine truth] only when he was caught and bound.” It is obvious that Milton here draws Proteus’s image from Vergil’s *Georgics* — “For save by force / No rede will he vouchsafe”⁴¹ — and not from Homer’s *Odyssey*, since the latter would not allow for the distancing Milton accomplishes here.⁴² On the other hand, Truth *is* like Proteus, for if caught and bound she too “turns herself into all shapes except her own.” The way Truth’s turns into all shapes — “tuning her voice according to the time,” — is again protean, and doubly so, for it is not merely an escapist transformation but a deceptive one too, at least in the light of Prynne’s pamphlet libeling John Dury “the time-serving Proteus.” Yet far more interesting than this negating assertion of Truth’s Protean likeness is the next paragraph of *Areopagitica*, where Truth becomes the spitting image of the protean Christ — becoming all to all, yet, never unlike himself — as depicted earlier in Erasmus’s *Ratio verae theologiae*:

Yet is it not impossible that she may have more shapes than one. What else is all that rank of things indifferent, wherein Truth may be on this side, or on the other, *without being unlike herself?* [...] what great purchase is this Christian liberty which Paul so often boasts of? His doctrine is, that he who eats, or eats not, regards a day, or regards it not, may do either to the Lord. How many other things might be tolerated in peace and left to conscience, had we but charity, and were it not the chief stronghold of our hypocrisy to be ever judging one another.

(HUGHES 1957, 747 – *italics mine*)

⁴¹ “Nam sine vi non ulla dabit praecepta” (4.398). Vergil seems the customary recourse for Milton in the only two other instances when he alludes to Proteus, apart from the already mentioned (alchemical) reference in *PL* 3.601-605. In *Comus* Proteus is the Carpathian wizard (872), in reference, again, to VERGIL’S *Georgics*, locating the realm of the “Caerulean Proteus” “[i]n Neptune’s gulf Carpathian” (4.387). And again, in *Epitaphium Damonis* (“...deserto in littore Proteus / Agmina Phocarum numerat” [99-100]) in reference to *Georgics* 4.432-436 (“Sternunt se somno diversae in litore phocae. / Ipse [Proteus]... considit scopulo medius numerumque recenset”).

⁴² As opposed to Vergil’s account emphasizing a continuous bidding of Proteus, in HOMER’S rendering, Eidothea’s advice to Menalaus is to “cease from force, [once Proteus resumes his original shape] and [to] set the old man free” (*Od.* 4.420-424).

The obvious consonance between Erasmus and Milton is due to their shared commitment to the freedom of will and their belief in the fragmented nature of human knowledge,⁴³ both accounting for the protean/many-shapes of Truth.⁴⁴ And nowhere is this freedom and fragmentation more obvious than in their linguistic praxis, that is, in their copious use of words.

⁴³ Milton's most memorable metaphor of truth in *Areopagitica* (making its readers overlook the Proteus comparison) is that of Osiris-like Truth hewn "into a thousand pieces, and scattered [...] to the four winds." The fragmented pieces of Truth, says Milton, "[w]e have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming. He shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mold them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection" (HUGHES 1957, 742). ERASMUS recurs to 1Cor 13:12 to convey the same: "Many things are reserved for that time when we shall no longer see through a glass darkly or in a riddle, but in which we shall contemplate the glory of the Lord when his face shall be revealed" (2006, 39)

⁴⁴ There are, says Milton in *Areopagitica*, "neighboring differences, or rather indifferences, [...] whether in some point of doctrine or discipline, which though they may be many, yet need not interrupt 'the unity of spirit,' if we could but find among us the 'bond of peace'" (747-748). This is, of course, not to say that Milton and Erasmus would necessarily agree on what those indifferences are, but merely acknowledging that while there are truths that "must be learned by all, [...] the rest are more properly committed to God" (ERASMUS 2006, 40).

3 The copious use of words

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 1:1, 3

No human body part is so cautiously constrained by Nature than our tongue. Or so ERASMUS claims in his *Lingua [The Tongue]* (1525). For while our eyes are merely covered with “a frail membrane, suited only for sleep”, Nature “buried the tongue virtually in a dungeon, and bound it by many bonds” (1989, 268). Erasmus also reminds his readers that, in fact, Varro thought the word *lingua* “tongue” to come from *ligare* “to bind.”¹ And as if this bidding were not enough to constrain this protean member, Nature set in its path “the double rampart and barrier of the thirty-two teeth” and, in addition, “the double doors of the lips” (ibid). The reason for this thorough bidding of the tongue lies in its ambivalent properties which render it a simultaneous source of malevolent and benevolent discursive agencies:

¹ ISIDORE of Seville in his *Etymologies* particularizes this by saying that “Varro thinks that the tongue, *lingua*, was named from bidding food, *ligare*; others because it binds words [Linguae a lingando cibo putat Varro nomen impositum. Alii, quod per articulatos sonos verba ligat]” (*Orig.* XI.51; see also MAZZIO 1998, 98, 114n19)

O ambivalent organ, from which such a great plague of life can spring up for men, and yet from it such benefits could flow, if anyone directed it as they should! [...] For the tongue exercises equal domination whether you wish to save or destroy. [...] The tongue is Ate, strife personified, if it lacks a pilot. It is a horn of plenty, if you use it well. It is Eris, rouser of quarrels, but the same tongue is Grace, who wins good will. It is Erinys, the bringer of all evils, but it likewise calms all things. It is the venom of the asp if it acts with ill will, but a universal antidote if good intentions control it. It is the source of wars and civil strife, but it is also parent to peace and concord. It overthrows city-states and kingdoms, but it also founds and establishes them. Finally it is the deviser of death, but equally the bestower of life. (ERASMUS 1898, 365)

The contrary motion of the tongue, both in respect of its discursive agencies and physical motion,² was a source of anxiety both in pagan and biblical antiquity as seen by the vast number of classical allusions in Erasmus's *Lingua*. But this was not the only aspect of the anxiety about the tongue — especially in its meaning of language —, for the initial anxiety was intensified in the Renaissance by the *Questione della Lingua*: the pertinent question whether (or when) to write in Latin or in a vernacular.

3.1 The struggle with protean vernaculars

As the name of the *Questione della Lingua* suggest, Italy was the first to confront the language-question, with DANTE pioneering the debate. In *Il Convivio [The Banquet]* (1304/1307) Dante justifies at length his choice of writing in vernacular Italian and in the process establishes the crucial difference between Latin and the vernacular language: the former is eternal and incorruptible, while the latter is unstable and corruptible, being constantly fashioned and, thus, susceptible to change. So much so, that “in the cities of Italy [...] we find that within the last fifty years many words

² For the ambivalence inherent in representations of the tongue in early modern England see MAZZIO 1998.

have become obsolete, been born, and been altered” to the point “that if those who departed this life a thousand years ago were to return to their cities, they would believe that they were occupied by foreigners, because the language would be at variance with their own” (I.5).³ For Dante these observations, despite his genuine love and devotion for Italian, establish the sovereignty of Latin, the beauty of which is seen in the harmonious correspondence of its parts. In addition, the parts of a language correspond “more properly” in Latin than in the vernacular, “because the vernacular follows custom [i.e. use], while Latin follows art [i.e. the rules of grammar]” (I.5).⁴

All of the above mentioned features established Latin as the decisive scholarly tool, the constancy of which was sharply contrasted with the versatility of the tongues in use. It was the *sine qua non* of the educated and, in John K. HALE’s words, “a triple gateway: to preferment, to the intellectual life of antiquity, and to active membership of the European intelligentsia” (2005, 2). Its universal gravitational pull “enabled humanist to study and teach everywhere [...] and no humanist ever voted for the vernacular at the expense of Latin’s portability” (3). Those who choose to write in their vernacular tongues where, therefore, aware of a certain loss, a sense of sacrifice, especially in respect to the durability of their work.⁵ Even in England, where the English vernacular supplanted Latin (and

³ Dante here notes his intention to elaborate the matter more fully in a treatise on *Eloquence in the Vernacular*. And indeed, in February of 1305 Dante was at work on *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in which he argues for the establishment of a “illustrious” vernacular that could serve as the medium for a national literature. WASWO blames the relative obscurity of the treatise on the fact that it was written in Latin (1987, 51-52).

⁴ The notion about the corruption of the vernacular because of its custom induced mutation is so prevalent as to be discernible in Stephen Skinner’s *Etymologicon Linguae Anglicanae* published in 1671 (JONES 1953, 267n70).

⁵ MONTAIGNE, thus, writes in his *Essays*: “I write for few men and few years. If duration were the question, the work should be committed in more rigid language. Given the continual variations that ours has undergone up to now, who can hope it will be used in its present form fifty years from now? Day after day it is slipping through our fingers, and in my lifetime half has already altered. We say that now it is perfect. As each century said the same for its own. I take care not to stop there as long as it pursues this constant flight and deformation” (3.9.982; in JEANNERET 2001, 178)

French) as the language of law and government by 1500 and by 1540 even the liturgical language of the church (4), the notion of eternal Latin versus transitory vernacular persisted well into the seventeenth century, as evinced by Edmund Waller's poem "Of English Verse" first published in 1668:

Poets may boast, as safely vain,
Their work shall with the world remain;
Both bound together live or die,
The verses and the prophecy.

But who can hope his line should long
Last in a daily changing tongue?
While they are new, envy prevails,
And as that dies, our language fails.

[...]

Poets that lasting marble seek
Must carve in Latin, or in Greek;
We write in sand; our language grows,
And like the tide our work o'erflows...

(WASWO 1987, 57)

Milton too was aware that "to fix all the industry and art [he] could unite to the adorning of [his] native tongue" was but to write "as men buy leases, for three lives and downward" (Hughes 1957, 668).⁶

In these instances of anxiety about the mutability of the native tongue one can observe a change in the assumed relation between language

⁶ Richard Foster Jones in *The Triumph of the English Language* says that the "[c]onsciousness of the instability of the vernacular permeated the [seventeenth] century more than we realize, and frequently finds half-hidden and not easily recognized expression" (1953, 264n59). His two most interesting examples are, probably, S. C. *Fanaticism Fanatically imputed to the Catholic Church* (1672) – the author of the treatise arguing "that the Scripture should be kept in Latin, an immortal language, rather than in modern tongues, which are subject to corruption and change" – and the endeavour of Sir Francis Kynaston and Theodore Bathurst to save Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Spenser's *Sheperdes Calendar* from oblivion by translating them into Latin, respectively (ibid).

and meaning. The two extreme points of the Renaissance semantic shift — referential versus relational language, as described by Richard Waswo in *Language and meaning in the Renaissance* — are already discernible, I believe, in DANTE's *Banquet*. On the one hand, the relationship between language and meaning in case of Latin is ontologically bound: “language, which is constituted to express human thought, is virtuous when it does this, and more completely it does this, the more virtuous it is” (*Convivio* I.5). Hence, the supremacy of Latin, for it “expresses many things conceived in the mind which the vernacular cannot” because “the vernacular follows custom [*usus*] while Latin follows art [*arte*]” (*ibid*).⁷ Latin is, therefore, the referential language *par excellence*, since it “cannot undergo change” and whose transmission is consequently uninterrupted by time or space: “Thus in the ancient Latin comedies and tragedies [...] we find the same Latin as we have today” (*ibid*). On the other hand, the correspondence of words to preextant things (“things conceived in the mind”) is compromised in the case of vernaculars by their constant shifts and alterations in following custom/use instead of art/grammar.

However, it was in a century after Dante that the semantical shift could take its real effect. For the writers to follow the lead of Dante and to choose their vernaculars over Latin, the very confidence which Dante had in the incorruptible transmission of Latin at the beginning of the fourteenth century had to be shaken by an awareness that a historical rapture had taken place, and that not even Latin was a safeguard against loss and change.

⁷ One should note, however, that despite the continuing anxiety over the English vernacular in the seventeenth century (see previous footnote) there was also a strong assertion of the virtues of English. Camden, for example, in Remaines (1605) claimed that it is “as fluent as the Latine, as courteous as the Spanish, as courtlike as the French, and as amorous as the Italian, as some Italianated amorous have confesed” (JONES 1953, 261). In respect to Dante's notion of Latin as being more able to express the things conceived in human mind than the vernacular, it is worth noting Alexander GIL's belief, pened by Jones, that “no language is more polished, more ornate, more suited to expressing all the thoughts of the mind, or more pleasing than English” (see *Logonomia Anglica* 1619, preface; JONES 1953, 248n23). Gil was Milton's schoolmaster while at St. Paul's School, and his enthusiasm for the English language certainly had an influence on Milton (see MASSON 1859:1, 52-55).

That language had a past was something even generations before the Renaissance were aware of. Yet it was, in WASWO's words, "[t]he 'rebirth' of the classical past through the acutely self-conscious midwifery of Renaissance humanist" that "created an awareness of the historical context of usage in language that gradually came to be treated as semantically constitutive" (1987, 79). Lorenzo Valla in particular played a crucial role in forming this awareness. Renowned in his own day as the author of the *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* (1471) — an elaborate account of the grammar, diction and style of the classical Latin — Valla lay the foundations of a philology that challenged the received semantics of reference. His philological methodology was dazzlingly simple in concept (although not in execution). Aiming to recover the eloquence of Roman antiquity, Valla conducted an empirical survey of how classical writers actually used their Latin and, consequently, exposed a temporal distinction in syntactic and lexical usages of Latin between ancient Rome and medieval Europe.⁸ WASWO summarizes the philosophical and theoretical import of his work, and the challenge it posed, as:

the profoundly disturbing demand for the literal re-vision not merely of what we think but of how we are able to think anything at all. [...] Valla attempted to conceive of signification as different from, other than, the res significata whether in the world or in the mind: as a function of words and their use, not as their objects of reference. For him, words had cognitive force, and meaning was an activity multiply determined by grammatical relationships and historical contexts. (1987, 111-112)

⁸ Valla applied the method most notably to expose the Roman imperial decree, the *Donatio Constantini* —ensuring the papal dominance over the Western Roman Empire as the legacy of Constantine's donation, transferring the authority over Rome and the western part of the Empire from the Emperor to Pope Sylvester I. — as a historical fraud employing a vernacular style conclusive of a much later era than its alleged provenance. Christopher B. COLEMAN, the English translator of Valla's proof, *De falso credita et ementita Constantini Donatione declamatio* (1439/1440), noted its significance thus: "[F]or the first time, [Valla] used effectively the method of studying the usage of words in the variations of their meaning and application, and other devices of internal criticism which are the tools of historical criticism today" (1922, 3; in WASWO 1987, 88).

Valla contemporaries might not have understood the impact of his work in full, yet the diffusion of his historical interpretative practice was widely felt in debates on rhetoric, on emerging protestant biblical hermeneutics and, naturally, on language.⁹ It was through him, as WASWO elsewhere noted, “that humanist philologist discovered time” and, in turn, “it was history, by observing the fact of change in all languages, that made it possible to liberate and dignify the vernaculars, to perceive their status and potency as equal to those of Latin and Greek” (1987, 59).

Similarly, Michel JEANNERET, in his study of Renaissance’s “transformist sensibility”, notes the opportunity and challenge perceived in the aging of the antique heritage by scholars promoting the vernacular. In his assessment of this challenge, Jeanneret resorts to a Proteus-reminiscent description of language struggle:

[I]n spite of frustrations, most writers preferred to struggle with a flexible living tongue rather than serve a rigid dead language. The Latin conserved in the Middle Ages was certainly impure, but active and flexible. With influence of philologists and Ciceronian purists and an awareness that a historical rupture had taken place, Latin [of the antiquity] became an untouchable relic, a monument out of reach of the moderns. Reviving that inert object would mean surrendering to the fatality of an invariable language, abdicating the freedom to act on language and adapt it to new demands. (2001 181-182).

