". . . [V]igorous most / When most unactive deem'd."

—*Samson Agonistes*, 1694-95.

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"Sad friends of Truth": Reading and Restoration
in John Milton's 1671 poems

by

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For my parents

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Abstract

In this study I use John Milton's notion of the "fit" reader as a guide to the theology and politics of reading in his early prose and late poetry. Throughout, I suggest that this reader functions as a site of contradiction within Milton's writing, one that is indebted to a Protestant tradition of biblical hermeneutics, to the changing conditions of early modern book production, and to a burgeoning public sphere. These sources of tension reemerge in Milton's post-Restoration poetry to inform a strategy of reading that resists state surveillance and helps to discipline a faithful remnant of readers. In conclusion, I argue that both *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* involve their audience in a process of reading that is finally incompatible with the conditions and effects of England's Restoration.

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Introduction

Milton's "fit" reader

> . . . [T]o be able to read a *text as text* without the interference of an interpretation is the latest-developed form of "inner experience,"—perhaps one that is hardly possible. . . .
>
> (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*)

In his preface to *Eikonoklastes* (1649), his fierce response to Charles I's *Eikon Basilike*, John Milton distinguishes his work from "the easy literature of custom and opinion" while lamenting the likelihood that his published labours will "be judged without industry or the pains of well-judging." In spite of this, he writes, Truth shall venture forth

> to earn, how she can, her entertainment in the world, and to find her own readers; few perhaps but those few, such of value and substantial worth, as truth and wisdom, not respecting numbers and big names, have been ever wont in all ages to be contented with. (1060)

While there is nothing unusual about a poet aspiring to an audience worthy of his craft, Milton's frequent appeals to discerning readers are more than the vain projections of their author. Over the course of the following chapters, I aim to demonstrate how, in their original published form, Milton's final poems suggest a method of reading that is as much a political strategy for marginalized Protestants in Restoration England as it is a concrete mode of spiritual discipline within a framework of Christian virtue. Although the various appeals to the

reader in Milton's writing posit an extra-textual audience, I argue that the poet's "fit" reader is a textual production through and through. What distinguishes this textual subject from others is, on the one hand, the set of conditions from which it emerges and, on the other, the form of its engagement with those conditions. By this, I mean that Milton's poetry works discursively and materially to produce a specific kind of historical subject, one premised on an iconoclastic, Protestant understanding of reading that Milton understood as being incompatible with England's Restoration.

Sometimes referred to as Milton's "ideal reader," this "fit" reader does not constitute a static or regulatory ideal, but instead corresponds to a set of interpretive practices that confronts the limits of England's immediate political context. Although the effects of interpretation are finally answerable to history, the reading of literature cannot be simply reduced to the reader's time, place, or community. In their reading, writes Fredric Jameson, works of literature produce "that very situation to which [they are] also, at one and the same time, a reaction" (1983: 82). Between approaches that emphasize the book as an object of material history, on the one hand, and those that treat reading as the operation of sheer interpretive agency, on the other, I focus on reading as a materially dependent practice that takes place within specific conditions. Just as the 1671 poems work to produce specific kinds of reading subjects, they also work to construct the enemies of such activity, which frequently appear as interpretive foils. Together, *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* reconstruct their historical subtext, positing an irreducibly ideological space of reading.

The politics of interpretation in Restoration England were, of course, the result of a larger social transformation that, for Reformers like Milton, remained unfinished. As is well known, much of the poet's mature thought hangs on the failure of the English Commonwealth, beginning in the early 1640s with a prolonged series of civil wars, and ending, tragically for Milton, with the Restoration of England's monarch, Charles II in 1660. My first chapter sketches the dominant trends of early modern Protestant interpretation as they appear in the poet's early prose. Here, I locate Milton's developing hermeneutic method—the beginning of his fit reader—in the ideological contradictions of its historical moment. In this context, the poet-theologian figures as a harsh critic of extra-biblical authority and a vigorous advocate of further Reformation in England. In the tracts of his early career, Milton appeals to an audience for whom the Bible is a "self-interpreting" text and builds his argument for divorce upon what he calls, the "key of charity." Over the course of his argument, Milton suggests that an unhappy marriage diverts a man's labour from his vocation and prevents the leisure time necessary for one's public work to be productive. Similarly, *Areopagitica* (1644) argues that books are not only "published labours" but can also be "as vigorously productive as those fabulous dragon's teeth, and, being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men" (930). Milton thus advocates for a form of authorship that comes into contradiction with the regulation of the book trade and with a domestic sphere that fails to reproduce the author's labour power. This chapter argues that the privilege of both authorial and interpretive labour, which follows from the "living labours of

public men," must be considered alongside the material and domestic labour involved in textual production. The recognized labour of the *published* book, in other words, adheres to a conception of the public that is premised on individual access to leisure time and the reproduction of labour power within the home.

At the same time, however, Milton's early writing uneasily affirms the Protestant rejection of work as a means of attaining salvation. In both tracts, productive labour is defined less in terms of material wealth than it is by bringing a "helpful hand to this slow-moving reformation which we labour under" (1644: 963). *Areopagitica*'s occasion, the Licensing Order of 1643, signaled the revival of pre-publication censorship in England's book trade. The ethical vision of this tract locates a free market system of exchange as the expression of the nation's will towards Reformation, a sign of trust in its collective ability to "search after truth." Freedom from external constraint here entails an opposition to the monopoly of licensing. In treating the published book as the *author's* property, Milton's discussion prefigures the formal subsumption of material labour in the production process and participates in what some critics of liberalism have identified as a logic of "possessive individualism," which refers to the objectification and instrumentalization of social relations.[1] This displacement finds its corollary in confluence of books and readers. Throughout *Areopagitica* Milton alters this relationship,

[1] Chapter 1's discussion of "possessive individualism" relies on C.B. Macpherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*; as well as its more recent treatment by Miltonists like Christopher

equivocating subject and object to the point that he declares, "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book" (930).[2] Where *Areopagitica* can be compared with Milton's first post-Restoration tract, *Of True Religion* (1673), for its emphasis on reading as the ground of toleration,[3] I read this discourse on liberty as symptomatic of an emerging capitalist appetite for collective labour—one mirrored in Milton's vision of England as a nation of discriminating readers.

The optimistic image of a reading republic so prominent in *Areopagitica* is transformed with Milton's post-Restoration poetry. If *Paradise Lost* (1667) acknowledges the possibility of a "fit audience" (7.31), Milton's 1671 poems reveal how it might be achieved and the limitations that it must confront. While *Paradise Regain'd* reveals how the mobility of the reading subject depends on the contingency of the material text, *Samson Agonistes* draws the space of reading into conflict with the space of the theatre. In both poems, the formal characteristics of the printed book are highlighted, first, as a contradictory ground for interpretive labour and, second, as a strategy of opposition to the popular spectacles of the Restoration.

In my second chapter I look at the social and political context of the London book-trade following the Restoration. Key to this setting is what I call

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Kendrick, whose *Milton: A study of ideology and form* provides a crucial reading of *Areopagitica* in such terms.

[2] The difference that Milton maintains is that of the reasonable creature and reason itself; that is, between a subjective faculty and its ideal, a "life beyond life." It would be wrong, however, to give divine reason a static identity in Milton's conception of reading. Soon after, he describes books as the intellectual substance, or soul (*anima*), that animates and outlives the body.

the "ideology of completion," a strategy by which England's restored government convinced its citizens of the necessity of monarchic rule and a centralized state church. Milton's 1671 publication occurs in this context as a material disruption of fixed (or "restored") categories. Arguing that *Paradise Regain'd* works to construct a mobile reader whose disciplined interpretation of the bible enables her to appreciate the contingency of the material text, this chapter explores how the Son upsets the determining conditions of identity by dismantling the hermeneutical binaries—means/ends, internal/external, contemplative/active, private/public—through which Satan interprets God's kingdom. Although both the Son and his adversary draw on verses from scripture in their debate, Satan is revealed to rely on extra-textual modes of domination, while the Son demonstrates an immanent relation to God's Word.

Parallel to the Son's mode of reading, an activity that is described in the poem as "revolving," I position the material format of the 1671 edition against the arguments of those like Walter Ong, who see the advent of print as the further reification of the written word. In its production and consumption, writes Ong, print "is comfortable only with finality" (132). Rather, drawing on the material features of Milton's text and the work of Michel de Certeau, I argue that the apparent constraints of print are opened through a process of reading and re-reading that is suited to biblical interpretation, which Dayton Haskin has helpfully defined as the conference of biblical places. This mode of reading is

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[3] For a summary discussion of reading and toleration in Milton's 1673 tract, see my conclusion, "Milton and the limits of reading."

also encouraged by the 1671 *Omissa*, a feature unique to the first edition, in which readers are directed to insert ten lines of additional verse into the main text of *Samson Agonistes*. Here, I argue, the friction between contradictory passages of scripture enables a space of opposition to the state and provides subjective relief from the two-fold production of identity and salvation required by the Church of England.

While Chapter 2 shows how the labour of reading is assumed and transformed through the Son's posture of interpretation in *Paradise Regain'd,* my final chapter considers how *Samson Agonistes* throws the fit reader into crisis, forcing her to confront the conditions of representation that limit collective agency. By focusing on the collapse of labour into idolatry in *Samson Agonistes*, I argue that Milton's tragic poem is positioned against those who would valorize human industry without thinking through its political and theological consequences. Israel's captivity means that there is no "outside" of idolatry for Samson or his audience, except through something similar to what Walter Benjamin has theorized as "divine violence." Such violence operates outside of the visible system that constrains Samson and corrupts his people. Again, I try to demonstrate how Milton's publication relies on its formal features to produce a particular kind of reading subject. Alongside Samson's toppling of the Philistine temple, Milton positions his dramatic poem against the spectacle of theatrical production. The *Omissa* again functions as a built-in mode of resistance to an ideology of completion, but here assists in turning the poet's audience from spectators to readers. With *Samson Agonistes*, in other words,

Milton preserves the possibility of an audience by forcing his readers to pass through the violence of Samson's destruction, marking a transition from theatrical spectacle to a space of reading. This chapter concludes with a return to the problem of the vocation for early modern Protestants and its articulation through Max Weber's theory of the Protestant work ethic. Drawing upon the recent work of the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, I suggest that the old poet's "fit audience" persists as a "remnant" whose collective capacity depends on its openness to the future and its resistance to the strictures of identity and production.

Rather than simply treating Milton as a representative of the bourgeois ideology of possessive individualism, this study considers a poet whose post-Restoration publications found him still searching for a social potential that was not pre-determined by the formal or real subsumption implicit to capitalist modes of exchange, "not respecting numbers and big names" (1649: 1060). Neither do we see a simple affirmation of free, interpretive space in Milton's late poems, but are engaged in a mode of fit reading that is just as opposed to the "easy literature of custom and opinion" as it is to the closure of England's political horizon.

Chapter One

"Day-labourers of their own afflictions": Conditions of reading in Milton's early prose

> Some whose necessary shifts have long inured them to cloak the defects of their unstudied years and hatred now to learn, under the appearance of grave solidity . . . find the ease of slighting what they cannot refute, and are determined, as I hear, to hold it not worth answering.
>
> (Milton, *Tetrachordon*)

Along with condemning the Anabaptists for permitting divorce (and further speculating on other obscene activities proper to such "heretical" sects), Daniel Featley—the unmentioned target of Milton's attack in this chapter's epigraph, and the inflammatory author of *The Dippers Dipt* (1645)—had publicly attacked the first of Milton's divorce tracts. In his retort, Milton plays off the metaphor of Featley's title, ridiculing him for failing to grasp the particularity of his opponents:

> . . . I must be forced to reckon that doctor, who in a late *equivocating* treatise plausibly set afloat against the Dippers, diving the while himself with a more deep prelatical malignance against the present state and church government, mentions with ignominy 'the Tractate of Divorce'; yet answers nothing . . . (my emphasis, 1645: 989)

The English pamphlet wars of the 1640s proved time and again that critical practice always works within a selective description of its object, and Milton was often just as guilty of forgetting this as his rhetorical opponents. Be it divorce, book licensing, or regicide, the polemical poet would continue to resist the

determining logic of his critical horizon, not by trying to advance to a space outside it, but by rehearsing its contradictions and actively encouraging a "fit" audience of readers to do so along with him. Milton's ideas, as Christopher Hill has observed, "were always pressing tensely against the framework in which they [were] enclosed" (1979: 259). The result for the poet's work, then, is not simply the tension of contraries—whether between discipline and liberty, law and love, or labour and grace—but an awareness of the interpretive limits that ensure their reproduction.