The same liberating effect of the use of vernaculars, as noted by Waswo and Jeanneret so far, is the final conclusion John K. Hale comes to

⁹ Just how late are the notions sowed by Valla in their ripening, see Tibor Fabiny’s article, “Literature: A New Paradigm of Biblical Interpretation” (FABINY 1999, 11-29). In it Fabiny confirms the paradigm-shift of biblical interpretation that turns to language and puts the *locus* of meaning in the text itself as opposed to the theological and the historical approach in which the *locus* of meaning was/is “behind the text, either in the ‘doctrine’ or in the ‘event’” (14). Following Northrop Frye’s initiative of perceiving biblical language as “the language of proclamation, ‘the vehicle of revelation’”, Fabiny maintains that biblical language is “much closer to the poetic-figurative rather than to a plain, referential ‘literal’ language... As opposed to the denotive- referential language of science, biblical language, especially that of the prophecies, is emotive, associative and connotative” and “radiates words with power, the purpose of its rhetoric is to affect, transform and change its reader” (15).

when expounding the language choices Milton had to face.¹⁰ For although Milton was inclined to seek, as his contemporary Edmund Waller wrote, the “lasting marbles” of poetry, and quite capable of carving “in Latin, or in Greek”, he, nevertheless, chose “to struggle with a flexible living tongue” of his own. In *The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelaty* (1642), book two, he divulges of himself the following confession/vocation:

I began thus far to assent [...] that by labour and intense study, (which I take to be my portion in this life,) joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times, as they should not willingly let it die. These thoughts at once possessed me, and these other; that if I were certain to write as men buy leases, for three lives and downward, there ought no regard be sooner had than to God’s 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 Latins, I applied myself to that resolution, which Ariosto followed against the persuasion 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 toilsome vanity,) but to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things, among mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect. (HUGHES 1957, 668)

When Milton writes about becoming “an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things”, he has in mind the practice of *Imitatio*,¹¹ that is, “emulation”, not some slavish copying. It entails simultaneously the ambition for originality and the following of proven exemplars, as in the opening invocation of *Paradise Lost*, where Milton’s “Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rime” (1.16) echoes Ariosto’s “Cosa non detta in prosa mai,

¹⁰ Hale has exounded the impact of Milton’s many languages in two book length studies, in *Milton’s Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style* (2005) and in *Milton as Multilingual* (2007). The first book focuses on the multilingualism of Milton’s English works, while the latter book deals more exclusively with Milton’s Latin, Greek, Italian and Hebrew texts.

¹¹ I follow Hale in rendering *Imitatio* with an upper-case *I*, hence, distinguishing „the Roman idea from Aristotle’s mimesis on the one side and from Plato’s derogatory sense, ‘imitativeness’, on the other” (2005a, 208n2).

né in rima” (*Orl. Fur.* 1.2) only to prove himself the more original in distinguishing his theme from those of previous epic poems, including *Orlando Furioso* (*PL* 9.25-41). Indeed, it is the question of *Imitatio* in relation to the *Questione della Lingua* which brings us back to Jeanneret’s observation about writers struggling with their protean mother tongues, and how it applies to Milton.

It is certainly not a simple application. John K. Hale, who is without doubt the single expert among contemporary Milton scholars on Milton’s multilingualism, devotes a whole book to the complexity of Milton’s language choices.¹² Relying on his excellent introduction, I will try to encapsulate his observations pertaining to my argument.

Taking into the account the rawness and the impurities of a mother-tongue (in Milton’s age), HALE wonders if *Imitatio* could not work better by vernaculars than by Latin. After all, vernaculars did “offer greater scope for originality, right down at the cellular level, of words, phrases, lines of verse — the levels where poetry is alive or most dead” (2005, 11). But despite the challenge posed by the vernaculars, the choice was not an obvious one. Hale, building on Ann Moss’s argument about the deeply personal and anxious dimension of bilingualism¹³, claims that humanists “did not need to choose once and for all (especially as Latin was their ‘mistress’!)” (14). The humanists, Milton included, went on writing in Latin for some purposes. Vernaculars were favored for endeavors of high ambition, like poetry, but more often than not the announcements of those ambitions were made in Latin, along with the defenses for using vernaculars. When the goal was “European or pedagogical consumption”, their choice was again Latin (6). The choices of languages, thus, “resulted in complexities, paradoxes, changes and revisions of mind within the clear main current flowing away from Latin” (11). “The texts of the humanist

¹² The already mentioned *Milton’s Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style*.

¹³ MOSS 1994, 61-74.

and their vernacular counterparts seem to draw from their very uncertainties, from their protean shifts of style and intellectual contexts, an unfailing supply of color and energy” (CASTOR & CAVE 1984, xvi; in HALE 2005, 11).

Therefore, in Hale’s view, Milton “did not give up his languages”, rather, “the interinanimating of his languages increased [...] until his languages came to intersect where they could best intersect, within his English” (57).

In order to illustrate the not so easily disposed dilemma of language choice, Hale turns to intertextuality, because “it works at such a local level that it is the nuts and bolts of *Imitatio*: in the feeling of palimpsest in individual words, phrases and lines of verse, the poetic texture honours the ancient world and the post-Roman reception” (HALE 2005, 12). The creation of such a palimpsest comes “*more* readily” in Latin by using words, phrases, or even whole lines from Latin masters. Already in vernaculars abounding in Latin-derived words the task becomes harder, and increasingly so in English. Nevertheless, Hale does not consider it a foregone conclusion whether one chooses (or chose) to do what is harder, or what can be more complete. In particular, he sees Milton “choosing what gave him the more options”, that is, English, since it “gave him almost all the options which Latin gave, and some which Latin could not” (12). Hale summarizes and explains this as follows:

Using Latin words and metres to emulate Roman exemplars like Virgil, Ovid, Horace, he would so readily call into view their words that too much might show through the palimpsest; not necessarily dwarfing him, but obscuring his own sense or distracting from it (like a simile whose vehicle crushes the tenor). The challenge was to ensure that his thought commanded more attention than did the words or allusions [...] Composing in English produced the reverse dilemma. In English Milton could not summon up Virgil or others so easily or casually, because he could not use so many Latin-derived words within English. The task was

apparently far harder than in Latin. Yet Milton gains the option to foreground the thought and not the words, or the interaction of thoughts with words, and both options enabled an interaction of infinite variety. The more stringent needs of English *Imitatio* were, finally, more liberating. (2005, 12-13)

But one did not experience freedom of *Imitatio* only when writing in the vernacular. With the new sense of history, and the awareness of a past irrevocably lost (an awareness fostered by Valla's philological method), antiquity receded and vanished with the very moment of its rediscovery. But instead of mourning for its loss, and nourishing negative nostalgia, most humanists engaged in the salvaging of its goods by "inserting a measure of novelty in the hiatus" (JEANNERET 2001, 142). As if replaying the encounter between Greece and Rome, they "aspired to be both victors and vanquished, free and faithful, different and differential like the Romans" (ibid). Consequently, imitation was seen, on the one hand, as "mimetic devotion" minimizing the effect of history, and, on the other hand, as "exploitation of the eclipses of the past" for present use and benefit (ibid).¹⁴

¹⁴ Milton's choice to write in English is informed with another aspect of liberty: not merely of language, but of content as well. As he says, he chose English not out of "verbal curiosities" which "were a toilsome vanity" but "to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things" (HUGHES 668). In *Of Education*, first published in 1644 and then republished in *Poems, etc upon Several Occasions 1673*, when elaborating the end of language learning, Milton confirms the same saying: "the language is but the instrument conveying to us things useful to be known" (HUGHES 631). He goes as far as to even make a short jab at the linguist who "pride[s] himself to have all the tongues that Babel cleft the world into" — an achievement Milton finds no more praiseworthy than the learning of "any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother dialect only" if not paired with the study of "the solid things in them [languages] as well as the words and lexicons" (ibid). What matters to Milton is the salvaging of thoughts, the wisdom of the ancients, the very reason why "we are taught the languages of those people who have at any time been most industrious after wisdom" (ibid). It is useful here to quote HALE on an emphasis of Milton's language-learning, namely, the exercise of translating not merely from original language to target language, and vice versa, but "to go round a circle of languages, finally back to the original." The value of this "circle" method Hale sees in that "words and ornaments are bound to be left behind" while "the thought is seized, ready to be expressed in whatever tongue. Paradoxically, then, so verbal an exercise trains one in skill of thought, as much as skills of words" (2005, 10).

3.2 *Imitatio* as a metamorphic conception of a work of art

The best way to illustrate the bifurcated character of Renaissance *Imitatio* is to evoke the sixteenth century Ciceronian controversy. On the one hand, purist like Cardinal Bembo (1470-1547), Sadoleto (1477-1547), Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1538) and Etienne Dolet (1509-1546), have come to look upon Cicero as the only definitive standard for Latin composition. They went as far as to use only the words and constructions found in Cicero's works, applying any circumlocution to achieve this end. Paul MONROE, in an introduction to Erasmus's *Ciceeronianus*, list two main tenets of the Ciceronians: 1) the existence of "an absolute standard in the use of language" (1908, 14), and, since that absolute standard was most perfectly achieved by Cicero, 2) "a proper style of writing Latin in any age and for all purposes was to be formed by direct imitation of the master" (1908, 15). Hence, they defined a rational aesthetics founded on presumably universal principles, taking no heed of the passage of time and the changes it necessarily brought, favoring instead a constant and universally applicable ideal¹⁵ unaffected by place or time. On the other hand, Anti-Ciceronians like Poliziano, Gianfrancesco, and Erasmus, opposed purist because their exclusive zeal for Cicero's style made of Latin a "dead" language, devoid of flexibility and accommodating capacities that would suit it for all sorts of topics, including those not addressed by Cicero

¹⁵ The universal application of the prefect Ciceronian style was somewhat contested by the nacionalistic attitude of Ciceronianism which was primarily an Italian phenomenon, and whose proponents claimed that "only Italians had the true gift of the Latin tongue; other nations, they thought, were automatically precluded from writing Latin of a quality fit to be called Ciceronian" (RUMMEL 2003, 123). One finds this notion persevering well unto Milton, perhaps because of his inclination towards Ciceronianism, for we read the following recommendation concerning Latin pronunciation: "[Latin] speech is to be fashioned to a distinct and clear pronunciation, as near as may be to the Italian, especially in the vowels. For we Englishmen, being far northerly, do not open our mouths in the cold air wide enough to grace the southern tongue, but are observed by all other nations to speak exceeding close and inward; so that to smatter Latin with an English mouth is as ill a hearing as law French" (HUGHES 1957, 633). The selfsame notion is what compels Milton to record with considerable pride his success as a poet among his Italian friends in *The Reason of Church Government*, receiving "written encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side of Alps" (HUGHES 1957, 668).

himself.¹⁶ In *Dialogus Ciceronianus [The Ciceronian]* (1528) Erasmus argument against the Italian purists amount to a wide-ranging discussion about the nature of *Imitatio*. The *Imitatio* Erasmus approves of is an imitation

not enslaved to one set of rules, from the guidelines of which it dare not depart, but imitation which gathers from all authors, or at least from the most outstanding, the thing which is the chief virtue of each and which suits your own cast of mind; imitation which does not immediately incorporate into its own speech any nice little feature it comes across, but transmits it to the mind for inward digestion, so that becoming part of your own system, it gives the impression not of something begged from someone else, but of something that springs from your own mental processes, something that exudes the characteristics and force of your own mind and personality. Your reader will see it not as a piece of decoration filched from Cicero, but a child sprung from your own brain, the living image of its father, like Pallas from the brain of Jove. Your speech will not be a patchwork of a mosaic, but a lifelike portrait of the person you really are, a river welling out from your inmost being.

(RUMMEL 2003, 133).

Instead of uplifting one perfect model/standard, Erasmus and the Anti-Ciceronians defended a freedom of choosing and combining from several different models/standards. But more than that, they emphasized the internalization of what they have gathered, through a process that would assimilate the source beyond recognition and exuding, hence, “the characteristics and force” of one’s own personality. Jeanneret at one point claims that Anti-Ciceronians “accepted anachronism as a gauge of freedom, a space for creation and self-assertion” (JEANNERET 2001, 243). I am somewhat dubious of this claim, precisely because the emphasis Jeanneret

¹⁶ The moral and religious effect of such blind devotion to Cicero was the primary reason for Erasmus’ diatribe against Ciceronianism, for in their servile adherence to the exact words of Cicero they called God the Father Jupiter Maximus, Jesus Apollo, etc. Cardinal Bembo went as far as to warn Sadoletto “to beware lest his style be corrupted by reading the *Epistles* of St. Paul” (MONROE 1908, 9).

puts on assimilation and transformation. On the one hand, the Anti-Ciceronians were conscious of the temporal distance that separated their world from the world of Antiquity. “Wherever I turn I see things changed, I stand on another stage, I see another theater, yes, another world” (ERASMUS 1908, 62). Hence, instead of imagining in the place of the contemporary Christian audience the Roman Senate and employing the very words of Cicero, they imagined how Cicero would speak if he were to live in their age.¹⁷ Liberated from its genuine (and unavailable) historical context, Cicero (and the rest of Antiquity), thus, became their contemporary in an imaginary dialogue that varied according to cultural settings, themes and persons engaging in it. But, on the other hand, Anti-Ciceronians were loath to commit practical anachronism. “Immoderate love for Cicero deceives many, because to adapt the language of Cicero to an entirely different theme [one he did not address] is to come out unlike him” (ERASMUS 1908, 77). The “surpassing” element in their practice of *Imitatio* liberated them from mere repetition of and subjection to the original, but it also makes the description of their practice as anachronistic somewhat out of place.¹⁸

Simply put, *Imitatio* in their praxis was based on the metamorphic conception of a work of art, preventing mere duplication. In order to avoid the trap of repetition and subjection, the model one imitated was interiorized and absorbed to the point when it became an integral part of the imitator’s system and, hence, indistinguishable from it. This way, the

¹⁷ “[I]f Cicero were alive now and endowed with such genius as he was then, with such still of speaking, with such knowledge of our times as he had of his own, if he were inflamed with such zeal toward the Christian state as he showed for the Roman City and the majesty of the Roman name, he would speak today as a Christian among Christians” (ERASMUS 1908, 70 *et seq.*).

¹⁸ In this respect, I have found Richard RORTY’s observation on rational and historical reconstruction of philosophy quite useful. He claims that the two genres of the historiography of philosophy, namely, historical and rational reconstructions of philosophy, can never be quite independent, because, one cannot reconstruct what dead thinkers would have said to their contemporaries (historical reconstruction) unless we try to relate his thoughts to what we ourselves might want to say (the anachronistic endeavour of rational reconstruction), hence, treating them as our own contemporaries with whom we might exchange views (1984, 49-56). Erasmus certainly exhibits both reconstructions, when expressing an awareness of Cicero’s historical context and, at the same time, imagining Cicero as his own contemporary.

division between past and present was suspended, and one (if gifted) produced a unique voice out of many. And not only that. The division between writer and reader was also suspended, for this way the author was seen as reader appropriating and transforming source-texts (JEANNERET 2001, 241).

Reading, thus, becomes writing, and the metamorphosis from one to the other was often described in terms of digestive metaphors going back to antiquity. The bee metaphor in particular emphasizes the process of assimilation and transformation. One ought to follow the example of the bees, says SENECA, in sifting whatever one has gathered from a varied course of reading and “so blend those several flavours into one delicious compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from whence it came” (*Ep.* 84.5). As in the production of honey, the food consumed must change from its original form to become tissue and blood. Hence, in case of food nourishing our “higher nature”, we must “see to it that whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or it will be no part of us. We must digest it; otherwise it will merely pass into the memory and not into our very being” (*Ep.* 84.6-7).

Erasmus also employs the apian metaphor in his struggle against the Ciceronians, emphasizing both its collecting/gathering and the creative/transformational aspect. Milton, however, makes no direct allusion to it, but employs digestive metaphors which emphasize the importance of transformation, although, in a rather complicated way.

In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643/1644), Milton presumes the reason why custom among teachers and masters (like virtue and conscience) attracts the most disciples and is considered the best instructor:

because her method is so glib and easy, in some manner like to that vision of Ezekiel rolling up her sudden book of implicit knowledge for him that will to take and swallow down at pleasure; which proving but of bad nourishment in the concoction, as it was heedless in the devouring, puffs up unhealthily a certain big face pretended learning mistaken among credulous men for the wholesome habit of soundness and good constitution, but is indeed no other than the swollen visage of counterfeit knowledge and literature... (HUGHES 1957, 696-697)

According to Peter M. McCCLUSKEY, Milton here “shows that if food is knowledge, then bad knowledge causes indigestion” (1997, 229) resulting in flatulence of folly; flatulence “being the symbol of corrupt doctrine” (228). However, he does not quote the whole passage and, hence, omits the reference to Ezekiel which perplexed HUGHES: “The roll symbolized the prophet’s message, and Milton’s use of it here hardly harmonizes with its Biblical context” (1957, 696n3). I assume that Hughes’ thoughts on custom’s “sudden book of implicit knowledge” were similar to that of McCluskey in perceiving it as false teaching per se. In reference to reading, Milton in *Areopagitica* permits that “[b]ad meats will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction”, nevertheless, he confidently claims that “wholesome meats to vitiated stomach differ little or nothing from unwholesome” (HUGHES 1957, 727). Moreover, he notes that bad books “to a discrete and judicious reader serve in many respect to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate” (ibid). What matters, thus, is not what enters into a man, be it bad or good, but rather the process of digestion – for even Ezekiel prophecies might prove “of bad nourishment *in the concoction*” (*italics mine*). Custom causes flatulence not necessarily because of its unhealthy content, but because it is “swallow[ed] down at pleasure” in a “heedless devouring” (696). Hence, those puffed up with custom are envious and censorious of “aught that sorts not with their *unchewed* notions and suppositions” (697 – *italics mine*). The digestive

process starts in the mouth with chewing,¹⁹ and we should, as QUINTILIAN notes, “consign our food to our stomach only when it is masticated and almost dissolved, in order that it may be easier of digestion” (*Inst.* X.1.19).²⁰ Hence, in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, custom’s book is a “book of implicit knowledge” for those that gorge on it, swallowing it “unchewed”, and, consequently, sporting a “swollen visage of counterfeit knowledge and literature.” As Raphael warns Adam in Book Seven of *Paradise Lost*: “Knowledge is a food, and needs no less / Her Temperance over Appetite”, otherwise it oppresses “with Surfet, and soon turns / Wisdom to Folly, as Nourishment to Winde” (126-130).²¹

The assimilation and transformation of the source-text, therefore, depended on its mental digestion. Indeed, the physiological meaning of the verb *digest* is listed only as the fourth in the *OED*, and is preceded by meanings like consider, to settle and arrange methodically, to reduce into a systematic form, to classify, and also to divide and dispose, to distribute (s.v. *digest* 3; 2; 1).²² Hence, the noun *digest* is used in reference to a methodically arranged compendium of written matter, as exemplified by the tradition of commonplace book.

¹⁹ On Renaissance notions of physical digestion see ALBALA 2002, 54-66 (especially p. 56 on chewing).

²⁰ QUINTILIAN speaks of reading in terms of digestion. In the passage quoted from *Instituto oratoria*, he accentuates the freedom in reading as opposed to speech which “escapes us with the rapidity of oral delivery.” Reading, thus, allows for careful deliberation equated with chewing, since one can commit to memory and reserve for imitation what one has read “not when it is in a crude state, but after being softened, and as it were triturated, by frequent repetition” (X.1.19).

²¹ As “unchewed” devouring of custom leads to implicit knowledge, so does that of Scripture lead to implicit faith. MILTON in *Of True Religion* notes, that implicit faith comes from “much hearing and small proficience, till want of fundamental knowledge easily turns to superstition or popery” and reminds his readers of Eph 4:14 (1835, 565). The extent to which Milton uses the images of flatulence (see MCCLUSKEY 1997, 227-238) it is hard to imagine “every wind of doctrine” in Eph 4:14 without some repugnant odor (or fishie fume).

²² JEANNERET in *The Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talks in the Renaissance* (1991) also notes the combination of physiological with the more general sense of to separate, sort out, order or classify in the sixteenth-century French and in the Latin *digerere*. He also makes note of digestion as a figure of rhetoric (in Cicero and Quintilian) whereby a general idea is divided into particular points implying classification and setting out (136).

3.3 A Good Digest of Common Places

As seen from the previous section, personal creation in writing was preceded by a preliminary work of digestion, involving consideration, classification and sorting of the traditional material for subsequent exploitation. The principal goal of the humanist program was to facilitate access to complete versions of original texts, but, at the same time, the antique resources were also offered in digests, that is, “in mobile units that could be recycled in new contexts” (JEANNERET 2001, 247). Indeed, many sixteenth and seventeenth-century works were collections of pieces selected and sorted according to more or less arbitrary classifications, inviting the reader to engage in their redistribution at his will.

The practice of digestion was instilled at an early age, in grammar school, with the making of commonplace books.²³ Commonplace stems from the Latin term *locus communis*, a translation of the Greek *topos koinos*. *Topos* in this context literally means “place”, the location or space where a speaker (or writer) can look for available means of persuasion.²⁴ The principle of this activity of topic collection was set forth by Erasmus in the treatises *De ratione studii* (1511) and *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum* (1512) at the request of John Colet, founder and head of St. Paul’s, a school, the same school Milton were to attend a century later. In *De ratione studii*, and in a later treatise *De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis* (1529), Erasmus put an emphasis on performance and on its building blocks: practice is better than rules; method is better than specific content, and an accessible, manageable organization of resources preferred over memorization. In *De Copia*, Erasmus demonstrated the method for

²³ On the common book tradition, its origin and legacy in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, as well as its application by Milton see the booklength study of MOHL 1969.

²⁴ Milton in *Art of Logic* says of the same: “So in Greek the invention of arguments is called topica, since it contains τοποις [sic!], that is places whence arguments are taken, and teaches the way and the method of inventing arguments well, when they have been arranged in their proper order” (CE XI, 23; in MOHL 1969, 13).

generating one's own linguistic grist, and it is fundamentally "a study of the effects produced by different word choices and the various techniques of linguistic elaboration", and as such "a functional treatment of language as praxis" (BARNETT 1996, 545). Book two of *De copia* gives a general exposition on techniques of invention, and instructs the student how to make collections of themes and commonplaces disposable when called upon to write or speak. This was no simple note taking, the habit of which was discouraged by Erasmus as "injurious to memory and to the power of selection. Such [notes] as were taken were to be reduced to order, and arranged under headings in manuscript books" as mobile units ready for new uses (WOODWARD 1904, 119; in MOHL 1969, 19n24).

Consequently, the need for originality was not reserved merely to the new, inventive use of gathered riches, but also in the process of collecting and systematizing. A dissatisfaction with the procedure of commonplace book making is noted as early as Bacon, who in the *Advancement of Learning* writes that "of the methods of common-places that I have seen, there is none of any sufficient worth; all of them carrying merely the face of a school [...] referring to vulgar matters and pedantical divisions, without life or respect to action" (WRIGHT 164-165; in MOHL 1969, 24). And yet, Bacon was not against "a good digest of commonplaces" for it "assureth copie [i.e. plenty] of invention, and contrasteth judgement to a strength" (ibid). It was the pedantic note taking resulting in "patchwork of mosaic" that was held in contempt by all erudites in favor of imitation beyond the recognition of sources.²⁵ A

²⁵ See for example Erasmus describing Pio's work, the *XXIII libri*, as a *cento* (Latin term for a patchwork), calling Pio's alleged helpers *rhapsodi*, that is, "scroungers and sewers who gather scraps for the *XIII libri* and stitched them together" (ERASMUS 2005, 107n1). Milton, in *Areopagitica*, also makes an ironic remark on the clergyman who is satisfied to write his sermons with the aid of his commonplace book, his "topic folio, the gatherings and savings of a sober graduation... treading the constant round of certain doctrinal heads... by forming and transforming, joyning and dis-joyning variously a little bookcraft and two hours meditation" (HUGHES 1957, 740; MOHL 1969, 25-26).

commonplace book made aright bore the personal traits of its maker, and revealed his personal interests.

Educated in the practice of commonplace book making, Renaissance writers had a penchant for miscellanies, compilations, and anthologies. Hence, one of the most popular genres to arise in the sixteenth century was that of the emblem book. Not only were its images redistributed and circulated with changing meaning in changing contexts as in Jacob Cat's *Silenus Alcibiadis sive Proteus* (1618),²⁶ but the events and story bits taken from the antiquity set in different contexts also came to illustrate radically different ideas. It is no wonder, therefore, that antiquity is represented by Proteus (fig. 3) in Andrea ALCIATI's *Eblemata [Book of Emblems]* (1542).²⁷ The motto itself is telling: *Antiquissima quaeque commenticia* — The oldest things are all invented (from Latin *commentum* meaning invention, contrivance, also comment and interpretation). Bacon in his *Wisdom of the Ancients* identified Proteus also as “the messenger and interpreter of all antiquities and hidden mysteries” for knowing not only things present, and future (hence, his ability of divination) but past too (1854, 297). Such an interpreter, however, implies the variability of antiquity itself, a notion present not only in the motto of Alciati's emblem, but in the Latin verse accompanying it:

Pallena senex, cui forma est histrice, Proteu,
Qui modo membra viri fers, modo membra feri:
Dic age, quae species ratio te vertit in omnes,
Nulla sit ut vario certa figura tibi?
Signa vetustatis, primaevi & praefero seculi,
De quo quisque suo somniat arbitro.

²⁶ See footnote 36 to page 71.

²⁷ Although the first authorized edition of Alciati's *Emblematum Libellus* was published in 1534 (preceded by a German edition in 1531 by the publisher Heinrich Steyner), the Proteus emblem first appeared in the 1542 Paris edition by Christian Wechel as emblem 115 (see <http://www.mun.ca/alciato/c183.html>).

[Proteus, old man of Pallene, whose outward appearance changes like an actor's, assuming sometimes the body of a man, sometimes that of a beast, come, tell me, what is your reason for turning into all kinds of shapes, so that you have no permanent form as constantly alter? I offer symbols of antiquity and the very first times, concerning which everyone dreams up what he will.]



fig.3: Alciati's *Emblemata* (Antwerp, 1577), emblem 182.

In Alciati's emblem Proteus is, thus, offering the "symbols of antiquity" in a true mercurial fashion: assimilating them to the notions (dreams) of each individual's will. Erasmus's *Adages* exemplifies the very fecundity of such protean antiquity. In it, Erasmus aimed at collecting and explaining proverbs, aphorisms, figurative expressions harvested from the

ancients following the standards of the new philology: citing the adage's Greek and Latin occurrences, explaining its literal and figurative meaning, and providing additional information on contexts (a method followed more or less by Alciati too in the prose discussion of his emblems). The governing principle of the collection was amplification, hence, the first edition of 1530 published in Paris and containing merely 818 adages on 152 pages grew into a hefty edition of 4,151 entries by its last publication in the life of Erasmus (1536). The adage "Herculei labores [The Labors of Hercules]" became a long essay about Erasmus' own work on the *Adages*, a work always in the making, never completely done.²⁸ But the term was also appropriated to lexicography, the budding works of dictionaries and encyclopedias.²⁹ What made these compilations, miscellanies and anthologies so popular was indeed the mobility of its parts. Hence also, the popularity of epic poems that had an encyclopedic quality "distilling the essence of all the religious, philosophical, political, even scientific learning of its time" (FRYE 1965, 5; see also LEWALSKI 1993, 571-572). And due to their mobile, transforming building blocks, all of these genres participated in a constant transformation. The Renaissance authors perceived their works in repeated need of licking, as a bear does the formless lump of its cub, before it would come to resemble its final form. As Erasmus said: "Just as we do not stop working, as long as we live, to make ourselves better, we never stop correcting and improving the works of our mind until we stop living... No book is wrought such that it cannot be made more perfect" (MANN PHILLIPS 1964, xv).

²⁸ "If any human labours ever deserved to be called Herculean, it is certainly the work of those who are striving to restore the great works of ancient literature..." (MANN PHILLIPS 1964, 194). Erasmus, not content to compare his laboring to that of Hercules alone, invokes also the image of Sisyphus, "for proverbs are like little gems, so small that they often escape the searcher's eye unless you look very carefully [...] and not once only but over and over again, as the subject requires it, one must push up the stone of Sisyphus" (196).

²⁹ See CONSIDINE 2008, 1-18.

3.4 Works in progress

Not even the invention of printing, that gave such impetus to the laboring of sixteenth-century humanists, could bring an end to the mobility of Renaissance authors. Especially, since the tendency of the young printing trade was that of caution: starting off with small printing and — should the reception prove favorable — increasing the quantity subsequently. The author, moreover, all those involved in the process of production (typographer, corrector), could intervene and modify the text almost at any time, consequently, all copies of the “same” edition, although bearing the same title page and date of publication, were not necessarily identical. The changes, from punctual interference during the process of press to the replacement of sheets and insertions of pages in the binding, “resulted in virtually limitless combinations of — most often slight — variables, up to certain extreme cases where every copy of the book is unique” (JEANNERET 2001, 202). What Jeanneret notes with surprise, is the “strong resistance in the sixteenth century against the mechanical reproduction of a fixed text” (2001, 202).

I believe this resistance persisted well into the seventeenth-century and that Milton was no stranger to it. There is a particularly revealing section in *Areopagitica* where he describes the annoyance of modifying or adding to a licensed work under press:

[W]hat if the author shall be one so copious of fancy as to have many things well worth the adding, come into his mind after licencing, while the book is yet under press, which not seldom happens to the best and diligentes writers; and that perhaps a dozen times in one book. The printer dares not go beyond his licenced copy. So often then must the author trudge to his leave-giver, that those his new insertions may be viewed, and many a jaunt will be made, ere that licenser, for it must be the same man, can either be found, or found at leisure. Meanwhile, either the press must

stand still, which is no small damage, or the author lose his accuratest thoughts and send the book forth worse than he had made it, which to a diligent writer is the greatest melancholy and vexation that can befall.