In his preface to *The Political Unconscious* Fredric Jameson begins by acknowledging, "we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself." Rather, texts are always constrained by "sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those interpretive traditions" (1983: x). It is, therefore, the task of literary and cultural study to analyze the various "interpretations through which we attempt to confront and appropriate" the text. When the Protestant movement emerged in sixteenth-century Europe as a reaction against what many saw as the Catholic Church's increasing corruption, the question of interpretation became central to the counter-theologies of various Reformers. However, the Protestant struggle for interpretative hegemony proceeded by assuming the opposite of Jameson's point. Indeed, it became a defining trait of Reformed theology to oppose and work outside of traditional methods of interpretation. Especially for Radical Reformers like Milton, authority was no longer to be found in the established church or in its prevailing customs, but could only come in the form of God's Word. As Thomas Luxon

puts it in his study of early modern allegory, the "early Reformers . . . removed the body of Christ from the altar and relocated it in the Scriptures, redefining Christ's true body as a discursive body—the Word" (5), thus marking an important shift in early modern ideology. Anticipating Regina M. Schwartz's recent revaluation of the Reformation's legacy of secularization,[4] David Gay follows Luxon in arguing that Milton's writing represents a discursive transformation of the sacraments, where the "real presence" traditionally found in the Eucharist comes to be located within the written Word of scripture. In this way, suggests Gay, "the communion of Milton's reformed body politic is a communion of reading" (36). Especially in *Areopagitica* (1644), Milton's celebrated polemic against the licensing of books, reading becomes constitutive of what John D. Schaeffer identifies as *sensus communis*, and, in its socially unifying effects, comes to resemble the Roman Catholic doctrine of Real Presence in the Eucharist.[5] In Milton's post-Restoration work, as later chapters will argue, the practice of reading comes to resemble a sacrament because of the way such activity facilitates and disciplines the individual reception of divine grace.

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[4] In *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (2008), Schwartz draws on the work of George Herbert, John Donne, and Milton to show how the longings for the kind of sacred presence one finds in transubstantiation (what was once manifest in the ritual of the Eucharist) were not lost with England's Reformation but displaced and re-inscribed through poetry. By her account, "A sacramental poetry is a poetry that signifies more than it says, that creates more than it signs, yet does so, like liturgy, through image, sound, and time, in language that takes the hearer *beyond* each of those elements" (7).

By the mid-seventeenth century, it was clear that English Protestantism's emphasis on biblical authority had paved the way for disagreement and dissent over the use and meaning of scripture. It had also enabled literate individuals to articulate and express their beliefs in new and unconventional ways. This chapter explores several instances in which Milton's early polemics politicize the major tenets of a dynamic Protestant hermeneutic, which the author believed to be necessary to further the Reformation in England. In his divorce tracts, Milton sets forth his argument within a distinctly Protestant framework, where the Bible alone provides the basis for God's revelation of soteriological and ethical knowledge. Here, Milton draws upon the seeming contradictions of scripture in order to advocate the cause of interpretive liberty, which, he makes clear, is not to be confused with self-defeating principle of individual license.[6] Such liberty occurs as both the condition and the outcome of reading the biblical text against itself; that is, without any external mediation from institutional strictures.

This chapter looks to the construction of the reader in early modern discourse as an agent whose reception of texts increasingly depends on his ability to engage in interpretive labour, and argues that the vitality and the necessity of Milton's progressive biblical hermeneutic draws its logic from

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[5] See "Metonymies We Read By: Rhetoric, Truth and the Eucharist in Milton's *Areopagitica.*" *Milton Quarterly*: 34.3 (2000) 84-92.

[6] For examples of this familiar distinction in Milton's writing, see, Sonnet 12: "License they mean when they cry liberty; / For who loves that must first be wise and good" (11-12); see also, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649). "For indeed none can love freedom heartily but good men; and the rest love not freedom but license, which never hath more scope or more indulgence than under tyrants" (1024).

Reformation: not simply a moment of historical transition—as we normally understand it—but a practical requirement of the Christian faith that was to be carried out through the reader's labour in the Word. In *Areopagitica*, Milton presents such labour as a collective activity, but in doing so, overshadows the other site of collective labour upon which a reading republic depends: the social relations of the print shop. This ground of labour is only extended by the licensor's appearance, and is thus refuted in the name of the author, whose intellectual work is supercedes and is purchased by all other forms of labour. In much the same way, the divorce tracts reveal the contradiction between authorial labour and domestic labour. When wedlock is made "a supportless yoke,"—that is, when the home is not a place of leisure for the husband, and unrecognized domestic labour for the wife—the only resolution is divorce (1643: 912). If reading and writing count as forms of labour in Milton's early polemics, they must be thought in relation to the hidden labour that conditions their possibility.

Early modern authors worked within a transitional period with respect to the ideology of the free market. Rather than believing in the neutrality, or necessity, of market participation, writers in Milton's time were caught between a disappearing system of patronage (a remnant of feudalism) and an economic model suited to the interests of a growing merchant class. For this reason, participation in the market was not simply a given, but was, especially for post-Reformation writers, imbued with ethical significance during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Laurie Ellinghausen has suggested, positive figurations of authorial labour in the period "involved representing the

marketplace not as something to be shunned, but as a test for character" (117). Milton's own experience of the Revolution and its aftermath of Restoration mark him as a figure of transition, one whose writings reflect the uneasy relationship between the "possessive individualism" of free market ideology, on the one hand, and moral responsibility to the English public, on the other.[7] By focusing on competing forms of labour in his early writing, this chapter attempts contextualize and politicize what Milton would, later on in his career, refer to as his "fit" reader.

While it is no longer a problem to understand Milton's written *corpus* as "political," this project repeatedly appeals to the category of "ideology" as a way of situating Milton's theological politics in relation to the dominant forces (social, cultural, economic, and political) of seventeenth century England, and as an attempt to ground this study in its historical moment.[8] Given the public, self-

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[7] For a classic account of the emergence of "possessive individualism" as a trend in early modern thought, see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. For Macpherson, the thinking of Hobbes, Locke, and radical religious groups during the seventeenth century corresponds to the actual relations of a free, competitive market based on individual property rights. In his essay, "A Bourgeois Revolution?" Christopher Hill identifies two types of individualism that, he suggests, ignited the Revolution in England: "the individualism of those who wished to make money by doing what they would with their own but also the individualism of those who wished to follow their own consciences in worshipping God, and whose consciences led them to challenge the institutions of a stratified hierarchical society" (96-7).

[8] For a good account of how the disappearance of ideology, as a subject in its own right, enables its very reproduction, see Slavoj Zizek's essay, "The Specter of ideology," in *Mapping Ideology*. Ed. Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 1994), 1-25. The term "ideology" has become a rarity in mainline Milton scholarship, despite the fact that Milton's "politics" are still ceaselessly being written about. Kevin Sharpe, for example, claims that "to Milton reading *was* politics: a

representational nature of Milton's authorial vocation it seems appropriate, if not necessary, to draw on the concept of ideology as "a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of history" (Jameson 1983: 15). Following a survey of contemporary theoretical approaches to reading, this chapter touches briefly upon the interpretive modes of seventeenth century Protestant readers; I then turn to Milton's early tracts, where interpretive activity becomes a priority for both Milton and his perceived readers. Here, I argue that *Areopagitica*'s famous discussion of liberty asks us to consider interpretation in terms of an emerging market, based on the free exchange of ideas. The social cooperation here envisioned turns our attentions to the material realities of book production—that is, the extraction and commodification of labour power. In his tract, Milton displays a desire to retain control over his intellectual property and warns his

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process of demystifying royal authority that was constituted both through royal words and silent royal spectacles; an opening of *arcana imperii* to critical public scrutiny and debate" (289-292). Rather than another equivocation of reading with the political (which frequently takes the form of a liberal celebration of public debate), what we need is a clear idea of where such politics begins and ends—whether it remains with the contradictions that motivated Milton, or continues in our own conflicted inheritance of his legacy. Another example that equates reading with politics is Sharon Achinstein's *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader*, which presents a Milton whose "political intention" is to train readers to be critics of propaganda. In this way, she claims, the "lessons" of *Paradise Lost* "are activist and engaged" (222). Not only does Achinstein fail to give a proper account of the early modern political subject, she fails to question the relationship between the forces that structure such subjectivity and the agency that supposedly defines it. Instead, she merely tips the balance of this dialectic in favour of the liberal, democratic individual, whose critical awareness, she argues, should be equally valued in our own time.

readers against the danger of treating their "religion," the product (or exercise) of their own interpretive labour, as "a dividual movable" that can be abstracted from public vocation. However, this emphasis conceals the increasingly privatized spheres of material book production and domestic labour.

By the time of *Areopagitica*, the analogical relation of free spiritual inquiry to free trade had been established by Puritan reformers and others. But in both realms, liberty "could exist only where there were no monopolies" (Hoxby 2002: 35). Milton's contribution to this side of the debate was to draw this emblem of market control into contradiction with what he defined as the valuable labour of reading, writing, and bookmaking. As I hope to demonstrate, the "politics" of Milton's apparent privileging of private conscience over public representation turns on the question of how we define the act of reading and, consequently, how we define early modern subjectivity in relation to its social context. At least for the pre-Revolutionary Milton, the space of interpretation embodies the social relations of a free market and, with it, constitutes the ground of potential for further Reformation.

Scenes of reception

Since the 1960s, the act of reading has become a privileged site of agency and potential within the larger landscape of literary theory, yet it has continued to house a form of textual idealism that many scholars still associate with canonical figures like Milton. Much contemporary debate over discursive practices and the production of meaning follows a familiar dialectic between structure and agency:

here, text and reader each represent contrasting degrees of formal limitations, on the one hand, and interpretive freedom, on the other. As strong reactions against the American school of New Criticism, the interwoven legacies of structuralism and reader-response criticism offer different ways of understanding the reader's role in constructing meaning and the ways in which texts both enable and discipline such activity. In discussions of reading and authorship it has become standard practice to cite Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, both of whom heralded the demise of the author: the gauge and guarantor of meaning somehow external to the play of textual signifiers. When reader-response criticism emerged as a force for literary study in the late 1960s, its only real unifying feature was a denial of the New Critical implication that analyses of the formal properties of any literary work would necessarily result in similar responses and interpretations among readers. New Criticism's appeals to "the work itself" as a figure of organic unity, independent of its immediate context, led to a schema in which the reader could only function as a passive receptacle for the views of an author (as mediated by a fixed, determinate text). While this reaction against the school of New Criticism resulted in a rejection of the literary text's autonomy and authority, a renewed focus on the reader inevitably led to the valorization of interpretive agency at the cost of social and historical analysis. We might understand reader-response theory's major proponents—namely, Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes, and Stanley Fish—as offering us different ways of dealing with this dialectic. Of these critics, Fish has done the most to collapse the distinction between structure and agency, text and reader, into the field of interpretation. As

we shall see, his position, or lack thereof, is flaunted in his reading of Milton's *Areopagitica*. The aim of this survey, however, is to arrive at a theory of reading that is sensitive to a social and material ground of labour that produces the text along with its reader. By appreciating the differentiated field of production surrounding the literary text, we are in a better position to locate the ideological significance of interpretive labour in Milton's early writing.

By focusing on the "work" produced by text-reader interaction, rather than on one pole or the other, Iser sees the act of reading as inherently relational and productive. In his famous essay, "Interaction between Text and Reader," he focuses his attention on the gap between the literary text and the reader's aesthetic response as a necessary condition of interpretation. But despite an emphasis on indeterminacy, Iser's framework has a clear hermeneutic agenda. The goal of reader-text interaction, we are told, is to produce an interpretative sequence that will establish literary meaning. While it would be wrong to call Iser's approach conservative—the given limits of a text, he maintains, are "regulatory" but not "prescriptive"—the text is for Iser always a limiting object which the reader must aggressively engage for the purpose of a necessarily ordered, internally consistent, literary interpretation. At the same time, an interpretation must always be logically constrained and structured by some notion of "the text itself" that exists outside of its hermeneutic constitution.

If Iser's theory of the interplay between text and reader covertly retains a desire for textual determinism, Barthes dialectically opposes this hidden tendency in his celebration of reading as a hedonistic operation, the object of

which is a moment of *jouissance*: the symbolic annihilation of the reader's unified self. In this way, the act of reading opposes a bourgeois ideology that seeks to naturalize the myth of the solitary individual. In his essay *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes writes that texts enable a sublimity, where "*everything* is lost," which both transcends and plays within its material body: in its reading, the text overcomes "the *moral unity* that society demands of every human product. . . . [I]n the text of pleasure," writes Barthes, "the opposing forces are no longer repressed but in a state of becoming: nothing is really antagonistic, everything is plural" (31).

Departing from Iser, who remains tied to a notion of the text that exists outside of interpretation, Fish is able to regulate the free play that Barthes celebrates by invoking the "interpretative strategies of interpretative communities." Much like Barthes, Fish's work attempts to reveal how objects of interpretation are always constructed (or "written") by their readers. As he explains in *Is There a Text in This Class?*, such strategies of interpretation are not so much "for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (171). Fish's aim is to demonstrate how textual ambiguity is resolved by the modifications we make to our own interpretive strategies, like, say, establishing a context or ground that exists at a deeper level than interpretation. In this way, his theory always returns the text to a constitutive indeterminacy, a function of the "reader" rather than the "text." At times, however, it is difficult to see Fish's overt lack of a critical position as little more than evasive. As he writes, "No one can *be* a relativist,

because no one can achieve the distance from his or her own beliefs and assumptions which would result in their being no more authoritative *for him* than for the beliefs and assumptions held by others" (1980: 319). In other words, we read in a certain way in a certain situation because we can do no other.