(HUGHES 1957, 735)

Note that Milton primarily envisions additions, not corrections,³⁰ to the work in the process of publishing, an occurrence “which not seldom happens to the best and diligences writers”, moreover, “a dozen times in one book.” But Milton shares the transformist sensibility of the Renaissance not merely in this productional aspect of variation and transformation. A book that would stop changing after the death of its author, a work that would take up a fixed form preserved in its last (or any previous) state would die too. Milton knew that the life of his work depended on a posterity that would “not willingly let it die” (HUGHES 1957, 668). To keep his works alive, to put that “potency of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are” (720) they have to undergo the same transformative digestion Milton’s source-text had to undergo.

Milton’s famous dragon’s teeth comparison in *Areopagitica* deserves here a special attention. “I know that they [books] are as lively and as vigorously productive as those fabulous dragon’s teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed man” (HUGHES 1957, 720). Catherine Gimelli Martin recognizes in it an almost verbatim paraphrase from BACON’s *Advancement of Learning*:

the images of men’s wits and knowledge remain in books, exempted from the wrong of time and capable of perpetual renovation. Neither are they fitly to be called images, because they generate still, can cast their seed in the minds of others, provoking and causing infinite actions and opinions in succeeding ages [...] that whatsoever motions the spirit of man could

³⁰ Adams in *Milton and the Modern Critics* envisions a frenzied, imaginary scene of Milton directing some of the minor changes and variations in spelling and capitalization within the first edition of *Paradise Lost* (a hypothesis of Helen Darbishire) that would make even the ablest parodist burst with envy (1955, 67-68).

act and perform without the organs of the body [...] might remain after death. (1854, 183; MARTIN 2010, 132).

Bacon is clearly emphasizing the potential of literature to continuously generate, casting new seeds in the minds of others and, hence, provoke and cause actions and opinions in succeeding ages.³¹ But Bacon's seeds seem "gentler" than Milton's "dragon's teeth" in that the latter are capable of "springing up armed men." It is a general assumption that Milton took this image from Ovid's story of Cadmus, and in doing so evoked also the image of civil war.³² Thus, MARTIN, following Nigel Smith, recalls Henry Parker's use of the Cadmus myth "for the same political purpose: to show that multiple branches of 'knowledge in the making' are essential to 'the reforming of Reformation itself'" (2010, 132).³³ Civil war is similarly the outcome of Joad RAYMOND's reading, who draws our attention to another aspect of Renaissance book production, namely, that "small books were indeed sewn up and down, being stitched together instead of bound; and that in 1642 stitched book did indeed 'spring up armed men'" (2003, 203). However, I would like to suggest another, Erasmian interpretation that seems to me more in line with Milton's particular argument about "lively and vigorously productive" books.

³¹ One should, of course, note that Bacon puts an equal emphasis on their time enduring capacity as opposed to that of more solid structures, like statues and buildings, which were not "exempted from the wrong of time." In this respect, what Bacon lauds is contrary to Jeanneret's and my own emphasis on transformation for, in BACON's words, their capacity of endurance lies in maintaining their original form: "For have not the verses of Homer continued twenty-five hundred years, or more, without the loss of a syllable or letter" (1854, 183).

³² In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Cadmus, instructed by Athena, sowed the dragon's teeth in to the ground, from which sprang a race of armed men. Cadmus fearing a new battle (he had just slain the dragon whose teeth he sow) prepared to arm for defense, but one of the earth-born cried: "Arm not! Away from civil wars!" A fierce massacre ensued with only five warriors surviving, who later assisted Cadmus in founding Thebes (3.95-137).

³³ The context in which Parker refers to the dragon's teeth (and the fact that he writes it with a capital *D*) suggest the identification of the dragon with Papal Rome: "The main Engineers in the Civil Warre are Papists, the most poisonous, serpentine, Iesuited Papist of the World. And the Papist in Europe either pay for the prosperity of the design, or here contribute some other influence and assistance to it. This warre was not the production of these last two years, nor was England alon the field wherein the Dragon's teeth were sown" (PARKER 1643, 9; in SMITH 1990, 110). Smith is careful not to draw the parallel too close when noting that the image of dragon's teeth in Milton "becomes the image of active republic, full of vibrant, energetic individuals" (111).

In a dialogue on the right way of speaking Latin and Greek, *De recta pronuntiatione* (1528) — a topic dear to Milton as well —, Erasmus connects the myth of Cadmus’s sowing the dragon’s teeth with the traditional assumption that Cadmus introduced writing to the Greeks. For, as he explains, if one were to look and “count the top teeth and the bottom teeth” in the dragon’s mount, one “would find the number of letters that Cadmus introduced” from Phoenicia (ERASMUS 1985a, 396). In allegorizing the sowing of the dragon’s teeth, Erasmus is not merely explicating on his favorite word, *sermo* [speech] (for “the word ‘say’ and ‘sow,’ *sermo* and *sero*, share the same root” [397])³⁴ but providing a vivid, albeit brief, image of his notion of language as praxis: “When they [the teeth] are in their original [alphabetical] order they are inert. Scatter them, sow them, let them multiply, distribute them in different combinations, and they will become alive, active and aggressive” (396-397). In other words, the true potential of the letters is realized only in distribution, in multiplication and in their reorganization in various combinations; only this way can they become a force. The fact that Milton compares books and not letters to the dragon’s teeth is not an obstacle to a fruitful application of Erasmus’ interpretation. As the fruits of the seed planted provide new seeds for planting, so do books composed of “dragon’s teeth” provide new “teeth” for sowing. But for them to rise up armed man, they too must not remain

³⁴ In the second of the five editions of his New Testament, *Novum Testamentum omne* (1519), Erasmus made the controversial substitution of *sermo* for *verbum* in John 1:1, a change to which Erasmus clung almost obstinately, even in face of bitter opposition (especially, if one considers his mellowing stance on Comma Johanneum, the 1 John 5: 7-8 passage he omitted from the first two editions, but supplied from the third edition (1522) on). As BARNETT notes, “Erasmus seldom interests himself in meaning independent of speakers and their performances. For him the speaker speaking seems to be an essential factor in the efficacy of a discourse generally, and [...] particularly important in relation to the degree to which discourse can successfully perform an ethical function” (1996, 558). In this contexts, the importance of Erasmus’ word choice lies in asserting Christ as the speech of God, reflecting his rhetorical activity; and, consequently, the notion of *imitation Christi* as speaking eloquently with the objective of “eliciting tears of contrition and inflaming the hearts of their listeners” (545). Waswo sees in this substitution of *sermo* (speech) for *verbum* (word) a reflection of the semantic shift he exposes in *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, for it reveals “the humanist practice of locating meaning less in single, discrete words and more in whole utterances and propositions, larger units that presuppose the semantic importance of usage and context” (1987, 220)

inert in their original form of composition, but must be scattered, sown, and their content distributed in different combination. This is how posterity would not willingly let a work die. “Success does not lie in accomplishment but in the impetus give to posterity [...] the essential pole of the book is in the future, with the recipient who will act as relay, carry on the production and pass it along in turn” (JEANNERET 2001, 211).

3.5 Turning ideas into more shapes than Proteus

The relevance of a work is, therefore, determined by its reception. The more room a work leaves for the reader to intervene, lending itself to various operations and appropriations, the better. Renaissance authors intuitively understood that the future of their works depended on a collaboration with their readers, hence, they had to appeal to the reader’s intelligence and stimulate his imagination. And the best way to engage the mind of the recipient party is by applying variety. For “variety is so powerfull in every sphere”, claims ERASMUS,

that there is absolutely nothing, however brilliant, which is not dimmed if not commended by variety... Just as the eyes fasten themselves on some new spectacle, so the mind is always looking for some fresh object of interest. If it is offered a monotonous succession of similarities, it very soon wearies and turns its attention elsewhere, and so everything gained by a speech is lost all at once. This disaster can easily be avoided by someone who has it at his fingertips to turn one idea into more shapes than Proteus himself is supposed to have turned into. (1978, 302).

The ability to turn an idea into more shapes than Proteus is not useful only in speech acts, but in writing too (although, I will return to the significance of speech later, in conclusion). Especially, since for ERASMUS writing was in essence “just silent speech” (1985a, 397). Variety lets the speaker/writer avoid two sources of tedium: tautology, the repetition of a

word or phrase, and homology, identical repetition with even less variation, both boring the “wretched audience to death” (1978, 302). But variety does not only keep the audience/readers’ attention alert. In the *Ratio verae theologiae*, Erasmus applies protean versatility to Christ himself, noting that variety does not “disturb this harmony [of Christ], but as a composition of different voices is rendered more agreeable, the variety of Christ makes harmony more complete” (see page 63n36).

In a section of one of his antiprelatical tracts, the *Animadversions* (1641), Milton argues against a set form of liturgy in a similar fashion. The tract is written as a dialogue between Remonstrant, voicing a selected quote from the opponent, and Milton, offering a polemical reply. The suggestion that prescribed words of a prayer help people be more intent on orison and less distracted is met with Milton asserting the opposite: the continuous use of the same words makes one careless, even sleepy. It is “variety” that “erects and rouses an auditory, like the masterful running over many chords and divisions; whereas if men should be ever be thumbing the drone of one plain song, it would be a dull opiate to the most wakeful attention” (FLETCHER 1835, 62). Milton elaborates the same thought in more detail and with more irony when writing *Eikonoklastes* (first published in 1649, then again with additions in 1650). He emphasizes the tyranny of prescribed litany and the servility of those following it. Exasperated by the argument that we are all to pray the same words because we pray to the same God, Milton ironically exclaims: “Let us then use but one word, because we pray to one God” (314). Moreover, in a fit of extremes he compares the prescribed words of a prayer to the heavenly manna, which “hoarded up and enjoined us [...] will be found, like reserved manna, rather

to breed worms and stink” (ibid).³⁵ And although Milton acknowledges that we have duties upon us, and feel the same wants, he adds:

yet not always the same, nor at all times alike; but with variety of circumstances, which ask variety of words: whereof God hath given us plenty; not to use so copiously upon all other occasions, and so niggardly to him alone in our devotion... as [God] left our affections to be guided by his sanctifying spirit, so did he likewise our words to be put into us without our premeditation; not only those cautious words to be used before gentiles and tyrants, but much more those filial words, of which we have so frequent use in our access with freedom of speech to the throne of grace. (FLETCHER 1835, 314-315)

It is no surprise, therefore, that Milton’s Adam and Eve offer their orisons each morning

In various style, for neither various style
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.
(5.146-150).

Moreover, the variety of their prayers reflects the variety perceived in Creation in general, or vice versa:

Aire, and ye Elements the eldest birth
Of Natures Womb, that in quaternion run
Perpetual Circle, multiform; and mix

³⁵ During their exodus the Israelites were fed by God with manna (Ex 16), an edible substance they had to gather each day anew, for stored up for the next day it “bred worms and stank” (Ex 16:20). The only exception being that of manna provided on the day before Sabbath, which was twice the amount usually gathered and did not spoil the next day to accord the Sabbath ordinance (Ex 16:23-24). It is interesting to note again, how Milton manages to compare the prescribed prayers to manna and, yet, by that very comparison establish the unpremeditated prayer as the true manna whose “new” expressions “God every morning rains down... into our hearts” (FLETCHER 1835, 314).

And nurish all things, let your ceaseless change
Varie to our great Maker still new praise. (5.180-184)

WASWO would no doubt delight to know, that Milton too insisted “on the semantic principle of context” (1987, 222), that necessitated different words for different circumstances. At the same time, he would also note (although not specifically in this passage but elsewhere in Milton) what he calls the discrepancy between theory and practice in Renaissance language debates. Namely, “[w]hen language is talked about, it is consciously regarded as the clothing of preexistent meanings, but when language is employed to reflect on its various functions [...] it is often implicitly regarded as constitutive of meaning” (60). The former, Waswo calls the “cosmetic view” while the latter he terms the “constitutive mode.” The difference is between

regarding language as the clothing or container of thoughts, feelings, objects, and meanings that have a separate existence elsewhere and regarding it as constituting those thoughts, feelings, objects, and meanings in the very act of articulating them – just as a melody is constituted by, and is inseparable from, its sounds and the relations among them. [...] the theoretical opposition between these views is a product of all the subsequent reflection on language that has crystallized clearer issues out of what remained for Renaissance thinkers and writers a rather murkier solution of assumptions. (WASWO 1987, 60-61)

Hence, in his chapter on Erasmus, WASWO praises the humanist scholar for his recipes of variation for implicitly treating “meaning as context- and purpose-dependent”, while emphasizing the above mentioned discrepancy since “words are” for Erasmus “still explicitly conceived as semantically cosmetic” as seen in his copious use of the “standard formula — ‘what clothing is to our body, style is to thought’” (1987, 216-217). Milton also applies this “formula” time and time again and perhaps most

prominently in his *At a Vacation Exercise in the College*.³⁶ Furthermore, the practice of giving variety to expression as the quotation from *Eikonoklastes* suggests (“variety of circumstances, which ask variety of words”) is, to use Erasmus’ words, “exactly like changing clothes” (BARNETT 1996, 552). The reason why I digress into this topic is because I would like to suggest a slight corrective to Waswo’s perception on the discrepancy between cosmetic and constitutive mode of language.

First of all, I think that his choice of term “cosmetic” is misleading in respect to Renaissance way of thinking about words as clothing thoughts. The adjective “cosmetic” is definitively derogatory in Waswo’s use, indicating the subjected status of words in a binary hierarchy with words. It allows words/clothes a mere decorative role that has no constitutive value. Hence, I don’t think that cosmetic(s) appropriately describes what Renaissance thinkers thought clothes (and words) do. Clothes do make a man, and they especially did so in the Renaissance. The sumptuary laws, dictated both by the national and local government, and legislating what items of dress could be worn by various ranks of people, were enacted in the spirit of this commonplace. The concern with the proper standard of dress (especially the subversive use of clothes) was nowhere so accentuated as in the antitheatrical writings of the age. As CERASANO notes:

Accounts of the Elizabethan theater are replete with references to the sumptuary laws and the frequent complaints against players who “jett in their silks” thus aping their social betters. Finally the playing companies were capable of purchasing clothing that individual actors were legally prohibited from wearing except on the stage where they impersonated those who had sold them the clothes, thus “borrowing” both robe and title.
(1994, 55)

³⁶ Addressing his “native Language” Milton writes: “...haste thee straight to do me once a Pleasure, / And from thy wardrobe bring thy chieftest treasure; / [...] / 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 ar[r]ay” (17-26).

However, the issue at question, as I have already noted in the chapter on Proteus, is far more complicated and burrows deeper than simple borrowing of “robe and title.” Paraphrasing Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-two, Phillip STUBBES writes: “Apparel was giuen vs as a signe distinctiue to discern betwixt sex and sex, & therefore on to wear the Apparel of another sex is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the verities of his own kinde” (1583, 73). By borrowing an apparel of a different gender one put one’s own gender in jeopardy, for the act meant participation “with the same” with consequential adulteration of one’s own true nature. Clothes are, therefore, seen not merely as separable adornments but also as constitutive (participating in) of the very things they clothed, because they were able to adulterate them, that is change them by addition. All in all, I do not see such a discrepancy between the Renaissance theory and practice of language. The theoretical opposition between the referential (Waswo’s cosmetic) and relational (constitutive) views is, as Waswo himself notes, “a product of all the subsequent reflection on language” but I am still in doubt whether this subsequent theoretical opposition “crystallized clearer issues”, and would positively deny that these issues “remained for Renaissance thinkers and writers a rather murkier solution of assumptions” (see WASWO 1987, 61). The reason why one perceives such a discrepancy in the first place is, as noted above, that Renaissance thinkers indeed thought about language doing both: referring to their thoughts and construing them at the same time, just as their metaphors on clothing suggest. And it is precisely this “adulterating” power of clothes/words to change by addition that is facilitated by the ability to turn one idea into more shapes than Proteus.