A brief example of how this lack of position supports Fish's critical program can be found in his essay on Milton's *Areopagitica*. Here, Fish argues that the importance of the tract lies in its process of "rhetoric" or "persuasion": the making of virtue by what is contrary. He then proceeds to distance his reading from Christopher Kendrick's Marxist interpretation, finally endorsing both critical positions as equally tenable sites of literary criticism: as such, they are both in accord with a literary institution that determines and enables each critic's work. "No criticism is more political than any other," writes Fish, "at least not in the sense one normally means by 'political,' an intervention in the affairs of the greater—non-academic—world" (1988: 249). Again, the strategy appears to echo Milton, for Fish's point in saying this is to demonstrate how Kendrick's "political reading" is a product *of* the institution for consumption *by* the institution; that is, that "there is nothing larger, that institutional life (of some kind or other) defines and exhausts those possibilities, but (and this is the crucial point) that those possibilities are rich and varied, and they are, in the only meaningful sense of the word, political" (1988: 252). There is, in short, no *deeper* (i.e, political) reading of a text than the one that is produced within an institutional politics; there are only differences in institutional life, which as Fish

bluntly puts it, cannot even amount to a conscious choice but are rather given as the "groundless ground" of academic freedom.

While both Fish and Barthes are intent on resisting an "authorial" image of unified agency, each critic has, in his own way, described the reader in such terms. For example, Barthes writes in "The Death of the Author," "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biology, psychology; is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which a written text is constituted" (280). Fish makes a similar claim when he describes his critical method as a kind of production that can only occur *within* the confines of the institution. "Rather than restoring and recovering texts," he writes in his well-known essay "Interpreting the *Variorium*," "I am in the business of making texts and teaching others to make them" (180). This is to repeat the basic claim he makes against "political" readings from critics like Kendrick; but the earlier example also illustrates how Fish's appeal to the institution as "a definable set of commonly held assumptions" fails to account for the indeterminacy and debate that defines this supposedly untranscendable category. As Samuel Weber has argued, Fish's concept of an interpretive community is "ultimately nothing but a generalized, indeed universalized form of the individualist monad: autonomous, self-contained and internally unified, not merely despite but because of the diversity it contains" (43). When Fish opposes a critic like Kendrick, his strategy is to explain away their difference by placing it within the disparate unity of the

institution. In Weber's words, "The institution thus emerges as the condition of possibility of controversy, and hence, as its arbiter" (Ibid.).

Although he is similarly interested in the institutional conditions of reading, the French sociologist Michel de Certeau approaches the dialectic of reading and writing in terms of production and consumption. This allows him to appreciate the formal differences between them: "To write is to produce the text; to read is to receive it from someone else without putting one's own mark on it, without remaking it" (169). Such definitions appear to miss Fish's point: surely, readers are not passive recipients but active interpreters who work in tandem with institutional structures to construe textual meaning. What separates de Certeau's approach from that of Fish is his commitment to historiography. For de Certeau the relationship between reading and writing that we witness in the Enlightenment (a relationship defined by a strict observance of the text's autonomy) is ideological; that is, it amounts to the *reproduction* of sociocultural relationships—but preserved within the act of reading is a spatial potential that no force of control can disable or prevent. Reading, he writes, is "situated at the point where social stratification (class relationships) and poetic operations (the practitioner's constructions of a text) intersect. . . . The autonomy of the reader depends on a transformation of the social relationships that overdetermine his relation to texts" (173). Instead of merely granting the reader a position of autonomy and bracketing out the role of the author in the determination of meaning, de Certeau recognizes that the constitutive relationship between text and reader is subject to (but not ultimately limited by) social and economic

relationships, and is, therefore, a historically contingent practice. While the act of writing is preoccupied with establishing "the multiplication of its production through the expansionism of reproduction," reading is inherently nomadic.

> Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself and also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly, and each of the places through which it passes is a repetition of the lost paradise. (174)

De Certeau locates the possibility of a "free" reader not in the absolute present—the ahistorical space in which Barthes locates the possibility of escape through a submission to textual plurality—but joins Fish in emphasizing how the context of pre-existing social relationships condition the ways in which one reads a text. This is because the object in question is a social product, what amounts to the reification of existing social relations as they are generated by socio-economic forces and reproduced through activities such as reading. Such constraints are also resources for interpretation. To again invoke one of Milton's famous distinctions, the reader's agency is not, despite the author's supposed absence, equivalent to his license. But where Fish's emphasis on "interpretive communities" fails to offer a real acknowledgement of interpretive struggle, and fails to account for the historical dimension of reading as a materially dependent practice, de Certeau allows us to consider a form of agency that is specific to the reader as a social creature whose actions cannot be reduced to shared assumptions or institutional constraints.

As Jerome McGann has pointed out, Fish's discussion of interpretation depends upon a departure from the text as "documentary matter;" for Fish, the material text is a mere physical object that is taken for granted by the interpreter (1988: 185). Thus, for McGann, Fish's insistence on discussing the text as a reader's construct is a product of his own idealism. The problem with this division between the document and the text is that it removes the textual function of documentary matter from the reader's purview; and, as McGann argues, that specific function is a determinate one, which must be considered alongside a text's social and institutional histories. As Roger Chartier has argued, such an appeal to the documentary object does not proceed in order to establish some extra-textual ground beyond interpretation, but to recognize that "there is no text outside the material structure in which it is given to be read or heard" (90). Echoing McGann's critique of Fish, Chartier points to reader-response theory as an irresponsible school of textual analysis because it "postulates a pure and immediate relation between the 'signals' emitted by the text . . . and the 'horizon of expectation' of the public to which they are addressed" (91). The critiques of McGann and Chartier alert us to the fact that Fish too hastily collapses, or, at times bypasses, the various categories of production that constitute the literary text. I would further add that Fish also fails to distinguish between the different kinds of labour involved in "making texts," specifically, material forms of labour that are conditioned and reproduced through particular modes of reading and interpretation that de Certeau calls "consumption."

Critics such as McGann and Chartier have called attention to the ways in which material conditions determine interpretive activity, but, according to Fredric Jameson, our present historical position requires that we regard this apparently external content (political attitudes, ideological materials, juridical categories, the raw materials of history, the economic processes)—what Jameson calls "transcending moments"—as "provisionally extrinsic," that is, always to be "drawn back within the process of reading" (1983: 42). This is not to reduce such moments to the institutional configurations of interpretive activity or to an all-pervasive cultural dominant, but to draw them into relation with the traits of a specific history of reading and the material production that conditions it. To be sure, the work of historical analysis receives its unity from current strategies of reading, but even a Barthesian appeal to the reader must operate out of a specific methodology and conception of history. As Jameson has argued elsewhere, "if we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable" (1991: 6). For our purposes, this cultural dominant belongs to an emerging class to which Milton belonged.

In his 1986 study of Milton, Christopher Kendrick uses the category of "possessive individualism" to locate Milton's writing alongside the development of an emerging middle class subject that controls its own labour-power. For Kendrick, this subject's "open contempt of wage-labour [and] its lack of bad conscience about defining itself against the degraded Other, marks it as the

liberalism of an early phase of capitalism, in which class struggle has not yet been neutralized by the free working of the economy" (63). The commodification of labour that marks the constitutive moment of the capitalist subject is found in the possession of the individual, his control over his own bodily powers. This commodification removes the producing subject and his labour from his social conditions and relegates both the subject and its creative potential to the category of "labour power," which now assumes an exchange value. In this way, writes Kendrick, "The possessive individualist narrative institutes commodity reification into the sphere of the subject and objectifies all the subject's social relations" (66). As we shall see, Milton's *Areopagitica* reflects this logic in the realm of book production and the collaborative aspect of early modern publication that has been celebrated by critics like Stephen Dobranski. For now, we need to understand how early modern Protestants defined the determining conditions of reading, conditions which demanded a theological articulation because of their relation to biblical interpretation.

Letter and spirit

We find something of an analogy between contemporary literary theory's focus on the reader and the Protestant Reformation's attempt to break free of traditional hermeneutics in order to give greater agency to the individual believer in the name of freedom and spiritual authenticity. For this reason, the question of *reception* becomes crucial to debates over church liturgy and biblical interpretation. We thus witness a contradictory emphasis on the role of human

labour in the practice of interpretation, where spiritual trial consists in one's readiness to give her interpretive burdens over to Christ. As I will later demonstrate, Milton's divorce tracts show this logic at work. The role of the present section is to narrate this historical shift in biblical hermeneutics and to highlight its often reactionary nature.

Rejecting the allegorical strategies of the "Doctors of the Church," Reformers generally emphasized a literal reading of the scriptures, free from institutional constraint, thus giving a greater share of interpretive responsibility to the individual reader. But what separated the hermeneutic approach of more independent Reformers like Milton from conservative interpreters like Luther and Calvin was the poet's extreme rejection of extra-biblical constraint, whether in the form of church authority, state power, or individual license. Allegorical interpretation was originally employed by patristic theologians in order to make the scriptures more applicable to everyday life. In this way allegory gave the scriptures more traction for believers by aligning obscure passages with church doctrine. From the fourth century onward, Augustine's "rule of faith" was an important tool for carrying out this exegetical strategy. Under this method of spiritual reading, anything found in scripture that was not in accord with the charity of the gospels was to be interpreted figuratively. Scripture, writes Augustine, "teaches nothing but charity, nor condemns anything except cupidity, and in this way shapes the minds of men" (88). To see charity as an allegorical prophecy embodied throughout the scriptures was, for Augustine, to discover the

fulfillment of the Law, as Christ and St Paul had directed. As D.W. Robertson, Jr writes,

> If the allegorical method fails to produce a single 'correct' interpretation for each passage but leads instead to the perception of a diversity of meanings, some of which may not have been intended by the author, this fact is regarded by St. Augustine not as a shortcoming but as a virtue, provided that all of these meanings are supported in other parts of the Scriptures. (xi)

Thus, without the intention of a human author behind a specific biblical meaning, it could be considered closer to its origin in God. As this model developed into the four-level method of medieval exegesis, personal application came to be known as the third, or tropological, level of meaning. But, as Barbara K. Lewalski writes, "this formula was discredited by the Reformation insistence upon the 'one sense of Scripture' and also by Reformation theology: the Protestant sense of the desperate condition of fallen men dictated a shift in emphasis from *quid agas* [the "what to do" of moral allegory] to God's activity in us" (170). While allegorical readings of scripture could provide a way out of difficult passages, many Reformers saw such methods as a strategy for freezing meaning and preserving institutional power. John Calvin described the fourfold method of medieval exegesis as a "licentious system" contrived by Satan "to undermine the authority of scripture, and to take away from the reading of it the true advantage," which was to be found in the experience of the individual believer (Ibid.). "The Holy Spirit," claimed Martin Luther, "is the very simplest

writer and speaker there is in heaven and earth; therefore His words, too, cannot have more than *one most simple sense*, which we called the Scriptural or literal tongue-sense" (qtd, Luxon 905, my emphasis). Although Luther rejected the tradition of the "Doctors of the Church" in their allegorical approaches to scripture, he also rejected the ability of the laity to interpret and apply scripture to practical living on their own.

This tension between the diversity of individual interpretations and the unity of institutional constraint continued to characterize the Reformation well into the seventeenth-century. Throughout his career, Milton saw this kind of formal constraint as antithetical to progressive movement of Reformation. Like many Reformers before him, he understood this distinction based on the Pauline dialectic of Letter and Spirit. While the letter represented the fixed and binding laws of tradition, the spirit allowed Protestant readers some flexibility. Against the "stubborn letter," the spirit offers biblical interpreters "the softening breath of charity, which turns and winds the dictate of every positive command, and shapes it to the good of mankind" (1645: 1003). Taken together with an unconditional attachment to the biblical text as the sole authority of Christian life, this appeal to the spirit marks a crucial space of negotiation for readers, enabling autonomy from institutional authority. Consistent with the strategies of earlier Reformation theologians, Milton's two-pronged attack against church and state uses biblical authority as "an instrument to de-authorize: if the Letter liberated men from the church, the Spirit liberated men from other men" (Schwartz 2007: 238).

Milton's first published tract, *Of Reformation* (1641), deploys St Paul's dialectic of Letter and Spirit to narrate the history of the institutional church as a fall into idolatry, an increasing reliance upon external signs:

> Hence men came to scan the scriptures, by the Letter, and in the Covenant of our Redemption, magnified the external signs more than the quickening power of the Spirit, and yet looking on them through their own guiltiness with a Servile fear, and finding as little comfort, or rather terror from them again, they knew not how to hide their Slavish approach to God's behests by them not understood, *not worthily received*, but by cloaking their Servile crouching to all Religious Presentments, sometimes lawful, sometimes Idolatrous, under the name of humility, and terming the piebald frippery and ostentation of ceremonies, decency. (808-809, my emphasis)

Here, Milton characterizes the ornamental apparatus of Roman Catholicism as a type of compensation for its attachment to the Letter. In this way, sacraments had the double function of making individuals reliant on external or "traditional" forms as expressions of faith while giving greater control to the church authorities who were themselves charged with the task of disseminating these seemingly transparent signs of grace. Instead, Protestants relied increasingly upon the individual reading of scripture for moral guidance and spiritual reassurance.