The ability of turning an idea into various shapes comes particularly handy when one wishes to become “an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things” (HUGHES 1957, 668), for as ERASMUS commends, it is “of great assistance in commenting on authors, translating books from

foreign languages, and writing verse” (1978, 302). Not that I think of Milton as of a translator — the thought was foreign to Milton himself, although, there were times in his life when translation played an important role. But as his own words attest: “my mother bore me a speaker of what God made my own; and not a translator” (HALE 2005, 68). Nevertheless, he was an interpreter, in that he accommodated and related “the best and sagest things, among mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect” (HUGHES 1957, 668). And in *Paradise Lost*, Milton indeed came up with the sagest possible thing.³⁷ In it, Milton engaged in a kind of paraphrasis, the challenge of which ERASMUS described (in respect to his *Paraphrases* of the New Testament) as the challenge to “say things differently without saying different things, especially on a subject which is not only difficult in many ways, but sacred, and very near the majesty of the Gospel” (1984, 2-3; in BARNETT 1996, 555). The role of the paraphraser suited Milton more than that of a translator, since by paraphrasing he could rephrase his source in his own words (and, hence, be the speaker of what God made his own), whereas translation would mean an attempt to reproduce a version of the words of his source themselves. WASWO’s observation on Erasmus’ paraphrase is applicable to Milton’s too, for it too “seeks to engage the emotions of the reader by elaborating the text imaginatively, by recreating its situation in familiar and contemporary terms, by drawing out the emotional power in the actual discourse — not by leaping to a presumed ‘higher’ truth beyond or above it” (1987, 224). Just how successful Milton was in this, one only needs to recall Voltaire’s assessment:

³⁷ In Samuel Johnson’s words, Milton’s “subject is the fate of worlds, the revolutions of heaven and earth; rebellion against the Supreme King, raised by the highest order of created beings; the overthrow of their host, and the punishment of their crime; the creation of a new race of reasonable creatures; their original happiness and innocence, their forfeiture of immortality, and their restoration to hope and peace” (ELLEGE 1993, 483).

What Milton so boldly undertook he performed with a superior strength of judgment, and with an imagination productive of beauties not dreamt of before him. [...] There is something above the reach of human forces to have attempted the creation without bombast; to have described gluttony and curiosity of a woman without flatness; to have brought probability and reason amidst the hurry of imaginary things belonging to another world, and as far remote from the limits of our notions as they are from our earth; in short, to force the reader to say, "If God, if the Angels, if Satan would speak, I believe they would speak as they do in Milton." (ELLEGE 1975, 478)

It is time, therefore, that we take a closer look at *Paradise Lost*, and see how Milton turned his ideas into more shape than Proteus.

4 Hovering between images

*Behold, I shew you a mystery;... we shall
all be changed.*

1Cor 15:51

4.1 More or less than meets the eye

Of the many Milton critics that have noted the ability of Milton's verse to engage the reader's mind and imagination in an incessant movement, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's observation seems to me the closest to what Erasmus noted about the benefit of variety:¹

The grandest effort of poetry are where the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected; the result being what the poet wishes to impress, namely, the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image. (ELLEGE 1975, 499-500).

Imagination, as Coleridge defined it, is an unfixed state of mind, wavering between images, "attaching itself permanently to none" in contrast with a

¹ "There is absolutely nothing, however brilliant, which is not dimmed if not commended by variety... Just as the eyes fasten themselves on some new spectacle, so the mind is always looking for some fresh object of interest. If it is offered a monotonous succession of similarities, it very soon wearies and turns its attention elsewhere, and so everything gained by a speech is lost all at once. This disaster can easily be avoided by someone who has it at his fingertips to turn one idea into more shapes than Proteus himself is supposed to have turned into" (ERASMUS 1978, 302).

mind fixed on one definitive image and consequently becoming “understanding” (ELLEGE 1993, 499). Coleridge’s example of a passage offering such a strong working of the reader’s mind is “the fine description of Death in Milton” (ibid).

... The other shape,
If shape it might be call’d that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb
Or substance might be call’d that shadow seem’d,
For each seem’d either; black it stood as Night,
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell
And shook a dreadful Dart; what seem’d his head
The likeness of a Kingly Crown had on. (2.666-673)

Nowhere does Milton so copiously shower his readers with the semblance of mere “seem’d.” Milton uses everything at his disposal to make this image as evasive as possible: each and every contention, no matter how uncertainly introduced (with *ifs* and *mights* and *seems*) is at once recalled. We are left with commonplaces that help merely to reinforce our blindness, our very inability to *see* Death: Night, Furies, and Hell.² Even the crown, which Death has on what seems his head, is merely the “likeness of a Kingly Crown.” The only solid thing we can hold onto in this depiction is the “dreadful Dart.”³ One seems to discover a reason for this fleeting image of Death in Michael’s words to Adam: “... many shapes / Of Death, and

² See Isa 59:9-10; *Lycidas* 1.75, and *PL* 1.61-64.

³ It is interesting to note that Edmund Burke wrote about Milton’s description of Death in painterly terms: “it is astonishing with what a gloomy pomp, with what a significant and expressive uncertainty of strokes and colouring he has finished the portrait of the king of terrors” (1735, 44). Especially when we think of Coleridge, who used Milton’s description of Death to demonstrate “the narrow limit of painting, as compared with the boundless power of poetry” (ELLEGE 1993, 500). In the several attempts to visualize this allegorical episode of *Paradise Lost*, “how was Death represented?” — asked Coleridge. “Not as Milton has described him, but by the most defined thing that can be imagined — a skeleton, the driest and hardest image that it is possible to discover; which instead of keeping the mind in a state of activity, reduces it to the merest passivity, — an image, compared to which a square, a triangle, or any other mathematical figure, is a luxuriant fancy” (ibid).

many are the wayes that lead / To his grim Cave” (9.467-469). In the following twenty-five lines Michael proceeds to list these many ways, completed with “Diseases dire, of which a monstrous crew” is show in vision to Adam. Lines 485-487 were originally absent from the first edition of 1667, and were added to the 1674 edition to *Paradise Lost* (with several other additions) proving Milton an author to “be one so copious of fancy as to have many things well worth the adding” (HUGHES 1957, 735).

The image of Death is not the only image that resist fixation. Throughout the first four books of *Paradise Lost*, Milton compels the reader to a constant shift between opposing descriptions of the fallen angels by alternately referring to them as either hideously changed or being Godlike.

Satan starts his very first speech by taking notice of the change wrought in his companion: “If thou beest he; But O how fall’n! how chang’d / From him, who in the happy Realms of Light / Cloth’d with transcendent brightness didst out-shine / Myriads though bright” (1.84-87). In a passing remark he also notes his own change “in outward luster” and perceives also the change in scenery in that magnificent passage claiming himself the new possessor of Hell:

Is this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime,
That we must change for Heav’n, this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is Sovran can dispose and bid
What shall be right: fardest from him is best
Whom reason had equald, force hath made supream
Above his equals. Farewel happy Fields
Where Joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor;... (1:242-252)

The shift comes when we are shown (with Satan) the scattered legions of “Angel Forms”, “abject and lost” laying “Under amazement of thir hideous change” (1.300-313). The moment they regain their composure and stand in front of their leader, they are “Godlike shapes and forms / Excelling human, Princely Dignities, / And Powers that earst in Heaven sat on Thrones” (1.358-360); a description confirmed some two hundred lines later when Satan sums up their number and sees “Thir visage and stature as of Gods” (1.570). They in return observe their commander

... above the rest
 In shape and gesture proudly eminent
 Stood like a Towr; his form had yet not lost
 All her Original brightness, nor appear'd
 Less then Arch Angel ruind, and th' excess
 Of Glory obscur'd:... (1.589-594)]

What puzzles the reader is how unproportioned the application of the adjective “hideous” seems to a description that emphasizes the God likeliness of the fallen angels, and the luster slightly dimmed in Satan. It hardly warrants the dramatic exclamation of “O how fall'n! how chang'd” either. Since at this point the reader is not given any description of unfallen angels, the reader is lacking a reference point that would help perceive in what exactly lies the change from one (unfallen state) to the other (fallen state). Nor can one be quite sure if the hideous change stupefying the ruined angels is due to the observation of their “evil plight” (entailing their surroundings) or of their (if) transformed selves.

At this point, I would like to comment on the oft stated discrepancy between the narrator's comments in Book One, and the perception of its characters that has caused much debate among Milton scholars (FORSYTH 2003, 82-83). I think it is a rueful oversimplification to credit Satan's speech alone with the effect of supplying us with an image of God's

adversary bereft of “sting, hoofs, and horns”, clothed merely “with the sublime grandeur of a graceful but tremendous spirit” (3), while assigning to the narrative voice all of the corrective effects of balancing such imagery. In the passages I quoted, Satan and the narrator both add to our confusion, since both confirm a gruesome change in the fallen angels while maintaining a description of their original brightness not yet lost. Hence, the “splitting of the reader’s attention”, as Richard Bradford calls it, is not merely the result of “the contradiction between [Satan’s] speech and the narrator’s subsequent comment[s]” (FORSYTH 2003, 82), but of a much more complex shifting of grounds caused by a collaborative effort of both Satan’s words and the narrator’s comments.

Time and time again Milton blurs our perception, hence, when we reach the passage in Book Four where Satan, squatting like a toad by Eve’s ear, is caught by the night watch of angels and forcefully returned to his “own likeness”, the words of Zephon catch us by surprise:

Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same
 Or undiminisht brightness, to be known
 As when thou stoodst in Heave’n upright and pure;
 That Glorie then, when thou no more was good,
 Departed from thee, and thou resembl’st now
 Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foule. (4.835-840)

No less than the reader, Satan is “abasht” not so much for being caught and faced with the “awful goodness” of his captors “but chiefly to find here observd / His lustre visibly impar’d” (4.846-850). The stress is on “here”, both metrically and perceptually, for it is here in the company of the cherubim that Milton for the first time describes Satan as a horrible sight — “the grieslie King” (4.821).⁴

⁴ See also of Death, as “the grieslie terror” (2.704). I cannot help but note (with some mischievous glee) that Pearce made no comment on “grieslie” as being a “superfluous epithet” to “terror”, as in the case of Bentley’s “transpicuous gloom” (see p. 13).

Also, it is here in Book Four that we see him fluctuating his shape in rapid succession — a feat reminding one of Proteus. Renouncing “his loftie stand on that high Tree” (on which he perched like a Cormorant)

Down he alights among the sportful Herd
Of those fourfooted kindes, himself not one,
Now other, as thir shape servd best his end
Neerer to view his prey, [...]
[...]
A Lion now he stalkes with fierie glare,
Then as a Tyger, who by chance hath spi'd
In some Purlieu two gentle Fawnes at play,
Strait couches close, then rising changes oft
His couchant watch, as one who chose his ground
Whence rushing he might surest size them both
Gript in each paw:... (4.396-408)

But while Proteus deploys his ability to escape, Satan’s intent is the very opposite: it is to rush and capture his unsuspecting victims. However, this ability to change shapes and to assume different forms does not seem to be a uniquely devilish art.

In the midst of his catalogue of pagan gods, identifying Baalim and Ashtaroth as a male and a female fallen angel respectively, there is an abrupt insertion of a puzzling comment:

... For Spirits when they please
Can either Sex assume, or both; so soft
And uncompounded is thir Essence pure,
Not ti'd or manacl'd with joynt or limb,
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
Like cumrous flesh; but in what shape they choose
Dilated or condens't, bright or obscure,
Can execute thir aerie purposes,

It is puzzling, for the reader must necessarily be hesitant of its application: is this the ability of all spirits, fallen and unfallen alike, or merely applicable to the deceptive lot? Milton wrote the passage in fairly general terms, and the ability, literally to turn into more shapes than Proteus, comes handy when “Spirits” need to “execute thir aerie purposes, / And works of love or enmity fulfill.” But how do we interpret the adjective of their purposes? Is it *aerie* as in aerial and, hence, ethereal, or is it spiritual/incorporeal, or is it merely unsubstantial? Are those the purposes of the fallen or unfallen spirits? Can one decide on one such word as “aerie”?⁵ Nor does the last line of the quoted passage necessarily answer the question; it merely leads us into a maze of unanswerable questions, whether devils can have “works of love” and/or angels have works of “enmity.”⁶

Our hesitation, therefore, is sustained up to the point when God sends Raphael, “the sociable Spirit” on an errand to warn Adam of the looming danger of his Fall. The “winged Saint” on his errand flying “to all the Fowles he seems / A Phoenix” until “on th’ Eastern cliff of Paradise / He lights, and to his proper shape returns / A Seraph wingd” (5.271-277). What might catch our attention is not Raphael being perceived for a Phoenix, but the fact that he returns to “his proper shape” which suggest a change, a metamorphosis of a sort. Especially if one remembers the single other occurrence of the expression “proper shape” when Satan “cast to change his proper shape” appears as a “stripling Cherube” before the archangel Uriel (3.621-639). Roland Mushat Frye in his *Milton’s Imagery and the Visual Arts* (1978) notes a connection between Raphael and the devil disguised as a cherub, for the latter’s description, according to Frye,

⁵ OED claims it among Milton’s favorite words, but his use of it is varied depending on context and thus a mobile unit of our interpretation.

⁶ As in *PL* 6.788: “In heav’nly Spirits could such perverseness dwell?”

resembles the traditional visual representation of the guardian angel Raphael. Not that this alone would settle our mind regarding the spirit's ability to assume different shapes, rather, it is sent into another direction. In describing the "proper shape" of the seraph (and of the cherub) Milton yet again plunges our imagination to hover between images, this time, of clothed and naked angelic shapes.

4.2 Are Milton's angles naked?

FORSYTH's observation that one is "always tempted to tell stories" about Satan (1987, 4) seems to hold true even when one is about to discuss Milton's angels. For this we can rightly blame Milton because he gives us the first detailed description of an angel in the persona of Satan, albeit disguised as "a stripling Cherube"

Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
Youth smil'd Celestial, and to every Limb
Suitable grace diffus'd, so well he feign'd;
Under a Coronet his flowing haire
In curls on either cheek plaid, wings he wore
Of many a colourd plume sprinkl'd with Gold,
His habit fit for speed succinct, and held
Before his decent steps a Silver wand. (3.636-344)

FRYE singles out this depiction because of the two specialized attributes Milton employs in his description: "the silver staff [sic!], and the robe girded up for speed succinct" (1978, 178). Milton's phrase, i.e. "habit fit for speed succinct", especially catches Frye's imagination as describing "angelic robes which are girded up by a belt or a sash or tucked up in some other way, so as to allow free movement of the leg" (ibid). This description, Frye notes, suits only one angel's visual representation, namely, that of Raphael. Raphael, whose place among the angelic hierarchy

was assured by his dramatic appearance in the popular apocrypha, the *Book of Tobit*,⁷ was primarily “sent to heal,” “to scale away the whiteness of Tobit’s eyes, and to give Sara the daughter of Raguel for a wife to Tobias the son of Tobit” (Tob 3:17), and, hence, regarded as the celestial physician of both corporal and spiritual maladies. However, in art, Raphael was far more often represented as the chief of the guardian angels and the patron saint of peregrinators, travelers and pilgrims, who set out in his protection, because the completion of his mission of healing entailed that he first accompany Tobit’s son, Tobias, as a guide from Nineveh to Ecbatana (see Tob 5:4-6,16).⁸ Thus, “whether Raphael or any other guardian angel was intended,” he was expected to appear “with staff and girded robes”, according to Frye (1978, 178). Building on this iconography of Raphael, Frye claims that Milton in the depiction of the disguised Satan provides “a hint fraught with powerfully ironic significance: Satan enters the created world not only disguised as an angel, but even disguised in a form which artistically sophisticated readers could readily identify as the usual form of the guardian angel” (179).