What was at stake for many Protestant Reformers was the authenticity of individual faith, and, for Milton, the personal trial of biblical interpretation was the best method of proving one's faith to be legitimate. In the passage quoted

above, Milton also makes an important point with regard to the type of "reception" conditioned by the sacramental tradition. *Of Reformation*'s emphasis on right reception runs parallel to the Reformation's vision of emancipatory individualism, and the particular valence of this dialectic is worth noting. Here, voluntarism is the condition of spiritual authenticity. With the rejection of institutional mediation in the name of a more active expression of personal faith, the individual's role in the reading of scripture must, at the same time, become almost entirely passive. By the early seventeenth century, notes Lewalski, poetic practices as well as Bible-reading comes to demonstrate what she calls the "Protestant-Pauline paradigm of salvation," which was played out in "the drama of man's spiritual restoration . . . understood wholly as God's work" (1979: 16). In his analysis of seventeenth century English poetry, Ryan Netzley puts a finer point on the English Reformation's distinction between God's work of salvation and the human labour of reception. As he suggests in his study of seventeenth-century devotional poetry, early modern Protestants understood the Christian faith as an inward struggle "precisely because it does not promise the reassuring logic of accomplishment and failure that attends any and all accounts of desire and reading that characterize them as work" (2011: 20). Reading the Bible thus came to be understood as a crucial practice and expression of Christian belief *and* of the free grace of God.

Resting and wresting

As the book historian Richard Altick has noted, with the appearance of the first English Bible authorized by the Crown in 1540, its widespread purchase and popularity, and its subsequent banning to women and lower class labourers in 1543, early modern English society was driven by an active desire among individuals from all classes to read the Bible in the most expansive sense: to internalize, embody and eventually own the scriptures. While interpretive activity became vital to the expression of individual faith in early modern England, it was also believed by some to be a detriment to true religion, both in terms of individual salvation and social cohesion. As readers of the Bible sought to fit obscure "places" into a standard narrative pattern of sin, guilt and grace, Reformed theologians endorsed what they called the "analogy of faith," which provided an ordering supplement for difficult or obstructive Biblical passages.

While this interpretive strategy might appear as a natural outcome of increasingly private reading practices, it also resembles the Patristic method of exegesis that was revived according to the doctrine of *sola scriptura*.[9] In his Lectures on Romans, Martin Luther "insisted that a legitimate 'analogy' is not actively created by the intellect but passively received without going 'beyond the bounds of faith'" (Haskin 77). For seventeenth-century English Protestants, William Whitaker's *Disputation on Holy Scripture, Against the Papists* (1588) demonstrated and distilled what many saw as the Reformation's hermeneutic

principles. While Whitaker's exegetical work frequently refers to Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton's early attempts to work within this same hermeneutic tradition avoid any mention of the classical theologian, and are presented to readers as moments of potential for further Reformation.[10] Instead of the "analogy of faith," the phrase "the Rule of Charity" appears on the title page of the first edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and, throughout the tract, stands as a more particular name for what Milton proposes to gather from "the general *analogy* of evangelic doctrine" (910). The subtitle of the 1643 tract provides a helpful summary of the strategy:

> RESTOR'D TO THE GOOD OF BOTH SEXES, From the bondage of Canon Law, and other mistakes, to Christian freedom, guided by the Rule of Charity. Wherein also many places of Scripture, have recover'd their long lost meaning: Seasonable to be now thought on in the Reformation intended.

The association Milton here makes between the analogy of faith and further Reformation in England was not, however, shared by all its practitioners. For many churchmen, including John Donne, it was made to function as a principle of moderation that required ordinary Christians to consult authorized interpreters, or simply that "there is no more to be done for them, but beleeving"

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[9] In near accord with Augustine's "rule of faith," the Puritan theologian William Perkins defined this interpretive guide as "the summe of religion gathered out of the clearest places of scripture." Quoted in Haskin, 7.

[10] As Haskin points out, "It is an index of Milton's profound implication in a tradition which professes to scorn 'tradition' that, although he used the definite

(qtd in Haskin 79). What the analogy of faith does reflect is a context of public debate over the use and meaning of scripture: where the contradictions found within the biblical text often mattered on the most personal levels, and where one's interpretive method could rarely be severed from its political implications.

The political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, for example, drew a stark connection between the current "anarchy of interpretations" and the political unrest that characterized the 1640s, insisting that the king authorize a singular reading of scripture, or at least install official interpreters of scripture to monitor its meaning. Hobbes' anxiety over competing interpretations of scripture and the proliferation of disparate sects was common in mid-seventeenth-century England. At issue for Hobbes was not the availability of the vernacular Bible, but interpretation itself, which, as an outward activity, had to be ordered and regulated so as not to contradict the established order of the state. Fearing the social effects of such dangerous introspection, Hobbes called the "wresting" of verses from scripture its "greatest, and main abuse" (629). If Milton's position on interpretation can be characterized by an opposition to external forms of tradition as the obstructions of an active faith, Hobbes takes the rival viewpoint, arguing instead that the perversion of truth occurs when it is stripped of convention. As Stanley Fish has recently put it, Hobbes is a "philosopher of surfaces." Where Milton works from the inside out, "Hobbes works exclusively on the outside and regards the inside as a realm to be avoided (literally) at all

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article in the phrase "The Rule of Charity," he made no mention of [Augustine] its most famous proponent" (70).

costs" (2011: 68). Thus Hobbes opposes the threat of private interpretation by treating language in the same way that he treats the figure of the sovereign: as a figure whose assimilation of individual wills is necessary to maintaining social order. As Hobbes puts it in his *Leviathan*,

> The question [of Biblical interpretation] is not of obedience to God, but of *when*, and *what* God hath said; which to Subjects that have no supernaturall revelation, cannot be known, but by that natural reason, which guided them, for the obtaining of Peace and Justice, to obey the authority of their severall Commonwealths; that is to say, of their lawful Soveraigns. (415)

By defining faith as a gift of God (that is, something not worked for) that "never follow[s] men's commands," Hobbes is able to distinguish it from the activity of interpretation, instead arguing that faith can only be made visible through subordination to power, in accord with natural law. At the same time, Hobbes maintains an important distinction, shared by other Reformers including Milton: "internal" belief cannot and should not be regulated. The difference between such positions and that of Hobbes is that the latter privileges outward actions as the means by which the state ensures its peaceful conformity. Indeed, *Leviathan* is itself an attempt to show how the collective will of state subjects is brought into outward unity through the "artificial" representation of the sovereign ruler. Milton, by contrast, could not easily accept this contradiction between private belief and political subjectivity, just as he could not accept an appeal to an ultimately static model of social representation.

As we have seen, Milton's reliance on the analogy of faith provides him with a way of departing from the conventions of church and state—forms of *stasis* that he equates with "resting in the mere element of the text" (1643: 866)—through the pretense of a consistently biblical method. The second of his divorce pamphlets, *Tetrachordon* (1645), further intensifies this call for the ongoing labour of interpretation as a way of attacking common political ideals. According to Haskin, Milton's writing in the 1640s shows him increasingly aware that "the traditional Protestant insistence on the perspicuity of scripture encouraged readers to think that unexamined interpretations were 'clear' just because they were commonplace" (184). The "plainness" of scripture so often invoked against the interpretive methods of the medieval tradition could, in other words, turn reading into a stale habit, which would allow readers to think they could arrive at right interpretation without the requisite labour. Rather than departing from *sola scriptura*, and falling back on an external form of authority that would effectively coerce individuals into proper reading, Milton avoided such pitfalls through a process of comparative reading that engaged with the contradictions inherent to the scriptures through an unceasing analogy of faith.

Under the pervasive influence of Calvinist predestination, English Protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were preoccupied with the questions of salvation and election. In this context, "[w]hat separated the truly elect from the mere temporizer," observes Haskin, "was a willingness to keep searching the scriptures and to persevere to the end" (11). The labour of Bible-reading, in other words, had a practical necessity for fervent believers, offering

them assurance as they discovered "places" of scripture that provided motivation for their own earnest introspection. In this way, I want to suggest that such reading gave early modern Protestants a site for labour that was significant because it was *unproductive*. Of course, reading and interpreting the Bible came to be productive in all kinds of ways; but formally speaking, it was theologically necessary to recognize, as Milton does in Sonnet 19, that "God doth not need / Either man's work or his own gifts" (9-10). Along with the displacement of "Real presence" from the sacraments to the Word of God and its communion of readers, we see the development of biblical interpretation as a form of labour that does not "achieve" salvation; instead, such labour can be understood as a mode of conditioning for the right reception of God's grace. Most seventeenth-century Protestants believed in the gift of free salvation, but this truth proved harder to bear than we might think. The question of how to *receive* such a gift, as Ryan Netzley argues, is at the heart of early modern Protestant poetics. Milton's invocation of the "rule" or "key of charity" in this *schema*, drawing biblical contradiction into relation with the liberating love of Christ, and thus, letting Christ assume the burden of interpretation, is one way of displacing such labour without wholly rejecting it. What we are left with, in other words, are the effects of a diligent mode of reading that is not, after all, an end in itself. Milton's early attempts to publicly engage in biblical hermeneutics use this theological contradiction in order to dissolve another contradiction that characterized the lives of early modern Protestants: the public sphere of representation and the private sphere of unrepresentable domestic labour.

In both *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and in the later *Tetrachordon*, Milton's argument for divorce draws on the growing tension between requirements of public presentation and the freedoms of private life that are symptomatic of emerging capitalism. The two passages of scripture taken up in Milton's divorce tracts (the Mosaic allowance for divorce in Deuteronomy and Christ's strict revision of this law in the Gospel of Matthew) appear to contradict each other, but, inspired by his own traumatic experience of married companionship, and assuming a sense of responsibility for the governance of his own household, Milton is compelled to stage a bold new exegesis against the "canonical ignorance" and false "countenance" of custom. As Stephen Fallon has pointed out, Milton's style of presentation in this tract imitates that of Christ, whose public ministry was, according to Milton, a rhetorical display contingent upon its occasion. Thus "we may plainly discover how Christ meant not to be taken word for word, but like a wise physician, administering one excess against another to reduce us to a perfect mean. Where the Pharisees were strict, there Christ seems remiss; where they were too remiss, he saw it needful to seem most severe" (1643: 888). In *Tetrachordon*, Milton offers a similar description of Christ as divine interpreter of the law, yet again emphasizing the context-bound nature of charity against the abstract method of application appropriate to the law.

> But Christ having cancelled the handwriting of ordinances which was against us (Coloss. 2.14) and interpreted the fulfilling of all through charity, hath in that respect set us over the law, in the free custody of his

> love, and left us victorious under the guidance of his living Spirit, not under the dead letter; to follow that which most edifies, most aids and furthers a religious life, makes holiest and likest to his immortal image, not that which makes us most comfortable and captive to civil and subordinate precepts; whereof the strictest observance may ofttimes prove the destruction not only of many innocent persons and families but of whole nations. (1645: 992)

Rather than simply accepting his first marriage as an "affliction which God hath sent" to be endured "with patience and silence," Milton argues that continuing in a bad marriage is not a sign of submitting to God's will but an unnecessary fidelity to the law at the expense of the Gospel: a product of false imaginings (1643: 920). Marriage, he writes, will be restored to its private glory as the "haven and retirement of happy society" when Christians "judge it more wisdom and goodness to break that covenant seemingly and keep it really" (Ibid.).

Milton's exegetical performance in his divorce tracts is more than a strategic appeal to his fellow Protestants; it is also a concrete product of his own interpretive labours, a demonstration of charity's triumph over the letter of the law, a foretaste of further Reformation. Here, Milton weds the contradiction between Letter and Spirit to what is perhaps the foremost social contradiction of early modern life. At stake for a man in Milton's position is the expenditure and confinement of his labour to the domestic sphere—a place better suited to its reproduction through private leisure and a woman's care. In other words, Milton here asserts himself as a fully masculine subject that deserves the full control of

its own productive and reproductive labour. Without a fit spouse, the male subject's labor power is effectively neutralized; divorce, then, is the only way to remove what therefore appears as an economic obstruction.

Those papists who oppose divorce, writes Milton, thus "make men the day-labourers of their own afflictions, as if there were such scarcity of miseries from abroad that we should be made to melt our choicest home blessings and coin them into crosses" (1643: 912-913). Here again, the law's repressive function ruins the bourgeois subject's potential for his public duty and figures as a fatal distraction from his vocation; in this way, the law coerces its subjects into a form of unproductive labour, which Milton draws into contradiction with what he sees as England's international role in the further progress of the Protestant Reformation. "Let not England forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live," he advises in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*'s opening address to Parliament. This conception of national responsibility continues through *Areopagitica*, where Milton again sets the law in opposition to the immanent guidance of Christ's "living spirit," which "aids and furthers a religious life." As we shall see, this logic produces a similar anticipation of a capitalist public sphere, where labour finally becomes a recognized commodity.

Reforming *Areopagitica*

By the time of *Areopagitica*'s publication, Milton was embroiled in a war of words on various fronts. His low reputation was in large part due to the unlicensed printing of several controversial tracts. His most controversial

pamphlets, which dealt with divorce, had been widely denounced and called upon as evidence for the necessity of proper licensing. With the publishing *Of Reformation* in 1641, Milton had offered his support to Presbyterian attacks on the episcopacy, but later felt betrayed when such allies came to support and carry out Parliament's reinstatement of censored printing. As Nigel Smith observes, "Milton's text uneasily internalizes various stated positions from the Parliamentarian and Puritan spectrum," as his appeals to contemporaries like the Erastian leader John Selden, the parliamentary theorist Henry Parker, and the extreme tolerationist William Walwyn repeatedly demonstrate (103).

In *Of Reformation*, Milton had argued that the scriptures "pronounce their own plainness" (814). But, by the time of the divorce tracts, he had come to understand that specifically literalist interpretations lead, in their "strictness" to the "overburdening" of those in need of "considerate care" (1643: 920). The Protestant doctrine of scriptural plainness, moreover, "bestowed on merely habitual readings a presumption of accuracy and of timeless stability" (Haskin 184). Printed without license in 1644, *Areopagitica* adopts the style of a classical oration to present a complex argument against the prohibition of unlicensed publications, and shows how politically volatile the question of interpretation had become for English Protestants in the mid-seventeenth century. Interpretation, as Milton here presents it, is so basic that even extra-textual reality—"whatever thing we hear or see, sitting, walking, traveling, or conversing"—is subject to reading, "may be fitly called our book, and is of the same effect that writings are" (1944: 945). Milton had his reasons for being

suspicious of those who claimed positions beyond debate; indeed, this governing suspicion is one of the few threads common to the contradictory terrain of his political career, his theological views, and his labours as a writer. But in his attempt to dislodge the authority of single (i.e., monopolizing) interpretations—drawing into question those licensers who would possess the seat of judgment, and thereby assume a position "above all others in the land [and] the grace of infallibility and uncorruption" (1944: 941)—Milton here resorts to a theory of reading where the inherent ambiguity of interpretation appears as a consequence of human fallenness. Decades later, Milton would, again, modify his position on interpretation by presenting readers with an expanded re-telling of humanity's origins in *Paradise Lost* (1667). Here, interpretation is constitutive of pre- *and* post-lapsarian life, as Adam and Eve struggle to understand the revelations of Raphael and Michael, decipher Eve's forboding dream, and debate the merits of dividing their labour. The Fall turns this condition into something more burdensome for the pair, but the ambiguity of creation, as Victoria Kahn has argued, is there all the same; such ambiguity is not, therefore, "a consequence of the fall but the precondition of any ethical choice" (197). Unlike *Paradise Lost*, *Areopagitica*'s call to the collective labour of interpretation locates this ambiguity within the growing marketplace of books and ideas. If Milton's project of prioritizing interpretation in *Areopagitica* fails to go as far as it does in his post-Restoration publications, we can still understand this famous tract as an important stage in its development, where the contradictory ground of labour and

production again has the potential to obstruct—or at least, disrupt—the author's published output.

The process that *Areopagitica* effects through its parade of images, analogies, and anecdotes suggests a vision of truth manifested as variety, but it resists the temptation to privilege any one part as final. While the broad appeals of *Areopagitica*'s rhetoric are multivalent, Milton's emphasis on interpretive exercise, where reason operates through adversity, warns against the brash separation of content from form—of reading from its conditions of possibility.[11] According to Elizabeth Sauer, Milton conceptualized reading as a "communal experience" that drew competing texts and their authors into dialogue. Likewise the cultural commonplaces that emerge repeatedly throughout *Areopagitica* point to a strategy of encouraging social "engagement with unauthorized, unlicensed books as an ethical program" that is similarly mapped out in Milton's commonplace book (Sauer 455). Sauer's implication of communion also points us back to the theological framework that enables Milton's polemic. Beginning with metaphors that describe the book as an animated subject, carrying the

[11] In this way, the depiction of reading in *Paradise Lost* marks an important departure from the interplay of reading and textual interpretation that one finds in *Areopagitica*. As Haskin observes, the fact that the interpretive work of Adam and Eve depends upon stories that have either been transmitted orally or through dream sequences seems to suggest that "reading" does not function in the "senses of that word which have been given priority since the seventeenth century, all of which have to do with discerning meaning in written materials" (194). Instead, the "reading" that occurs in *Paradise Lost* more closely resembles the derivation of the word from Old English, where it meant to "advise" or "explain." Like the verb "to read" used in *The Faerie Queene*, the activity of reading, Haskin continues, "is frequently associated with 'speaking, answering,

essence of its author, Milton moves to metaphors of books as food to be ingested, a contradiction, which, as John D. Schaeffer has argued, points to the metonymy of the Eucharist and thus figures reading as communion.[12]

But the conflation of production (books as subjects) and consumption (books as objects) throughout the tract occurs for political reasons as well. Rather than acquiescing, like Hobbes, to a model of coercive representation at the cost of personal insight, Milton argues that the very process whereby truth is sought is more important than the belief professed. Similarly, by describing books as people, Milton's tract contrasts with Hobbes' royalist allegory of sovereignty where all bodies are collected under a unified emblem. In this way, he suggests that coercion always turns truth into a lie, not by altering it, but by restricting its enjoyment and thereby forcing individuals to become "heretics in the truth." Where it was customary to speak of books as mere instruments, Milton describes it as the "image" of God reflected in the eye of man, and "embalmed" for a "life beyond life." The book, he continues, is as "vigorously productive as those fabulous dragon's teeth: and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men" (1644: 930). Stanley Fish has suggested that this preliminary definition of the book as containing an immortal "potency of life" is contradicted in a larger process of "decentering" that reorients Milton's audience from the letter to the "ever-ungraspable" spirit. "The temptation of idolatry," Fish writes, "of surrendering ourselves to the totalizing claims of some

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explaining, [and] describing rather than with the comprehension of writing'" (Ibid.).

ephemeral agenda, can only be resisted by the relentless multiplication of that which signifies our lack, the relentless multiplication of difference" (1988: 247). For Fish, in other words, *Areopagitica* enacts for its readers a dialectical process that eschews any firm resting place for the individual conscience: tensions are never resolved or escaped, but are, instead, multiplied. The risk of idolatry provides the injunction to "read incessantly," which underwrites the tract's argument against truth's obstruction in licensing.[13] For Milton to name this condition of ambiguity thus represents an act of faith in his English compatriots, but only *as readers*; that is, only as subjects who participate in a "leisured" form of textual reception.

Clearly, *Areopagitica* is not a tract written for common readers. It is, however, charitably offered in their defense as a "trust." Granting people liberty, Milton writes, proves the "care or love of them," while "the pipe of a licenser" keeps all citizens "under a perpetual childhood of prescription" (1644: 949, 938). Following Seldon, Milton recognizes the basis of this principle in natural law. God does not censor or coerce his creation into conformity under the law, but grants humanity the "gift of reason" by which we are able to temper and regulate those "passions within us, pleasures round us" into virtue. The theodicy of *Areopagitica* thus anticipates Milton's retelling of the humanity's origins in *Paradise Lost*. Both texts account for evil by placing free human agency at their

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[12] See Shaeffer, "Metonymies We Read By," 86.

[13] As we shall see in Chapter 3, the identity between interpretive labour ("incessant reading") and right worship (as resistant to idolatry) is condemned

centre. But the result cuts both ways. While Milton wants to preserve and echo God's faith in his own created image, he adopts a tone of practicality that serves as a deliberately vague opening for some form of regulation administered by the state. National corruption, mixed conversation, idle resort and evil company—"These things will be and must be; but how they shall be least hurtful, how least enticing, herein consists the grave and governing wisdom of a state" (1644: 943). Milton's proposed solution to this problem is for the state to prevent any kind of monopoly from emerging by enforcing an open market in which the free exercise of liberty will naturally discipline English citizens. This logic is reproduced at nearly every level of Milton's mature political and theological writing, whether he is responding to licensing of books, decrying popery, expounding on the free debate of church doctrine or the abomination of the monarchy.

When Milton distances his position in *Areopagitica* from the utopian writings of Thomas More and Francis Bacon, he does so by dismissing such attempts to construct an imaginary polity that resolves or "sequesters" social contradictions. This, argues Milton, is what licensers are doing by separating virtue from its natural, "incessant labour to cull out and sort asunder" the "cunning resemblances" of good and evil. But his rejection of utopian idealism also adopts an important characteristic of early modern utopian thought. As Robert Applebaum has suggested, utopian politics in seventeenth century

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outright by the Son in *Paradise Regain'd* and thrown into crisis by Israel's captivity in *Samson Agonistes*.

England were understood as "expressive not of things as they ought to be, of political life raised to the level of the speculative ideal, but of a hitherto hidden or misunderstood reality, prophetic history, against which conventional, secular political values could be shown to be mere illusions" (5). In Milton's terms, the prescription of virtue turns it into a "name" and avoids "this world of evil, in the midst whereof God hath placed us unavoidably" (1644: 943). Imposing fanciful regulations on the book trade would not only be a reproach to the English people, it would be to misunderstand them:

> Lords and Commons of England, consider what nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governors: a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to. (1644: 956)

This ideal of national progress—here, synonymous with further Reformation—bears a significant economic analogue, but it is more complicated than a simple affirmation of the free market. As Blair Hoxby writes, *Areopagitica* "rests on the assumption that men can be improved by market relations, and it implicitly urges them to be enterprisers in *all* aspects of the public sphere" (2002: 45). To control the reception of printed books would be to assist in the very practice that has led to the abstraction, commodification, and compartmentalization of religion as something "dividual movable," an object left behind while one sits "in the shop trading all day" (1644: 953). The state's attempt to constrain the exchange and production of books would, in other words, separate the workings of faith and

conscience from public life. Here, Milton is consistent with his Protestant ethics of virtue by the trials of constant and promiscuous exposure. Religion is not a mere object to be exchanged or a formal system of prescription; it is, rather, the embodied performance of interpretive labor and ethical trial—which, in the context of Milton's England, has a formal tendency towards Reformation. Milton's radical optimism is here markedly different than the "Warre of everyone against everyone" that sets the stage for private property in Hobbes' state of nature (189). Yet, as C. B. Macpherson has shown, Hobbes, like Milton, tailors his state of nature to the clash of individuals in his own time, where "all are drawn into the market" and "competition determines what they will get for what they have to offer" (57). The difference here has to do with where Milton locates the exercise of virtue—not in a passage of reasonable conformity to the sovereign rule of equality, but in an open site of temptation that requires some degree of interpretive labour. Milton's protest against licensing is, therefore, a protest against what he see as the alienation of interpretive labour from the English people and might suggest an embedded critique of the labour's commodification and determination by the market, were it not for the fact that the actual site of manual labour in *Areopagitica* is beholden to the property rights of its author.

Labouring in the word

When Milton proceeds "from the no good can [licensing] do, to the manifest hurt it causes," he turns to the material realities and tenuous circumstances that define

early modern book production. Stephen Dobranski has shown that by the time that *Areopagitica* was published, Milton had developed close relationships with printers, booksellers, and other members of the book trade. We have noted how the tract envisions a shared, collaborative responsibility for national Reformation based in the unregulated proliferation of printed books and presents the author's deep trust in collective, interpretive labour. In his analysis of *Areopagitica*'s production, Dobranski extends this vision of shared labour to the tract's material origins. While Milton is quick to denigrate "the hasty view of the unleisured licenser," he marks out his own intellectual practice as "the labour of book-writing" (1644: 947). According to Milton, leisure refers to the private freedom that makes his "published labours" possible. The collaborative act of publishing—of making public—assumes for Milton a special kind of social privilege that depends on other "unleisured" labourers. It is also a declaration of the material book as a piece of literary property within what, Milton imagines, should be a system of unregulated exchange. In this way, authority and intellectual ownership provide an analogue to, or at least the prefiguration of, the formal subsumption of material labour in the production process. In his self-representation, however, Milton consistently privileges his own labour as an author through his relations with other leisured men. Rather than acknowledging the material collaboration that occurs in the printing house, Milton speaks of himself as a socially acute writer:

> When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and

> likely consults and confers with his judicious friends; after all which done he takes himself to be informed in what he writes, as well as any that writ before him. (1644: 947)

Here, we witness a moment of social recognition by the author, an awareness of the social condition of published writing, not simply in its reception, but in its creation. But this mode of social creation depends on a subjection of the labour that enables the text's material production. As Raymond Williams has suggested, "To see individuation as a social process is to set limits to the isolation but also perhaps to the autonomy of the individual author" (1977: 192). Indeed, one must hold this representation of the individual author in dialectical tension with the social network that enables his leisured book writing, but we must be mindful of *which* social group is receiving our attention. What is important to note, in this regard, is that Milton's tract reveals how social relations at the authorial level are parallel to the objectification of social relations that is most acutely grasped at the level of production. As Marx writes in the first volume of *Capital*,

> The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour

> become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social. (165)

In capitalism, commodified objects of human labour mediate social relationships. The relations between such objects also reflect the social relations of their producers by representing them in the form of abstract value. The homology between books and readers within *Areopagitica* runs parallel with Marx's critical observation, confusing subject, object, and abstracting social relations in the form of a future value: a ground of potential.