Frye’s interpretation, on the one hand, opens a new horizon on the Raphael/Satan opposition/comparison, but on the other hand, it closes another venue of interpretation which reads Milton’s ambiguous

⁷ A late Jewish work, never received into the Jewish Canon, although pronounced canonical by the Council of Carthage (397) and latter reaffirmed by the Council of Trent (1546). The Protestants count it among the Apocrypha, books that were not considered part of the Canon and yet present in the Protestant Bibles up until early nineteenth century with the rest of the apocryphal books.

⁸ Images relating to the *Book of Tobit* are relatively rare in the Middle Ages, however, there is an ostentatious boom in production of *Tobiasbilder* in the mid-fifteenth-century Florence, most of them depicting the angel Raphael on a journey with young Tobias and his dog. A catch-on theory explaining this interest is that of Hans Mackowsky, who sees in these pictures a religious *ex-voto* of the wealthy Florentine parents whose sons were sent off, like Tobias, on long and often dangerous trading journeys. GOMBICH, however, is cautious in accepting this theory lacking documentary evidences, and, instead, points to a connection between these images and the Florentine Confraternities, like the *Compagnia di Raffaello* (1972, 26-30; see also HART 2006, 82-84). The other cluster of *Tobiasbilder* was symptomatic of the seventeenth-century Dutch ‘Golden Age’, its most prominent artist, Rembrandt, alone producing more than a dozen of them. The *Tobiasbilder* of the Northern Renaissance, however, differ from their Florentine counterparts in that they depict Tobit’s healing and the departure of the angel quite as often as the journeying part of the apocryphal narrative.

expression, “[h]is habit fit for speed succinct” as referring to the wings the “stripling Cherube” wore “[o]f many a colourd plume sprinkl’d with Gold” (3.642). The “habit” in this reading stands metaphorically for the cherub’s wings and is thus indeed “fit for speed succinct.” This second reading might seem incompatible with dictionary definitions of the word “succinct” because the majority of them quote the aforementioned Miltonic line in order to illustrate the sense of being “girded up,” or “tucked in”, thus, supporting Frye’s argument.⁹ If, however, one takes a look at Pope’s translation of *Odyssey*, in Book Twenty, one stumbles upon the phrase “speed succinct” in a quite different context:

From council, strait th’ assenting peerage ceas’d,
And in the dome prepar’d the genial feast.
Dis-rob’d, their vest apart in order lay,
Then all with speed succinct the victims slay[.]
(*The Odyssey* 20.310-313; italics mine)

It is obvious that Pope’s use of the word “succinct” has nothing to do with the length of the garments but all with ‘speed’ and, thus, with the action of the suitors who promptly fell on slaying “the sheep and shaggy goats” (*The Odyssey* 20.314).¹⁰ Nor is this meaning inapplicable to Milton, for Thomas NEWTON in his comment on *PL* 3.641-643 wrote:

If Milton meant that Satan had clothes on as well as wings, it is contrary to his usual manner of representing the Angels; but I rather understand it, that the *wings he wore* were his habit, and they were certainly a habit *fit for speed succinct*: But *succinct* I understand as Dr. Pearce, not in the first literal sense,

⁹ The *OED* also quotes *PL* 3.343, illustrating the adverbial meaning of *succinct* as “Of garments: Not ample or full, close-fitting, scant” (s.v. “succinct” *adj* 3)

¹⁰ *OED* here proves its occasional unreliability, for it quotes Pope’s line illustrating the girded up definition of the word *succinct* omitting the speed part of the phrase (s.v. *succinct*, A.2a; “Aside they lay Their garments, and succinct, the victims slay”), and provides a mistaken source reference to boot (*Odys* XVII.200 [sic!]).

girded or tucked up; but in the metaphorical sense, *ready and prepared*: As Fabius in *Inst.Orat.ii.2*, says: “*Proni succinctique*” etc. (1750, 243n)

Thus, Milton’s “stripling Cherube” is wearing nothing but wings, and quite contrary to FRYE’s claim that it “would be difficult to find another literary description which so graphically evokes the visual tradition” (1978, 176), there is hardly a description so diametrically opposed to the traditional visual representations as this one, or the one Milton gives of Raphael in Book Five.

Visual representations of Raphael where he is wearing a staff and a girded or short robe is mostly symptomatic of the seventeenth-century Northern Renaissance among artists like de Keuninck, Jan Massys, Pieter Lastman (fig.4), to mention just a few beside those already listed by Frye (1978, 178). However, a number of earlier *Tobiasbildern* by fifteenth-century Florentine artists have Raphael holding instead of a staff an attribute befitting the etymology of his name: as the “medicine of God” he is holding a kind of medical étui, a box of wholesome drugs, as on images by Lippi, Perugino (fig.5), Botticini, and a follower of Verrocchio. To support his argument, Frye notes that the angel on the painting from Verrocchio’s school (fig.6) “has not only belted his under garment but is holding up his outer robe with his hand” (178). However, he mentions neither the étui in Raphael’s right hand nor the missing staff. His observation concerning the robe of the angel hardly seems relevant if we consider Botticini’s *The Three Archangels with Tobias* — where both Raphael and Gabrielle have belted undergarments and it is the latter one who is holding up his outer robe (fig.7)¹¹ — or Savoldo’s *Tobias and the*

¹¹ GOMBRICH would simply label Botticini’s painting as “The Three Archangels” for he sees Tobias merely as an identifying token for Raphael, a symbolic pointer equivalent to Michael’s sword and Gabriel’s lily. However, pursuing this line of argument, Tobias should properly be equated with Mary and the dragon, the latter two being the non-object “emblems” of Gabriel and Michael. Gombrich points out the “golden container” in Raphael’s hand, which he describes as “the box containing the fish’s entrails” and „which was identified as the golden censer (turibulum [sic!])” (1972, 28) — an interesting claim, since the box in Raphael hand bears no



fig.4: Pieter LASTMAN, *The Angel and Tobias with the Fish*
c. 1625, Oil on wood, 34,3 x 59 cm, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest



fig.5: Pietro PERUGINO, *Tobias with the Angel Raphael*
1500-05, Oil and tempera on wood, 113,3 x 56,5 cm
National Gallery, London



fig.6: Andrea del VERROCCHIO, *Tobias and the Angel*
1470-80, Egg tempera on poplar, 84 x 66 cm
National Gallery, London



fig.7: Francesco BOTTICINI, *The Three Archangels with Tobias*
 c. 1470, Tempera on wood, 135 x 154 cm
 Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



fig.8: Giovanni Girolamo SAVOLDO, *Tobias and the Angel*
 1522-25, Oil on canvas, 96 x 124 cm
 Galleria Borghese, Rome

angel where the length of Raphael's robe is practically overwhelming (fig.8). Had Milton wanted to make an allusion to Raphael with his depiction of a succinctly clad Satan in disguise, his source would have been rather literal than visual. Raphael is described in the *Vulgate* as a splendid youth, girded up as if ready to walk.¹² This, however, would have been an odd choice, for Milton was quite aware that the description in question was particular to the *Vulgate* only and omitted from other translations.¹³

So when it comes specifically to Raphael's description, Milton, although introducing him with allusions to his role in the apocrypha ("Raphael, the sociable Spirit, that deign'd / To travel with Tobias, and

resemblance to a metal censer suspended on chains — but fails to see it as a sufficient identifier of Raphael. However, more to the point is Gombrich's omission of a staff and/or the mentioning of the length of the angelic robe when enumerating and defining Raphael's iconographic signifiers.

¹² "Tunc egressus Tobias, invenit juvenum splendidum, stantem preacinctum, et quasi paratum ad ambulandum. Et ignorans quod angelus Dei esset, salutavit eum" (Tob 5:5-6a in WALTON 1655-1657, 4:46). DE VORAGINE's *Golden legend* (2000), translated by William Caxton, follows the *Vulgate* account word for word: „Then Tobias went forth and found a fair young man girt up and ready for to walk, and not knowing that it was the angel of God, saluted him" (para. 5).

¹² Milton read the Bible both in Hebrew and Greek, but "he definitely preferred among the English translations the [King James] Authorized Version and among the Latin translations the Junius-Tremellius version" (HUNTER 1980, 89) while also perusing the *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* by Brian Walton (RADZINOWICZ 1997, 209). The account of Raphael's appearance in the 1611 edition of the *King James Bible* differs from the *Vulgate* in that it omits all the details describing the angel: "Therefore when he went to seeke a man, he found Raphael that was an Angel. But he knew not; and he said unto him..." (Tob 5:4-5a). Similarly in the Junius-Tremellius Latin Bible it reads: "Abiens igitur ad conquirendum aliquem invenit Raphaellem, qui erat Angelus, sed nesciebat Tobija" (Tob 5:5-6). This is important, for the Junius-Tremellius version was "the standard Latin Bible for nearly all Protestants, and after certain alterations, was even sanctioned by the universities of Douai and Louvain" (HUNTER 1980, 88). Milton himself "frequently used Junius and Tremellius as the basis for the prooftexts in his Latin prose works" (89). Hence, Milton choice to describe Satan in terms reminiscent of Raphael as described in the *Vulgate* would also provide "a hint fraught with powerfully ironic significance" (FRYE 1978, 179) — although, not as Frye would have it.

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secur'd / His marriage with the seaventimes-wedded Maid" [5.221-223]), departs from the established visions of the western art to adhere to the description found in the *Book of Ezekiel*: "and their wings were stretched upward, two wings of euery one were ioyned one to another, and two couered their bodies. [...] euery one had two which couered on this side, & euery one had two, which couered on that side their bodies" (Ezek 1:11, 23). Consequently, Raphael wore

... six wings [...], to shade
 His lineaments Divine; the pair that clad
 Each shoulder broad, came mantling o're his brest
 With regal Ornament; the middle pair
 Girt like a Starrie Zone his waste, and round
 Skirted his loines and thighs with downie Gold
 And colours dipt in Heav'n; the third his feet
 Shaddowd from either heele with featherd maile
 Ski-tinctur'd grain. (5.277-285)

Milton's extensive description of the wings Raphael "wore," which "clad," "mantled," "girt," "skirted" "his lineaments Divine," gives the reader a visual impression of elaborate clothing, while, in reality, there are no clothes on the angel at all. Milton here seems to share DIDRON's opinion, that "where angels are given three pairs of wings [...] it is superfluous to endow them with robe and mantle besides" (1851-1886, 2:96). All the same, Didron in his *Christian Iconography* makes it clear that from the Middle Ages on "miniaturists, painters and sculptors, have arrayed their angels, already clothed with six wings, in robe and mantle" due to the "invincible tendency" of the Western nations "to humanize, and to give an ordinary, every-day character to their angelic beings" (2:95-96).

In Milton, however, the tendency works in the opposite direction. "Vaild with gorgeous wings" (5.250), his Raphael is no more clothed than the fish who "sporting with quick glance / Show to the Sun thir wav'd coats

dropt with Gold” (7.404-405), or the swan who “with Arched neck / Between her white wings mantling proudly, Rows / Her state with Oarie feet” (7.438-440). Similarly, “Insects or Worms” are said to be lavishly dressed, for their “smallest Lineaments exact / In all the Liveries [are] dect of Summers pride / With spots of Gold and Purple, azure and green” (7.477-479). Adam and Eve, when first spotted by Satan, are also described “with native Honour clad / In naked Majestie seemd Lord of all” (4.289-290). As Kristen POOLE keenly observes, “[...] Paradise is a place strikingly devoid of nudity. This pure environment is, in fact, primarily constructed through incessant description of cloth and clothing” (2006, 178). One gets the impression that in Paradise everything is naked and yet, at the same time, everything is clothed, or, to say it differently, nothing is naked and nothing is clothed. Again, in visual terms, our perception is blurred. A remark by Eliot seems particularly fitting here: “I do not think that we should attempt to see very clearly any scene that Milton depicts: it should be accepted as a shifting phantasmagory” (KERMODE 1980, 270).

4.3 A sensuous effect on the ear

ELIOT, who persistently emphasizes the limitation of Milton’s visual powers, is somewhat relenting when it comes to “imagery suggestive of vast size, limitless space, abysmal depth, and light and darkness” for this he considers “the kind of imagery in which he [Milton] excelled, or made less demand upon those powers of visual imagination which were in him defective” (1968, 40). But as we shall see, rather than painting these landscapes, Milton is composing them on the principle of variety.

Contrary to the traditionally assumed tranquil scenery of Heaven (which is only a nice word to say it is boring up there), Milton’s depiction of it is full of variety and delectable change, even to the point of seemingly contradicting the Scriptures. I particularly have in mind the description of

the holy Jerusalem, “descending out of heauen from God,” in which “there shall be no night [...]: and they [its redeemed inhabitants] need no candle, neither light of the sunne; for the Lorde God giueth them light” (Rev 21:10; 22:5). And yet, as Milton’s Raphael confides to Adam (in a succession of parenthetical remarks): “we too have also our Evening and our Morn, / Wee ours for change delectable, not need”, although, “the face of brightest Heav’n” merely changes “[t]o grateful Twilight (for Night comes not there / In darker veile)” (5.628-629, 644-646). By now, the reader might have come to expect that the distinctiveness of light and darkness is yet another imagery in *Paradise Lost* — if imagery can be called that lacks distinctive features in color, line or shape — blurred by Milton (see especially 2.262-270), the indication of which let us suffice here. It is more important that we note Milton’s God and his angels delighting in change and variety, as evinced from another parenthetical remark by Raphael: “(For Earth hath this variety from Heav’n / Of pleasure situated Hill and Dale)” (6.640-641). Thus, it is the sight of Earth’s variety in scenery that reminds Satan of Heaven:

O Earth, how like to Heav’n, if not preferr’d
 More justly, Seat worthier of Gods, as built
 With second thoughts, reforming what was old!
 For what God after better worse would build?
 [...]
 With what delight could I have walkt thee round,
 If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange
 Of Hill, and Vallie, Rivers, Woods and Plaines,
 Now Land, now See, and Shores with Forrest crownd,
 Rocks, Dens and Caves; but I in none of these
 Find place or refuge;...