When it comes to the production of the book, *Areopagitica*'s author reflects an emerging free market ideology, where the individual subject's creative energy is increasingly dependent on an objectification of social relations. In terms of textual production, Milton's argument is quite simple: licensing incorporates another party to what was already an overly complicated and fragile process between the author and the various hands at work in the printing shop: "either the press must stand still, which is no small damage, or the author lose his accuratest thoughts and send a book forth worse than he had made it" (1644: 947). Although the tract forcefully protests against the commodification of religion, this too is based on the freedom of readers and the publication of an author's intellectual property. Books and the pursuit of truth are "not such wares" as can be stapled, but, as Christopher Kendrick is keen to point out, neither are they "uncommodities"—that is,

> they are not averse in their very essence to the commodity form. They thus come to harbor a fetish-like potency, and consequently Milton's

> protest against the commodification of truth . . . is harnessed to the power of the fetish itself, and to the dynamic of the market which expresses that power. (42)

Kendrick's reading shows how Milton's tract draws on the constitutive tensions of early modern English Protestantism and, in this way, suggests a latent potential for commodification through the activity of a bourgeois subject within an instrumental network of social relations.

If one accepts that *Areopagitica*'s images of trade and commerce signal Milton's implicit allegiance to an emerging middle class through an ethics of "possessive individualism," then the forms of labour that Milton's tract makes visible must be interrogated. As we have seen, Milton's brief account of actual book production locates a fundamental tension at the level of authorship, while the rest of the tract works to resolve social antagonism through the activity of collective interpretation, free from any form of external constraint. In an essay on *Areopagitica*, Marshall Grossman tackles the early theorizing of intellectual labour through an analysis of Marx's brief allusion to Milton's production of *Paradise Lost*, "as a silkworm produces silk, as the activation of his own nature." As Grossman is quick to point out, the organic nature of Marx's simile bears a striking resemblance to the metaphors of "vigorously productive" books that are encountered in Milton's tract. The point of Marx's marginal note, however, is to illustrate that the difference between productive and unproductive labour is not based on content but on form. The note ends with a mention of Milton's solicitation of his product to its publisher, Samuel Simmons: an act that

for Marx turns the author into a "merchant." Productive labour, according to Marx, is, by definition, socially determined because it is exchanged directly for money as capital. Thus in a capitalist economy, writes Marx, "the worker only reproduces the value of his labour-power as determined beforehand, while as a value-creating activity it valorizes capital and *confronts* the worker with the values so created and transformed into *capital*" (1043). Unproductive labour, for which Milton stands as Marx's emblem, only produces a commodity whose value is determined by exchange, while productive labour "produces a surplus value, a return on investment . . . in the form of an amount of capital equivalent to that part of the worker's labour that remains unpaid" (Grossman 78). In Marx's work, this marks the difference between formal and real subsumption with regard to the extraction of labour power. In the world of real subsumption, producers are not selling their labour to the capitalist but their surplus: the whole production process, in other words, is already oriented towards exchange. Gone are the protective structures (guilds, patronage, etc.) that once enabled artistic production in autonomy from market forces and commercial interest.

While this description serves Marx's theoretical objectives, it also gives voice to a critical theme of labour and productivity that haunts Milton's career, one that can be traced back to a constitutive tension in the Protestant subject: how can one receive the free grace of God without resorting to a logic of exchange, whether through industry, penance or other signs of individual labour? In Grossman's view, Milton represents a crucial moment in this development because of his preoccupation with an increasingly "determined relation of

experience to reflection and sense to intellect that is itself the trace of the bourgeois ideology Milton helps to construct and Marx to theorize" (96). It is indeed worth asking why Milton is so anxious to represent his poetry as the fruit of socially productive, but no less intellectual, labour. Grossman reads Milton's anxiety over the reception of this work, his appeal for a "fit audience . . . though few," as a reaction against commodification and the alienation of the labourer from his product through the freedom of the market; in Milton's resistance to the commodification of truth, the author presents an image of surplus value that is not reducible to monetary accumulation but is rather shared as social capital throughout the nation. In this way, Milton does not give himself fully over to the market, but self-consciously presents his work as the product of a system of patronage.

"Written to aftertimes"

Prefiguring his arguments in *Areopagitica*, Milton's attempt to position himself in relation to the English public in *The Reason of Church Government* (1642) displays a preoccupation with the language of patronage and a consciousness of his own class position. Towards the end of the tract, Milton advertises to the "knowing reader, that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted" (843). The costs incurred for Milton's education are not only absorbed by his father, but are a burden carried by a public that for him represents the promise of a future audience. Earlier on in the same tract, Milton suggests that the "ease and leasure . . . given [him] for [his]

retired thought out of the sweat of other men" must be justified by a use of his "talents" to advance the cause of "God and his Church" (1642: 838). As he will restate in *Areopagitica*, "ease and leasure" paradoxically consist in that very "labour and intent study . . . joyn'd with the strong propensity of nature" by which he had hoped to "leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die" (1642: 840). Here, invoking Christ's Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-3),[14] Milton describes his own education and development as an investment of that which God has "lent" him for the good of the nation. Usury, in other words, determines the author's relation to his audience. Like many of his Protestant contemporaries, Milton saw his talents in the form of a divine investment, the capital that, as Grossman notes, would bear the interest of a poem.

Like the licensor who extends the production process in *Areopagitica*, the domestic space of Milton's divorce tracts obstructs this process of return by disrupting the leisured site of authorship.

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[14] Over the course of his career, this parable will appear repeatedly in Milton's poetry. As Dayton Haskin has demonstrated in his systematic analysis of the poet's interpretive development, the Parable of the Talents marks a difficult biblical place in Milton's early work—a site of anxiety, an interpretive burden that is transformed through the ongoing conference of places, most notably in Sonnet 7 and 19. Over the course of his career, Milton's opinion of the interpretive difficulties produced by Bible-reading shift in focus: from the shortcomings (i.e. the lack of charity) of his readers to apprehend the plain truth of scripture to "a matter of inherent contradictions in the biblical record itself" (53). Just as human labour cannot ultimately achieve salvation, so Milton eventually understands that the Parable of the Talents is not a clear allegory that can be resolved or simply applied; rather, it is a difficult biblical place, an intellectual burden, which the Son will assume and transform through his own interpretive labour, his conference of biblical places, in *Paradise Regain'd*.

> God loves not to plow out the heart of our endeavors with over hard and sad tasks . . . by making wedlock a supportless yoke . . . to make men the day labourers of their own afflictions, as if there were such a scarcity of miseries abroad that we should be made to melt our choicest home blessings and coin them into crosses. (1643: 912)

Here, "day labour" already refers to a commodity to be bought and sold; at stake for Milton are the conditions and effects of its exchange, which are represented by church symbols. The point of this metaphor is a profoundly Protestant one. Not only does it equate the fruits of unnecessary labour with the institutes of Popery, it also operates on the assumption that "day labour" must somehow conform with one's vocation.[15] It thus works not only as a metaphor for what Milton understands to be the inappropriate entry of public interests into private life, but as an early register of Milton's anxiety over the social utility of his vocation that is consistent the discussion of his "talents" in *The Reason of Church Governement*.[16] As we have seen, this contradiction leads Milton to stage a radical re-reading of the scriptures, demonstrating how the "key of charity" opens up the socially inscribed limits of the law. While Christ alleviates

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[15] It is also telling that, according to the *OED*, the term "day labourer" emerges no sooner than 1548, in Edward IV's Acts of Parliament: The Easter Offering and Tithes Act, c. 13 §7: "Other than such as beene common day labourers."

[16] In a complicated passage from *The Reason of Church Government*, Milton rehearses the potential outcome of his failure—what he calls "a preventative fear"—to use his "talents" in the form of "what stories I should hear within myself, all my life after, of discourage and reproach." A separate complaint falls on each of the author's ears. "These," he claims, "would have been my matins duly and my evensong"; but instead of such an outcome, Milton foregrounds the

the interpretive burden inherent to biblical reading—the Bible as comparative and self-interpreting—he also gives readers further cause to reflect and labour through his own suggestive words. For Milton, the heuristic nature of Christ's guidance in the Gospels thus conforms to the model of liberty and virtue that *Areopagitica* articulates: the "closing up truth to truth as we find it."

Areopagitica's vision for collective interpretation points to social progress through the resolution of authorial and interpretive labour. It is an act of faith, as well as an anticipation of some kind of return on God's investment. Milton's understanding of his vocation is, in other words, properly rooted in the social welfare of a nation whose allegiance to God is indexed by the progress of its Reformation. As Grossman has observed, "Milton comes upon a theory of surplus value to justify his poetic work as a form of productive labour, albeit labour expropriated to 'good' social use, by a peculiarly divine corporate manager" (81). The "free market" paradigm of *Areopagitica* requires a labouring for truth that is shared among English readers. In this model, each individual must do his own work, for to pass off this burden to others would be to turn truth into a commodity. Here, "being virtuous through self-control and *proairesis* makes the citizen the highest resource, above normal exchange relationships" (Smith 115). *Areopagitica* thus produces a dialectical moment in which the social is degraded in relation to the author, and affirmed as the condition of possibility for a value beyond exchange. All rests on whether Milton's "freely

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"privilege I have gained with good men and saints, to claim my right of lamenting the tribulations of the church" (838).

bestowed" words will exceed their commodified value in their social, political, and theological utility. All rests, in other words, on the interpretive labour of his audience.

By focusing on the system Milton proposes in *Areopagitica*, this chapter has attempted to situate this articulation of interpretive labour in its relation to material production and an open market. Here, the activity of "incessant reading" would enable and encourage the English people to further the Protestant Reformation. Thus, in the case of Protestant reading, Milton remains in step with a theology of Reformation that rejects "works" outright, but wants to preserve the kind of civic virtue such labour can produce. Milton's divorce tracts, in particular, demonstrate how the reader displaces her interpretive labour by relying on the "key of charity," which, unlike Augustine's "analogy of faith," works to resolve obscure biblical places *without* looking beyond the scriptures. Christ alleviates individual labour by assuming it, but, as Milton's tracts demonstrate, Christ's shouldering of this burden does not remove readers from a posture of interpretation; rather it enables a posture of interpretive charity that must remain ambiguous to be productive.

The following chapter focuses on the Son's mission "To earn salvation for the sons of men" in *Paradise Regain'd* (1.167). Although reading should appear as a form of unproductive labour in Milton's early polemics, it remains a potential source of social capital: that is, an implicit medium for surplus value in the form of an audience that would advance the Reformation. Milton's late poems, on the other hand, follow England's passage through a period of

revolutionary trial and its apparent failure in the Restoration of 1660. In the wake of such events, Milton not only confronted the limitations of his free market model, but was forced to rethink the practice of reading and, along with it, his strategy of publication.

Chapter Two

"These here revolve": Keeping the reader active in Milton's 1671 poems

> And we shall read our Savior never more grieved and troubled than to meet with such a peevish madness among men against their own freedom.
>
> (Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*)

With Oliver Cromwell's unexpected death in 1658 and the arrival in London of General Monck from Scotland in 1660, it grew increasingly clear that the England's brief experiment with an alternative system of governance had lost whatever social credibility it had. Although the reconstituted parliament, whose MPs were all openly re-elected, continued to reflect a nation at odds with itself, it paved the way for the old nobility to re-take its place in the House of Lords and voted to restore the rest of the pre-Commonwealth government. For many, Charles II's triumphant return to London on 29 May 1660 was a miraculous departure from civil unrest and continuous violence. As one city resident remarked, "I stood in the Strand, and beheld it, and blessed God. . . . And all this without one drop of blood. . . . It was the Lord's doing."[17] This return to so-called governmental stability was also marked by fears of how Cromwell and the Rump parliament would be succeeded: whether the national Protestant church, the role of parliament, and the existing social order could ever be secured without the Crown's re-establishment. As Gary S. De Krey explains, those who

[17] Quoted in Gary S. De Krey, 17.

sought to govern after Cromwell "succeeded in persuading the country that the alternatives to a Stuart restoration were military rule, sectarian excess, and endless taxation. Charles II would be restored more through the force of public opinion than through the force of arms" (13). Indeed, one of the first orders of business for the new government reflected this "socially conscious" approach to Restoration rule.

The Act of Indemnity and Oblivion provided full pardon to all who had committed treason against Charles or his father. There were only 33 exceptions, largely made up of the judicial court members who had condemned Charles I to death. In the first few years of Charles II's reign over a dozen of these men were executed; some, like John Milton, were imprisoned or went into hiding, while others fled to the continent. Still, notes De Krey, "virtually all those who had commanded men in arms against Charles I, who had sat in irregular parliaments, and who had held positions of responsibility in the Interregnum governments were exonerated and preserved 'in their lives, liberties [and] estates'" (26). As the restored Crown set about its tasks, it was clear that Charles II and members of the Convention Parliament recognized the political import of moderation. Yet Charles II and his courtiers frequently appeared unable to practice such control when it came to their own passions, whether they manifested themselves in sexual promiscuity or the excesses of court spending. Despite the frequent visibility and gossip of corrupt activities at court, the main sources of tension for Charles II stemmed from competing religious factions within the three kingdoms. When the Episcopalians finally won control of parliament they

instituted clerical structures that were meant to weed out any clergy with radical leanings. Such decisions not only reproduced the kinds of political divisions that had surfaced during the reign of Charles I, but also galvanized Dissenting groups and increased friction between the Crown and its opponents.

In this context of state surveillance and suspicion, radical writers—especially those like Milton, who were known for their involvement in the regicide of Charles I—had to be mindful of how their texts would be published, circulated, and received by a diverse reading public. Instead of the direct attacks that characterized his early polemics, Milton turned to the coded language of literary form to engage the social and political effects of Restoration. The first of his late works, *Paradise Lost* (1667), employs the allegorical conventions of royalist discourse while simultaneously undercutting them as conduits for conformity. Milton's epic poem thus reflects a nonconformist anxiety over what Sharon Achinstein describes as "the status of indirect, allegorical, and censored writing, conditions specific to the Restoration literary milieu" (1994: 202). In this way, *Paradise Lost* demands a level of intellectual exercise from its readers, drawing them into contradiction with their own interpretive constraints and expectations. While the question of interpretive labour that first emerged in Milton's early tracts continues to be a vital focus in his great epic, it takes on a new kind of urgency in the 1671 volume, *Paradise Regain'd. A Poem. In IV Books. To which is added Samson Agonistes*. If *Paradise Lost* presents interpretation as a natural response to God and his creation, with the Garden of Eden figuring as a place "Wherein to read his wondrous Works, and learn"

(8.68), *Paradise Regain'd . . . to which is added Samson Agonistes* stages the interpretive activity of its protagonists within biblical contexts of idolatry and debate.

As Dayton Haskin has shown, *Paradise Lost* departs from *Areopagitica*'s Calvinist ascription of interpretation to the Fall, instead making interpretive activity constitutive of both pre- and post-lapsarian life. While *Paradise Lost* imagines interpretive labour within the expansive space of the Garden, *Paradise Regain'd* reconfigures such labour as a spatial practice that negotiates with the material form of the printed book. "Space is a practiced place," the French sociologist Michel de Certeau once suggested. Accordingly, for de Certeau, "an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs" (117). Against the bland literalism of Satan's interpretive activity in *Paradise Regain'd*, both of the 1671 poems work to condition a form of active reading that is spatially productive. By "revolving" God's written word, the Son inhabits a space of interpretive possibility that disrupts the static categories of Satan's temptations. With the term "revolve," Milton joins the practice of reading to the internal activities of Samson and the Son. Unpacking this term in the context of the 1671 poems, I argue that it helps to establish a link between the spatial functions of the material text and the ongoing work of memory, thus deepening and politicizing Milton's theology of reading against the historical closure popularly accepted along with England's Restoration. Milton's brief epic thus attends to the interpretive problems of Dissenting readers, English subjects caught

negotiating between the strange typology of biblical narratives and the symbolic allure of their own ideological surroundings.

With the Restoration, English society returned to many of the cultural practices that had been condemned as idolatry and consequently banned in the 1640s and 1650s. In a recent essay, arguing against Milton's status as an iconoclast, Daniel Shore notes how Milton's rhetorical strategy in the combat of idolatry is not to destroy idols, but to preserve such monuments by putting them on display for his readers. "Like errors more generally, idols must be singled out, materially preserved, and made available for 'survay' and 'scanning'" (30). Milton's late poetry, in particular, finds him countering his opponents by reinscribing them in the material text, thus reintroducing them to the active ground of biblical hermeneutics. In the debates of *Paradise Regain'd* and the despair of *Samson Agonistes* idolatry becomes synonymous with historical and hermeneutical closure. This chapter, then, is an attempt to treat reading as an *activity*, a way of combating and resisting idolatry. As Stanley Fish has suggested, the central temptation of *Paradise Lost* is the evasion of interpretive responsibility in and through the construction of different self-serving narratives, each of which are expertly placed as possibilities at key junctures within the poem. For much the same reason, the Son in *Paradise Regain'd* is precisely not a model to be passively followed or a figure whose identity somehow exists beyond the unity of his inner and outer activity. But this emphasis on interpretive practice also marks a site of contradiction within the poem: the Son stands as the embodiment of interpretation *and* as its limit, confounding his audience while

condemning the kind of "incessant" reading that makes it "wearisome" (4.322-23). Just as Christ alleviates Milton's interpretive burden in his divorce tracts of the 1640s by displacing it without wholly rejecting it, *Paradise Regain'd* treats the end of reading as a question to be laboured over.

Paradise Regain'd does not simply model the internalization of God's word for Milton's audience, but works to condition the mobility of the reader at the same time that it reckons with the contingency of the material text. My final chapter argues that *Samson Agonistes* puts these specific conditions into crisis by presenting its Old Testament protagonist as a political prisoner whose labour at the "public mill" of the Philistines produces "no small profit daily" for his enemies (1259). Both chapters, however, assume that Milton's priority in both poems is to *keep the reader active*, or "fit." The material irregularities of the 1671 edition can and have been seen to support this radically Protestant program. The present chapter, however, avoids simply affirming this focus on the reader as sign of textual indeterminacy; instead, my aim is to demonstrate that such activity, especially in *Paradise Regain'd*, constitutes a form of textual conditioning that trains readers to resist the idols of identity, memory, and reading itself.

Between politics and print

Thanks in no small part to the efforts of historians like Christopher Hill and David Lowenstein, the majority of modern Milton scholarship no longer equates Milton's Restoration poetry with political quietism, nor does it understand

Milton's supposed turn inward as a rejection of extra-personal matters. Milton scholars have also turned to the resources of bibliography and print history to explore the social nature of Milton's writing and the political implications of its reception.[18] While modern readers frequently treat their books as neutral objects with a specific content or meaning, recent studies of book publishing in seventeenth century England, on the contrary, illustrate how the politics of a given book do not simply begin with the creative impulse of an author or the consciousness of an individual reader, but can be traced back to the conditions of its production and distribution.

In step with the 1661 Treason Act, the 1662 Licensing Act required pre-publication licensing by an appointed censor and obligated publishers to have their books entered into the Stationers' Company Register after licensing. The 1662 act also gave authority to censors to search out and seize illicit texts. The new Office of Surveyor of the Press was occupied by Roger L'Estrange, who soon became known for his prosecution of publishers of the speeches of the executed regicides. Along with Milton's continued notoriety for his politically charged prose, such hostile conditions for religious nonconformists help to explain the poet's silence in the early 1660s. But by the time that *Paradise Lost* was licensed, popular support for England's monarchy was waning and religious toleration was again up for parliamentary debate. The well-known crises of the mid-1660s, including the Great Fire of 1666 and a humiliating military loss to the Dutch in the following year, lent credibility to the apocalyptic tenor of

[18] See Dobranski, Knoppers, Von Maltzhan, et al.

religious dissent and threatened the nation's political stability. As Nicholas Von Maltzahn points out, this context of fear and suspicion likely influenced Milton's decision to swallow his pride and seek a license for the publication of *Paradise Lost*, although later issues of the first edition drop the formula "Licensed and Entered according to Order" (482). This time of national crisis presented a fine occasion for the broad circulation of Milton's literary epic. For the same reason, however, the licensor Tom Tomkins sought to deny the poem license. The lines in question (1.594-99), as suggested by the account of the early biographer John Toland, appear no less inflammatory than other sections from Milton's epic. But it is their apocalyptic tone, the interpretation of providence through astrological and meteorological signs, that disturbed Tomkins and led him to censor what they feared would lead to further scaremongering. As Tomkins wrote in *The Inconveniencies of Toleration* (1667), "Who but a Dutch man" would encourage sedition at the "Time of an invasion."[19] Much like Thomas Hobbes, Tomkins believed that stronger censorship and uniformity would correct the self-authorization of individual conscience that had sparked the interregnum, as well as the heresies and scandals that ensued, which continued to lead common people astray. While this prerogative shaped Tomkins' licensing decisions, his desire for uniformity may have also been reassured by the apparent orthodoxy and theological sophistication of a poem like *Paradise Lost*, which carried its sacred history "far beyond the disruptive self-assertion associated with the Dissenters' inner light" (487). Not only did Milton's epic brilliantly contrast the

[19] Quoted in Von Maltzhan, 484.

failings of court culture, it also embodied the literary values of a well-educated aristocracy, and thus escaped the charges of insubordination associated with "ruder conventicles or Quakers." By the time that Milton's poem was actually published in November 1667, the position of Nonconformists had greatly improved. Along with the growing freedom of worship for Presbyterians, it appeared that an Act of Comprehension was under construction. "Not even with the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672," argues Von Maltzahn, "would there again be so favourable a climate for the first reception of Milton's epic" (489). While the combination of elevated literary form and a brief context of lenience on the part of the Crown allowed *Paradise Lost* to achieve moderate success with its first publication, by the time Milton's later poems were licensed in 1670, authorities had intensified their ongoing war on religious nonconformity.

The Clarendon Code, a series of four legal statutes passes between 1661 and 1665, had "mandated that all municipal officers take Communion according to the rites of the Church of England; required all ministers to subscribe to the Book of Common Prayer or face ejection; prohibited religious meetings, or conventicles, of more than five persons not of one household; and forbad Nonconforming clergy to come within 5 miles of their former livings" (Knoppers xx). The Conventicle Act of 1664 had extended the repression of nonconformists to laymen, imposing fines for worship gatherings that exceeded four members of a household. Such fines were increased in the second Conventicles Act of 1670, which also provided "financial incentives to informants, allowing the testimony of one justice for conviction . . . and, in

implicit recognition of the lack of enthusiasm for the bill, fining constables and Justices of the Peace who failed to enforce it" (Knoppers xxviii). In his own writings, John Starkey, the publisher of *Paradise Regain's . . . to which is added Samson Agonistes*, paints a picture of the hostile reaction to the bill and the resolve of dissenting groups to continue exercising their religious freedoms in spite of legal constraints.[20]

The radical publisher was in fact the third of four different publishers with whom Milton produced each of his poetic volumes during his life. Instead of continuing to work with Simmons, who had published *Paradise Lost* in 1667, Milton sought out the publishing network of John Starkey, a man of similarly radical opinions, for the distribution of his most politically charged poems. As Peter Lindenbaum notes, Milton's dealings with four different publishers rather than a single one, suggests "a poet fully knowledgeable of, and rather deeply involved in, the day-to-day business of the book trade" (14). According to Knoppers, Milton's choice to publish with Starkey shows him making knowledgeable use of the market, taking care to situate his poetic work within a radical print context. In addition, she writes, the fact that *Paradise Regain'd . . .*

[20] Along with a vast catalogue of polemical writings, Starkey published his own newsletters, which were comprised of "detailed reporting of parliamentary debates, votes, and oppositional speeches, meaningful selections, ironic juxtapositions, and damaging postscripts that do indeed 'make for the disadvantage of the King and his Affairs'" (Knoppers xxxviii). It was in this way that Starkey lived out his identity as a radical Whig, a strong proponent of republican and Machiavellian theory, a member of the Green Ribbon Club, and an eventual exile. By the time he published Milton's last volume of major poetry in 1671, Starkey had also published works by the republican theorist James

to which is added Samson Agonistes first appeared without a dedication or preface highlights Milton's long transition from the patronage model to fuller participation in a marketplace of print, to what Knoppers, after Lindenbaum, calls "a kind of republican mode of literary production" (xl).[21]

If, as William Riley Parker and Thomas N. Corns have suggested, in publishing his 1645 *Poems of Mr John Milton* with Humphrey Mosely, Milton was seeking to establish himself along respectable networks and distance his literary career from Puritan polemics, then what are we to make of Milton's later publishing decisions? Some were simply unavoidable. By the time that Milton had finished writing *Paradise Lost*, Mosely was dead; and very little is known about the reasons for Milton's decision to work with the commercially unsuccessful, and largely unheard of Simmons beyond the fact that Simmons' father had printed seven of the poet's prose tracts in the 1640s (Lindenbaum 12). Taking this relationship and the moderate success of *Paradise Lost* into account, it seems all the more puzzling that Milton did not continue to work with Simmons.[22] While he and his second publisher were able to boost each other's

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Harrington, Harrington's close friend Henry Neville, the Presbyterian Richard Baxter, and the clergyman George Lawson.

[21] See also Peter Lindenbaum, "John Milton and the Republican Mode of Literary Production." Here, Lindenbaum traces the development of Milton's publishing decisions, from *Comus*'s reappearance in the 1645 *Poems* on to *Paradise Lost*, arguing that the poet's decision to depart from the support and protection of a patronage system reflects his republican politics as well as his marked resistance to identifying his audience in advance (134).