(9.99-119; *italics mine*)

The last two lines of the quotation above echo both in words and in sentiment a passage from Book Two to which I would like to pay more attention. The passage in question describes bands of fallen angels bent on discovering their new dismal world of Hell (2.570-628). The part echoed in Book Nine is the description of what they find (along with the reader):

... Thus roving on
In confus'd march forlorn, th' adventurous Bands
With suddring horror pale, and eyes agast
View'd first thir lamenable lot, and found
No rest: through many a dark and drearie Vaile
They pass'd, and many a Region dolorous,
O'er many a Frozen, many a fierie Alpe,
Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of
death
A universe of death, which God by curse
Created evil, for evil only good,
Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds,
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
Abominable, inutterable, and worse
Than Fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceiv'd,
Gorgons and Hydras, and Chimeras dire. (2.614-628)

Here we find a similar enumeration of an interchange of geographical scenery as in Book Nine. As in case of Satan, who finds no "place or refuge" in the variety offered on Earth though "sweet", the predicament of devils is even more pronounced: they find no rest in this "Region dolorous" whose debased variety is emphasized by the rapid succession of monosyllables: "Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens..." That the pastoral description "Of Hill, and Vallie, Rivers, Woods and Plaines / Now Land, now See, and Shores with Forest crownd" is invaded by "Rocks, Dens and Caves" only serves to show how Satan indeed "within him Hell / ...brings [...] nor from Hell / One step no more then from himself can fly /

By change of place” (4.20-23). The accumulated stress of the monosyllabic line also makes “the reading of Hell analogous to exploring it” (FORSYTH 2003, 204), one only need to remember Satan’s passage through Chaos: “Ore bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare, / With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way, / And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies” (2.948-951).¹⁴

However, despite the multitude of words displayed in this passage (and it is a rather long passage of fifteen lines) we get no sense of what the devils see in particular. It is rather the sense of what they *feel* while seeing it that we gather. Not only cannot the devils find rest, the reader too is denied a rest and is practically out of breath by the time s/he reaches the period of Milton’s paragraph. The adjectives are dominated by the sound of *R*: dark, drearie, dolorous, frozen, fierie, perverse, monstrous, prodigious, inutterable, worse; even the prodigies imported from classical antiquity resound with *Rs*: Gorgons, Hydras, Chimeras.¹⁵ According to John Aubrey (1626-1697), Milton “pronounced the letter *R* very hard” (HUGHES 1957, 1023). Aubrey glosses on the remark with the expression *litera caninca* (i.e. the canine letter), so the hard pronunciation of *R* might sound something like a growl, or a snarl. Read in such a manner, the passage almost creates the sense of “wailing and gnashing of teeth.”¹⁶ In the passage Milton makes the most of the particular structure and texture of English, particularly with the cluster of monosyllables that accentuate, as Milton’s schoolmaster would say, “heaviness and slowness” (Jones 1953, 238). Reading in Richard Flecknoe’s *Miscellania* (1653) that the popularity of English in Europe is due to “it’s monosyllables, and short

¹⁴ Donald DAVIE, in “Syntax and Music in Paradise Lost”, calls this effect the “muscularity” of Milton’s verse that makes “the vocal exertion in reading image the physical exertion described. It is the reader, too, who flounders, stumbles, pushes doggedly on” (1968, 71).

¹⁵ In Vergil’s *Aeneid* these prodigies of bestial kind, like Milton’s description of hell, lack concreteness. They “empty phantoms were: / Forms without bodies, and impassive air” (6.292-294), and cannot be grasped or cloven with mind or sword.

¹⁶ A recurring expression in the gospel of Matthew, describing the anguish of the damned. See also *PL* 6.339-343 of Satan.

snapping words [...] which render the sound harsh and unpleasant unto Strangers ears, accustomed unto words of greater length... [...] making so many breaches in speaking, as renders [English] ragged and disjointed” (JONES 1953, 238n6), I cannot help but think how perfectly his description of the English monosyllables and of their effect on the language fits also the ragged band of Milton’s fallen angels “[i]n confus’d march forlorn” (2.615).

Although one could hardly deny the predominantly oral effect the previous verses have on the reader (provided the reader is not simply reading to her/himself but aloud), I cannot completely agree with ELIOT, that “for the pleasure of the ear [speaking of the beauty of Milton’s long periods] the meaning is hardly necessary, except as far as certain key-words indicate the emotional tone of the passage” (1968, 18). I do think, that Milton expects us indeed to feel the anguish of this passage both by hearing it, and “wrestling with the meaning as well” (ibid). He is not presenting us here merely with a syntax determined by aural significance. For even where there is no “hypertrophy of the auditory imagination” (ibid), our mind has to negotiate the paradox of the lines 2.622-624. We might as well say with Satan that we are tormented by “the hateful siege / Of contraries” (9.121-122), for that is what Milton presents to us as the overall sense of Hell: “A universe of death, which God by curse / Created evil, for evil only good / Where all life dies, death lives” (2.622-624).

The dramatic effect of *Paradise Lost* on the reader – a word that Davie finds to “poor” and, hence, supplants it by “muscular” in a sense that the effect under consideration is kinetic – is probably its most valued and often cited strengths.¹⁷ In Book Two, there is a particularly telling example

¹⁷ Although DAVIE laments that “[n]either kinetic and dramatic effect, ... nor narrative and musical effect, ... are in evidence at all frequently as we read *Paradise Lost*” (1968, 75). Christopher RICKS criticizes Davie’s statement for it implies that “such effects ought to be the rule rather than the exception”, nor does he think that Davie’s examples of syntactic inversion of no “poetically expressive use” are indeed such (1963, 42-47).

of this effect. Sin has opened the Gate of Hell, the shutting of which “Excel’d her power;” and before Satan, Sin and Death “in sudden view appear / The secrets of the hoarie deep” (2. 884, 890-891). Yet again, the reader has no access to their “view” in terms of a visual description, for everything Milton lists defies visual imagination:

[...] a dark
Illimitable Ocean without bound,
Without dimension, where length, breadth, & highth,
And time and place are lost; where eldest *Night*
And *Chaos*, Ancestors of Nature, hold
Eternal *Anarchie*, amidst the noise
Of endless Warrs, and by confusion stand.
For hot, cold, moist, and dry, four Champions fierce
Strive here for Maistrie, and to Battel bring
Thir embryon Atoms; they around the flag
Of each his Faction, in thir several Clanns,
Light-arm’d or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift or slow,
Swarm populous, unnumber’d as the Sand
Of *Braca* or *Cyrene*’s torrid soil,
Levied to side with warring Winds, and poise
Thir lighter wings. To whom these most adhere,
Hee rules a moment; *Chaos* Umpire sits,
And by decision more imbroiles the fray
By which he Reigns: next him high Arbiter
Chance governs all. (2.891-910)

The invocation of a battle scene with the notion of an ordered army around flags, in factions, clans, according to their light or heavy armory only serves to enhance the futility of our attempt to imagine such a scene (for picturing would entail a sort of ordering, especially of a scene like this). What we get is anarchy, in that we can make no head or tail of an army of such insubstantial champions as hot, cold, moist, and dry (monosyllables

again). Like the victory of the elements and their “embryon Atoms” it is but for a moment that we get an image, only to discard in the following moment. As on a torrid soil, we get no solid footing and we stand in confusion, if stand at all.

It is at the brink of this abyss that Satan pauses, lingering and postponing his flight:

Into this wilde Abyss,
The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,
Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain
His dark materials to create more Worlds,
Into this wild Abyss the warie fiend
Stood on the brink of Hell and look'd a while,
Pondering his Voyage... (2.910-919)

The eighteenth century commentator, Jonathan RICHARDSON lauds this passage as “very Artful!” for in it “the Poet Himself seems to be Doing what he Describes, for the Period begins at 910. The he goes not On Directly but Lingers; giving an Idea of Chaos before he Enters into it” (1734, 81). But Milton is not merely artful in postponing our initial anticipation of Satan’s flight or jump “into this wilde Abyss” for the reader’s expectation is thwarted yet again at the repetition of “into this wild Abyss” as “the warie fiend” merely “stood on the brink of Hell and look’d a while, / Pondering his Voyage.” It is ten lines later that he will actually spread “his Sail-broad Vannes” for flight and spurn the ground (2.927-929). In RICHARDSON’S view Milton’s style “Better Paints the Image he Intended to give” (ibid). The comment is important, for it shows the difference between Mitlon’s early critics and his modern critics. Although Richards notes the dramatic effect at the onset of his commentary, he ends up with

an image – not of Chaos, to be sure, but of a lingering fiend, pondering a dangerous mission. Milton’s modern critics, however, will emphasize the experience the verse brings to the reader. Milton, in the words of Neil FORSYTH, “brings the Satanic hesitation directly into the narration and makes it textual. The reader cannot but experience it as Satan does” (2003, 117).

One might note that in the last few paragraphs I have been emphasizing the fact that in reading *Paradise Lost* Milton makes us sense, feel, experience what he is writing about, rather than making us see it. And consciously so, because it is by emphasizing the “less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous, and passionate” nature of poetry (HUGHES 1957, 637) that I aim to revisit WASWO’s elaboration on the “new way of apprehending meaning” as employed by Erasmian exegesis.

4.4 Dissociation or unification of sensibility?

In a chapter on Erasmus and on eloquence (posing a challenge to the referential view of language) WASWO writes that this new, semantical way of apprehending meaning interprets “a text not by extracting from it kernels of abstraction but by using all of its concrete detail to move the will.” This

results in a new kind of meaning apprehended: it becomes our emotional experience of the text... What Erasmus called the “sermonis vim” becomes in both Scripture and literature the power of language to constitute experience in and for the reader, which is its meaning.

(1987, 230)¹⁸

¹⁸ Similarly, BARNETT sums up Erasmus’ linguistics practice as a functional treatment of *linguae* as praxis that “marries form to content and meaning to utility”, hence, language as praxis “is language in action, language always in the process of exchange and negotiation, language that aims primarily at performance, not representation” (1996, 545). Hence, Erasmus, applying this praxis to theologians, instructs them to aim at setting forth the Scripture, and discussing spirituality “with the objective of eliciting tears of contrition and inflaming the hearts of their listeners” (ibid).

This “new” way of apprehending meaning “arrived at by unifying the text’s emotional power and its instructive value” is what Waswo calls “affective semantics” (1987, 229).¹⁹ Barnett, on her part, sums up Erasmus’ linguistics practice as a functional treatment of language as praxis that “marries form to content and meaning to utility”, hence, a “language in action, language always in the process of exchange and negotiation, language that aims primarily at performance, not representation” (1996, 545). Therefore, Erasmus, applying this praxis to the theologians, instructs them to aim at setting forth the Scripture, and discussing spirituality “with the objective of eliciting tears of contrition and inflaming the hearts of their listeners” (ibid). Before I elaborate the importance of these notions to Milton, let me first tackle a remark by T. S. Eliot that has had, I think, a long bearing on Milton studies from which we have not yet fully recovered.

In his essay on the metaphysical poets, Eliot claimed that “[i]n the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in” which was “due to the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden” (KERMODE 1980, 64). Before this “dissociation of sensibility” set in, the poets of the seventeenth century (according to Eliot at least up to the Revolution and, hence, excluding Milton) felt their thoughts “as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility” (ibid).²⁰ There was, in other words, fidelity of thought and feeling” in their work (KERMODE 1980, 62). Although Eliot amended his initial charge against Milton²¹, he certainly perceived a certain severance of sense and sensibility in the work of the blind poet. In his words, “[t]o extract everything possible from *Paradise Lost*, it would seem

19 It is somewhat similar to what Fish suggest in his “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics” (1970), when redefining meaning as “no longer an object, a thing-in-itself, but an event, something that happens to, and with the participation of, the reader. And it is this event, this happening... that is... the meaning of the sentence” (Fish 1972, 386). And yet, Waswo is careful to distinguish “affective semantics” from Fish’s “affective stylistics.” Unfortunately, Waswo does not elaborate the difference between the two.

²⁰ See also Fabiny 1998, 30.

²¹ In his lecture on Milton (known since as “Milton II”) before the British Academy in 1947 (see page 11n2) ELIOT conceded that it would be a mistake “to lay the burden [of dissociation of sensibility] on the shoulders of Milton and Dryden”, since the causes of it were “too complex and profound” and, therefore, to be sought after “in Europe, not in England alone” (1968, 34).

necessary to read it in two different ways, first solely for the sound, and second for the sense” (ELIOT 1968, 18).

If, however, we think of Milton as a typical seventeenth century poet in a sense that he too strived at unity of thought and feeling, as I believe he did, there is no need to read his work “in two different ways” as Eliot initially asserted. As a matter of fact, ELIOT himself mentions no need for this bifurcation in his second lecture/essay on Milton, pointing instead at *Paradise Lost*’s “peculiar demand for a readjustment of the reader’s mode of apprehension” in which emphasis is “on the sound, not the vision, upon the word, not the idea” (1968, 41). One should, however, quickly add that it is not emphasis on a single word that Eliot is referring too, but a string of words. As he notes, “Milton’s verse is especially refractory to yielding up its secrets to examination of the single line” or a word for that matter (42). The unit of Milton verse is “the period, the sentence and still more the paragraph” for “[i]t is only in the period that the wave-length of Milton’s verse is to be found” (ibid). It is no wonder, therefore, that Milton finally chose epic as the genre of his “graver subject” since motion, continuity, and sustained narrative are essential features of the epic style. As C. S. LEWIS wrote in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*:

We must not be allowed to settle down at the end of each sentence. Even the fuller pause at the end of a paragraph must be felt as we feel a pause in a piece of music, where the silence is part of the music, and not as we feel the pause between one item of a concert and the next. Even between one Book and the next we must not wholly wake from the enchantment... A boat will not answer to the rudder unless it is in motion; the poet can work upon us only as long as we are kept on the move.

(1967, 45)

Note that Lewis put an emphasis on sensing, “feeling” Milton’s larger, epic units (implying hearing in his reference to musical pause) and how the effect of this sensing is to be worked “upon” us, to be moved while “on the move.”

Now, let me turn back to WASWO’s observation on how Erasmus applied “affective semantics” in his *Paraphrases* on the New Testament

because I believe it relevant to Milton's *Paradise Lost* too. The distinct feature of Erasmus exegesis is — apart from supplying grammatical analyses, historical background and moral homilies — “a dramatized explication of a distinctly ‘literal’ kind” (1987, 222). Through it, Erasmus “seeks to engage the emotion of the reader by elaborating the text imaginatively... by drawing out the emotional power in the actual discourse — not by leaping to a presumed ‘higher’ truth beyond or above it” (ibid). As I have already noted (at the end of section 3.5.), the role of a paraphraser suited Milton more than that of a translator, since by paraphrasing he could rephrase his sources in his own words whereas translation would mean an attempt to reproduce a version of the words of his sources themselves. But above and beyond using his own voice, retelling the succinct biblical story of the Fall by stressing, as Erasmus did in his *Paraphrases*, the “motivation of the characters, evoking and expanding on their feelings and situation” (WASWO 1987, 224) allowed Milton to elicit an emotional engagement in order “to persuade the reader of an ethical issue” (ibid). Or as C. S. LEWIS wrote, *Paradise Lost* exhibits “the poet’s unremitting *manipulation* of his readers” as “he sweeps us along as though we were attending an actual recitation and nowhere allows us to settle down and luxuriate on any one line or paragraph” (1967, 41).²²

But is this manipulation any different from the one Fish discerns?

Let me elaborate on this question by referring to Robert Martin Adams’ chapter on “Empson and Bentley” (1955, 112-127). Strange as it may seem, I have found his criticism of Empson remarkably fitting Fish and relevant to my current question.

Empson, in ADAMS’ reading, “is enthralled by the subconscious motives” which, according to Empson, enabled Milton to write an interesting poem in spite of himself (1955, 122). This alone would not bother Adams. He too admits the presence of subconscious or half-perceived elements in *Paradise Lost* because Milton’s structure of the epic

²² Lewis did not think Rhetoric and Poetry to be distinguishable “by manipulation of an audience in the one and, in the other, a pure self expression, regarded as its own end, and indifferent to any audience” (1967, 53). He claimed both these arts definitely aiming “at doing something to an audience” (ibid).

is so vast while exhibiting a very focused resolve of the poet that “there is a rare penumbra of half-glimpsed, half-developed conflicts on the outer fringe of his [Milton’s] vision” (123). However, he also notes a limit to these perceptions, a limit “found where variety of effect gives way to monotony” (ibid). Hence, Adams sees an extraordinary monotony settling in when Empson reads Milton as if when seemingly “describing the devils digging gold out of a hill, the garden of Paradise, and snakes climbing the trees [...], he [Milton] is really slapping at Eve” (123). Adams also notes that “the more ingenuity one devotes to the argument, the more repetitious its pattern becomes” (ibid).

But does not Fish’s reading elicit precisely this same effect? Only, instead of slapping at Eve, Fish is slapping at the readers. As RUMRICH moaningly noted, in Fish’s reading “*Paradise Lost* instructs rather easily duped and forgetful readers by repeatedly convincing them of sin or by obtruding measures of their crookedness” (2006, 7). Rumrich finds this pedagogically disastrous, while FORSYTH thinks that this portrayal of the poet “who keeps lurking his readers into mistakes and then saying ‘Gotcha!’ is unlikely to appeal to any but masochistic students” (2003, 72). I wonder if any of those in opposition to Fish have read Adams since all of them seem to fall back on Empson. Indeed, Empson and Fish inhabit two polarly opposite visions: one is openly atheist and is not afraid to admit that his reading of Milton is informed by his conviction of a traditionally “very wicked” Christian God. FISH seems to me sometimes very close to admit the same, only to make an irrevocable statement: “What is true about the world is that God created it [no matter how one perceives him], and to enjoy its fruits as if they created or sustained themselves is to join Satan in chewing ‘bitter Ashes’ [PL 5.566]” (2001, 13). But no matter where their alliance lies, Empson and Fish will produce a similar effect — the repetitious pattern of a slapping effect — because their hermeneutics finds

an “occasion for an adventure in indirection” with “every epithet, every image, every assertion” of the poem (ADAMS 1955, 123).

No epic poetry read this way can be epic because, as Adam also notes, “among the cardinal virtues of the proper epic are motion, magnitude, sustained narrative line, typicality of character, and clarity of emotional response” (ADAMS 1955, 123). This of course has a bearing on how one perceives Satan and the rest of the characters in the first place, but is of no particular interest to us right now. What matters is that Adams sees Milton’s unit of thought and expression residing in the verse paragraph, just as Lewis or Eliot saw it before him. As a matter of fact, this is the very reason why ELIOT claimed Milton’s verse to be “especially refractory to yielding up its secrets to examination of the single line” (1968, 42). FISH, on the contrary, claims that “the line as a unit is a resting place even when rhyme is absent” and one of the “three truths” on whose operation Milton relies “[t]roughout *Paradise Lost*” (1997, 23). While Eliot, Lewis and Adams emphasize the verse paragraph and the verbal quality of Milton’s work, Fish and the majority of Milton scholars (even those against Fish) are preoccupied with Milton’s thought. Beverley Sherry — who has recently been expounding the benevolent possibilities lying dormant in T. S. Eliot’s legacy to Milton studies (2010)²³ — encapsulates this in the following:

In the past sixty years, since the work of, say, C. S. Lewis, Rosemond Tuve, Arnold Stein, F. T. Prince, Frank Kermode, Joseph Summers, Christopher Ricks, there has been a general move away from formalist study, which includes verbal criticism, towards an emphasis on Milton’s thought — moral, religious, philosophical, and political. This development has overtaken the close study of Milton’s handling of words, resulting in a neglect of his minutely sensitive and endlessly creative genius with decorum, which remained for him “the grand master peece to observe.” (HALE 2007, 17)

²³ See Sherry 2010 and 2010a

In a footnote to her assessment, Sherry singles out Fish's *How Milton Works* as "typical in its minimal concern for the way Milton works with formal elements of writing" (17n11). But Fish again proves to be a slippery catch, for in his article on "Why Milton Matters; or, Against Historicism" (2005) he is criticizing others of the same, by giving voice to the concern (or, to be more precise, echoing Ellen Rooney's concern) that "once the category of form has been attenuated every text is reduced 'to its ideological and historical context,' and 'reading has been displaced by a project of sorting by theme.'" Milton scholars, says Fish, "pick up the stick from the wrong end" so he proceeds to use the stick to slap them (one cannot help but wonder how many wrong ends can a stick have) for their practice of historical criticism and for forgetting that criticism focusing on aesthetic form "is no less historical than any other" because a history of literary forms is "far from excluding social and political concerns, [since] literary forms are, more often than not, their vehicles" (2005).

Let me, therefore, return to the pertinent question of protean vicissitude. In Fish's reading what passes for a "plot" on Milton's poetry is

the tension (sometimes barely registered by a protagonist like the Lady or the Son of *Paradise Regained*, but always felt by the readers) between the protean possibilities of interpretation and action apparently offered by the world and the single-mindedness of agents who see the world as a space or tablet on which only one interpretation — known in advance and hewed on — can and should be inscribed.

(FISH 2001, 33)

For this very reason FISH sees variety as "vehicles of our instruction and the habitation of temptation", a temptation to "take them seriously for themselves rather than as instruments of a supreme pedagogical intention" (2001, 14-15). Or, if not temptations, the "apparent heterogeneity, of the 'various forms' [...] that fill the world" are perceived as testifying "to a common source" and, consequently, "an endless iteration of the same"

(FISH 1997, xxii).²⁴ But even this leads back to the notion of temptation. Since he describes variety as serving a dull “iteration of the same”, it is perhaps not surprising to read him claiming that “from error comes everything of interest — everything that is complex [...] — in Milton’s work” (FISH 2001, 37). Consequently, one who is not wandering away (in a sense of error and falling away as in disobedience) from the common source to all but inhabits a condition of joy “secure / Of surfeit” (PL 6.638-639) has “nothing to do, nowhere to go, no goal to achieve; and indeed, the idea of ‘new’ enterprise or an alternative destination or an enhanced position [...] constitutes a temptation” (FISH 2001, 37).²⁵ Not that I would deny the possibility of perceiving versatility as temptation, however, limiting its role to merely temptation in Milton’s work would be a gross oversimplification (despite the elaborate ingenuity devoted to the argument).

As I see it, the protean vicissitude of words and syntax perceived in Milton’s work has primarily a poetical function of propelling the reader onward by escaping fixation and arrest of images that would allow the reader an unduly rest and an “occasion for an adventure in indirection” with “every epithet, every image, every assertion” of the poem (ADAMS 1955, 123). The better to achieve this, Milton, I believe, exhibited, in Eliot’s words, a “fidelity of thought and feelings” or unity of sensibility. Not that Eliot thought Milton did so. As a matter of fact, he accuses him of an unbridgeable division between sound and sense. SHERRY considers this

²⁴ It is astounding how FISH can make the bleak prospect of death and final doom perceived by the allegorical sister Spirit in Quarles’ emblem seem more exciting in comparison to his own prospect of the variety of the praises sung by Adam and Even, and all Creation. But in order to claim that “the phrase ‘without end’ [in *PL* 5.165] is to be understood not as profusion, but as an endless iteration of the same” (1997, xxii), he, again, needs to break the sweeping motion of Milton’s epic sway that list the very profusion of creation whose “ceasless change” is called upon to “Varie to our great Maker still new praise” (5.183-184).

²⁵ When RUMRICH claims Fish’s paradigm to be “a methodically radical update of Lewis’s reading of *Paradise Lost* as a literary monumentum to mainstream Christianity” (2006, 4), I cannot help but think of it as a wrongful slighting of Lewis, whose notions are anything but like that of Fish. In one of his *Screwtape* letters (xxii), the way he talks about God (from the devil’s point of view) is particularly revealing: “He’s a hedonist at heart... He’s vulgar, Wormwood. He has a bourgeois mind. He has filled His world full of pleasure. There are things for humans to do all day long without His minding in the least — sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be twisted before it’s any use to us” (LEWIS 1982, 101-102).

accusation to be “a bludgeoning which cries out to be rebuffed”, especially since “when it comes to exploring the interface of sound and sense, commentary [within Milton criticism] has been relatively sparse” (2010, 31). Hence, instead of turning our attention separately to the sound, and to the sense of *Paradise Lost*, we should (taking a parsing clue from Eliot) readjust our mode of apprehension that our *hearing* (of sound and sense together) may become more acute.

5 Conclusion:

“Some further change awaits us nigh”

Bring forth... the deaf that have ears.

Isa 43:8

Eliot's numerous reference to Milton's musical unit (a syntax determined by the musical significance) brings my dissertation full circle, encircling Milton, Erasmus, and Waswo's semantical shift from referential to relational (and indirectly Jeanneret perpetual movement too). For it is the reoccurring musical analogy that connects them. Erasmus and Milton both recourse to music for illustration when they are arguing the benefit of variety and its contribution to unity of thought. Hence, Milton in *Animadversions* claims that

“[v]ariety (as both music and rhetoric teacheth us) erects and rouses an audience, like the masterful running over many chords and divisions; whereas if men should ever be thumbing the drone of one plain song, it would be a dull opiate to the most wakeful attention”

(FLETCHER 1835, 62)

While Erasmus assures us that variety does not disturb the harmony of Christ, “but as a composition of different voices is rendered more

agreeable, the variety of Christ makes harmony more complete.”¹ Waswo, on his part, illustrates the constitutive function of language with music “just as a melody is constituted by, and is inseparable from, its sounds and the relations among them” so does language constitute thoughts, feelings, objects and meanings in the very act of articulating them (1987, 60-61).²

But there is another aspect of a melody that has a bearing on the interpretative praxis – it is not prone to fixation. The challenge Eliot poses to Milton scholarship to explore the interconnection of sound and sense, the constitutive way in which the matter of Milton’s verse weave the fabric of his poem, might prove a Penelope’s loom for the critic as it comes apart as it is woven, leaving a task of repeated attempts of construction while knowing that the very difficulty of such construction may invalidate the critical efforts. It is no surprise then, as Walter J. Ong notes, that literary/language studies “have in all but recent decades focused on written text rather than on orality for a readily assignable reason”, namely, the relationship of study to writing. As it has a bearing on the change I wish to foreshadow, let me elaborate Ong’s notion a bit further.

In his seminal work *Orality and Literacy* (1982) Walter J. Ong notes that

abstractly sequential, classificatory, explanatory examination of phenomena or of stated truths is impossible without writing and reading... When study in the strict sense of extended sequential analysis becomes possible with the interiorization of writing, one of the first things that literates often study is language itself and its uses [see for example the elaboration of the art of rhetoric]... — or any other oral performance — that were studied as part of rhetoric could hardly be speeches as these were being orally delivered. After the speech was delivered, nothing of it

¹ In his *Ratio verae theologiae* (1518): “Neque vero confundit hanc harmoniam Christi varietas; immo sicut e diversis vocibus apte compositis concentus suavissimus redditur, ita Christi varietas plenior efficit concentum. Sic omnia factus est omnibus, ut nusquam tamen sui dissimilis esset” (HOLBORN 211:28-31).

² Although I believe Waswo notion of referential language assumption as “cosmetic” in need of correction (see 3.5).

remained to work over. What you used for 'study' had to be the text of speeches that had been written down... In this way, even orally composed speeches were studied not as speeches but as written texts.

(2005, 8-9)

As a matter of fact, the whole section of 3.2 and 3.3 displays the veracity of Ong's observation. The fragmenting, the gathering, the assimilating and reassembling of the works of antiquity and preceding authors all rest on the study of *literature* that is essentially something written (from Latin *literatura* > *litera* = letter of the alphabet). "The commitment of word to space", says Ong, "enlarges the potential of language almost beyond measure, restructures thought" (7), moreover, by extension the study of literature "enforced attention to text even more" (10). Yet, there is a passage in Ong that we should consider more carefully in light of Milton's criticism's recent neglect of the oral and aural properties of Milton's work:

[I]n all the wonderful worlds that writing opens, the spoken word still resides and lives. Written text all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meanings. "Reading" a text means converting it to sound, aloud or in the imagination,³ syllable-by-syllable in slow reading or sketchily in the rapid reading common to high-technology culture. Writing can never dispense with orality.

(2005, 8)

Especially if we are dealing with a poet who chose epic for the genre of his "graver subject." In his attempt to come up with an alternative for the anachronistic and self-contradictory term "oral literature", ONG adapts a proposal by Northrop Fry for epic poetry, and opts to refer to all purely oral art as epos "which has the same Proto-IndoEuropean root,

³ Note that C. S. LEWIS resolves the complex syntax of PL 1.84-92 by reading the passage and advising the readers to have "the ghost of chanting, not a talking, voice" in their ear. This way the complex syntax "preserved the cantabile, it has enabled you to feel, even within these few lines, the enormous onward pressure of the great stream on which you embarked" (1967, 46).

wekw-, as the Latin word *vox* and its English equivalent ‘voice’, and thus is grounded firmly in the vocal, the oral” (2005, 13). Should we not then readjust our mode of apprehension of Milton’s work and let its aural and oral features enter the arenas of conflict of Milton’s thought? Especially since Milton’s poem is, in HALE’s words, “being oral in conception, execution, and first reception; so why not also in a present-day reception?” (2007, 17)

Milton marathons, that is, the public reading aloud of Milton’s work (mostly *Paradise Lost*) are perhaps a sign that such readjustment is not farfetched. They are gaining world-wide momentum, performed within many academic communities and nowadays regularly reported on the Internet. Although they tend to remain in the popular culture of academic communities, the members of the Milton_List regularly report these events and share experiences/stills of these marathons. The fact that these events occur in an age where recordings of oral performances are possible with all sorts of electronic technology only adds to the challenge it poses to present day Milton scholarship. Especially as it invites Ong’s notion of “secondary orality” into consideration. The aspect of the new orality’s “striking resemblance to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense” (2005, 133) is of particular interest. “Like primary orality”, writes Ong, “secondary orality has generated a strong group sense, for listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience, just as reading written or printed text turns individuals in on themselves” (ibid). I would like to think that continuing Milton marathons will eventually a “fit audience find, though few” (7.31) and in the process challenge Bloom’s notion of the “reader not as a person in society but as the deep self, our ultimate inwardness” (1994, 10-11).

Concluding, I would like to make a comment to a statement by Eliot. At the beginning of “Milton II”, he wrote:

the scholar's interest is in the permanent, the practitioner's in the immediate. The scholar can teach us where we should bestow our admiration and respect: the practitioner should be able, when he is a right poet talking about the right poet, to make an old masterpiece actual, give it contemporary importance, and persuade his audience that it is interesting, exciting, enjoyable, and active. (ELIOT 1968, 23)

Eliot erstwhile distinction between the scholar (i.e. teacher) and the practitioner (i.e. poet) no longer holds. Especially since the question of permanence (whether of canon or of values) has been contentious over the past two decades, to say the least.⁴ Bereft of the permanent, the scholar, like the practitioner, must “make an old masterpiece actual, give it contemporary importance” – as many among Milton scholars have already done by addressing the issue of why Milton matters. Yet, I think that to persuade our audience that reading *Paradise Lost* is still “interesting, exciting, enjoyable and active” we must encourage a more liberal, pulsing vein of its paragraph-length verse than a mere study, like the present one, could allow.

⁴ In fact, I think even LEWIS would have disagreed with Eliot. See his chapter on “The Doctrine of the Unchanging Human Heart” (1967, 62-65).

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