[22] Indeed, the continued contact of Milton and Simmons is evinced by the inclusion of ordering Arguments and an explanation of "The Verse" in later editions, which were meant to assist confused readers and put to rest complaints of the poem's difficulty.

reputations, Milton's literary and commercial achievement with *Paradise Lost* may have empowered him to seek out the services and contacts of a more explicitly political publisher. More likely, however, it was the Conventicles Act of 1670 and its accompanying climate of state surveillance that drove Milton to seek out a publisher he could trust.

The *Omissa* of 1671

While Starkey published and provided a basis for the circulation and distribution of Milton's late poems, it was the puritan printer John Macock who is credited with their material production. In April 1660 Macock was one of several printers appointed Printer to Parliament and assisted in the printing of the *Parliamentary Intelligencer* and *Mercurius Publicus*, the official newsletters for Parliament, as well as (after 1666) the *Current Intelligencer* (Knoppers xlii). By 1668, Macock was considered one of the largest printers in London, employing three presses, three apprentices and ten workmen. Printing, in the early modern period, as David McKitterick puts it, was "an exercise in communal responsibility" (117). Along with a network of readers, authors, and booksellers, Milton's 1671 volume was also tied to a network of producers whose efforts are visible in the irregularities of the first edition.

While critics of book history have emphasized the way shifts in technology transform memory practices and cultural understanding, some like Elizabeth Eisenstein and Walter Ong have maintained that, unlike manuscript culture, which retains many oral, process-oriented components, print's inherent

reliability—that is, its reproducibility—helps to "fix" knowledge and results in a change in consciousness.

> The printed text is supposed to represent the words of an author in definitive or 'final' form. For print is comfortable only with finality. Once a letterpress forme is closed, locked up, or a photolithographic plate is made, and the sheet is printed, the text does not accommodate changes (erasures, insertions) so readily as do written texts. . . . Print is curiously intolerant of physical incompleteness. (Ong 132-133)

Such formal and material distinctions are no doubt important to understanding the development of print technology and the cultural assumptions that developed along with it. Ong's assessment of this shift in consciousness, however, tends to underplay the practical concerns of early modern readers and printers, and reproduces the ideological strategies of early commercial printers: in particular, the representation of the printed text as complete, objective, and authoritative.

In different ways both Adrian Johns and David McKitterick have explored how the deployment of "print culture" as the beginning of reliable textual authority in literary and critical theory has masked a reality of divergent reading practices, and has allowed scholars to ignore the various contingencies that shaped early modern book production. As McKitterick argues, "the printed text was not merely liable to variation from copy to copy, or from sheet to sheet, but . . . was itself no more than a preliminary to further amendment, improvement or development after the edition had been run off" (128-129). The appearance of the "final published text" was, in other words, a "visual sleight of

hand," enacted by its producers to hide traces of the manufacturing process and increase its commercial value (118). Similarly, Johns argues that, from its very beginning, printing "was dedicated to the effacing of its own traces" in order to "gain the air of intrinsic reliability on which its cultural and commercial success could be built" (256). This strategic effacement of the production process is demonstrated through the various modes of correction that accompanied printed books from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Correctional strategies included scratching out mistakes with a knife and writing in corrections with a pen, or stamping in the correct words in the margins; in some cases, printers would go to the trouble of producing "cancel slips" or "cancel leafs" and would paste them over printing errors. "In practice," McKitterick writes, "correcting was usually haphazard, and relied principally on the author" (120). But despite the possibility of authorial presence at the print shop, it was most often "compromise" that characterized the decisions made in an early modern printing house; thus, it becomes "unrealistic to speak of printers' (let alone authors') 'intentions' as anything other than heterogeneous compromises, deliberate or no, often resulting in a number of versions many of which had to be, for better or worse, equally acceptable" (137). This impetus toward correction and completion serve the commercial interests of a growing book trade, and helps distinguish the dynamic at work in the production of Milton's publications. Especially in his post-Restoration work, Milton can be seen to oppose the coherent ideal of a finished literary product. Such opposition followed not only from Milton's ongoing concern with his published representation, but, as I aim

to demonstrate through an analysis of his 1671 poems, from his ongoing resistance to a political program of Restoration that would insist on its own historical necessity.

Throughout his career, Milton was someone who "rarely considered any of his works complete and instead continued altering many of them, sometimes substantially, even after they appeared in print" (Dobranski 1999: 7). As was already noted, *Paradise Lost* evolved significantly through its first several editions, with the additions of prefacing Arguments for each Book, an explanatory note regarding "The Verse," as well as the poem's reorganization from ten to twelve books. Milton's ongoing attention to the presentation of his published works reflects the contingencies of material production and, as my previous chapter argued with regard to *Areopagitica*, follows from his persistent anxiety over the tampering of "unleisured" participants in the production process.

The 1671 edition of *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* trades the grand appeals of its predecessor for the humble tastes of a more specialized audience of political allies, dissenting readers, and early admirers of *Paradise Lost*. On the title page of the 1671 poems, the large capitals of "Paradise Regain'd" and "Poem" link this book to Milton's previous success, *Paradise Lost*, while the smaller title for *Samson Agonistes* presents it as a supplementary text. Along with this, the names of "Milton" and "Starkey" would have alerted prospective buyers to the radical nature of the text. Like most printed texts of the period, the 1671 edition features numerous errors, many of which are collected

in the *Errata*,[23] but it is the companion to this collection of printing mistakes, and its potential role in the reading process, that has generated the most speculation about the book's material format.

In his analysis of Milton's participation in the seventeenth century book trade, Dobranski has championed the *Omissa* (sig. [P3]v / p. [102]), an appendix unique to the 1671 edition, which supplements *Samson Agonistes* with a ten-line passage and provides readers with directions for its insertion into the poem. According to Dobranski, its location apart from main body of the text requires readers to actively "restore" the passage to the last few hundred lines of *Samson Agonistes*. In his bibliographic analysis of the 1671 edition, Dobranski has concluded that the missing verse is not the result of a compositor's mistake but was likely a tactic for evading the censors (a threat Milton had earlier encountered with *Paradise Lost*), or perhaps represents a last minute addition by Milton after the formes had already been composed. Similarly Knoppers suggests, "Although the 1662 Licensing Act specified that licensors were to see all the materials in a volume, including prefaces, dedications, and so on, the

[23] The printing house was also responsible for selecting the octavo format and the sheets on which the book was printed, using a 14-point Garamond type. As the one who put together lines of type, the compositor could influence the text's design and presentation, making decisions about typeface, line arrangement, spacing, capitalization, and italics. In the first edition, observes Knoppers, more than seventy words appear in variant spellings, such that it is impossible to identify which spellings originated with Milton and which were printing mistakes. What we can see, however, is how patterns in spelling follow the different gatherings or signatures that constitute the codex; here, suggests Knoppers, the indication is that the text was cast off "and then composed not sequentially by pages but by formes" (lxxxi). This variation between gatherings

Omissa may have been deliberately added late; after the censor had approved the manuscript" (lxxxiv). The claim of authorial intent, made by both Dobranski and Knoppers, is based on a comparison with "minor instances of sloppiness" that litter the first edition, on the unlikelihood of a compositor miscounting while casting off, the punctuation of the lines preceding the additions, and the extra stage of correction (imposition) afforded by the column of numbers in the margins. Thus Dobranski can interpret the *Omissa* as the positing, by the author (at some point in the printing process), of "an alternative reality" for readers who were upset with the monarchy and had retained a desire for revolt. It is a supplement to the poem that draws out the contradictory attitudes of "God's servants in England," calling for patience, violence, and miraculous deliverance almost simultaneously.

In most printed texts of the period, readers expected to find errors, and, just as often, would carry out corrective procedures on their own. The *Omissa* would have been no different. This feature of early modern reading is not simply a sign that readers were more "materially engaged" or "actively involved" in the processes of reading and interpretation than later generations would prove to be. Rather, to carry this emphasis on practice further is to recognize that operations of interpretation, no matter how divergent in scope or sensitive to the materiality of the text, are ideologically embedded; that is, they function within a system of value that makes them comprehensible. According to Knoppers' field research,

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thus indicates the collaborative work of several compositors, each of whom had their own spelling preferences.

approximately one in six copies display markings that suggest readers followed the instructions of the *Omissa* and made efforts to insert those lines in the appropriate places (see esp. fig 6, lxv). Reviewing the frequency with which readers diligently corrected the *Errata* of these early editions, Knoppers observes, "Miltonic readers seemed to have a very early sense of the poem as an aesthetic object and they tidied up their copies, marking the Errata, although sometimes giving up by, or even before the end of *Paradise Regain'd*" (lxiv). Or perhaps such readers realized that reading and enjoying the text did not necessitate the material "restoration" of the printed text. To speak of the *Omissa* as an opportunity to "restore" the text, as Dobranski does, risks reducing the practices of readers to a historical narrative governed by an ideal of textual completion—it is also an oddly overt allusion to the Restoration, which was mythologized as the triumphant return of order and stability to the English nation. Dobranski's final analysis of the *Omissa*, in other words, works within the framework of one particular reading of the text and, thus, fails to understand that such acts of "restoration" are ideologically situated. Rather, we need to be mindful, as Adrian Johns has argued, that "texts, printed or not, cannot compel readers to react in specific ways, but . . . they must be interpreted in cultural spaces the character of which helps to decide what counts as proper reading" (262). This is to suggest that a study of reading, which relies on the bibliographical analysis of a particular text—in this case, a "literary" text that accumulated cultural capital long after its initial publication—must take into account the ideological conditions of its production and consumption; but must

also recognize the divergent possibilities of interpretation and *uses* of the book that such conditions enable.

According to Dobranski, the *Omissa* is crucial to the reader's interpretation of the narrative of *Samson Agonistes* because it links the impulsive interpretations of Manoa and the Chorus with the kind of miraculous deliverance that was expected by many religious dissenters. Following the conventions of Greek drama, Samson's final act takes place "offstage," accompanied by the "onstage" speculation of Manoa and Chorus and eventually confirmed by the report of a Messenger. The directions that appear along with the *Omissa* instruct readers to insert the ten-line supplement into this scene of suspense. These lines thus occur at a critical moment of hermeneutic uncertainty for character and reader alike. Like the "delayed" arrival of the Son's public ministry in *Paradise Regain'd*, the hermeneutic closure for readers of *Samson Agonistes* is deferred by the text's supplementary material. At issue for the Chorus and for Manoa is the possibility of divine providence: "What if [Samson's] eyesight (for to Israel's God / Nothing is hard) by miracle restored . . .?" asks the Chorus. Manoa responds with hesitant hope: God can provide deliverance "but [I] doubt to think he will / Yet hope would fain subscribe, and tempts belief" (*SA* 1527-1535). As Dobranski notes, this tempting image of divine deliverance echoes the strategic maneuvers of Satan in *Paradise Regain'd*. He further suggests, "For God suddenly to interfere in *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* would deny Jesus and Samson the opportunity to prove their allegiance" (2002: 43). Parallel to Milton's anti-heroes, readers are caught in a position where their faith is put

into question and are thus granted the opportunity to prove their virtue through their engagement with the material text.

The enemies of such material readings are later editions, which attempt to efface such "errors" and present readers with a complete or finished poem, thus doing the reader's work for him. With these later editions the material function of the text, which, in Dobranski's reading, extends Milton's politics of "fit reading" to individual readers, disappears; instead, we are left with another sign of Milton's canonical authority. Dobranski has argued that the material conditions of authorship in the seventeenth century "ought to inform the way we read Milton's works" and, as an analogue to the *Omissa*'s original function, due to the editorial practices that have come to dominate contemporary publication of Milton's works, this condition of production "is something we as readers need to insert" (2002: 44). Indeed, in the first fifteen years since its publication, the assimilation of the *Omissa* to the main body of the poem was prioritized over the mistakes collected in the *Errata*, which would remain uncorrected until the third edition of 1688. The 1680 edition, also published and sold by John Starkey, repeats many of the mistakes of the 1671 text. It includes the lines of the *Omissa* in the body of the text, as was directed in the first edition but ignores its *Errata*.[24]

[24] In her introduction to Milton's text, Knoppers suggests that this may have occurred because the printing house did not have access to the *Errata* page. Of the more than 200 spelling and punctuation errors in this edition more than 100 of the changes are not errors but attempts to modernize and standardize the spelling. Later, more elaborate editions represent focused efforts to solidify the

We can see, then, how this disappearance follows a historical process of abstraction, where the value of Milton's literary achievement comes at the expense of the material and political conditions that occasioned it. As McKitterick and Johns have stressed, the relationships that define the categories of author, text, and reader were no less ideologically charged in Milton's time than they are today. Even with attention to the material text, reading, as Terry Eagleton reminds us, is "an ideological decipherment of an ideological product; and the history of literary criticism is the history of the possible conjunctures between the ideologies of the text's productive and consumptive moments" (1976: 62). The *Omissa* represents one such moment of conjuncture and, as such, corresponds to Milton's argument for social, material, and political contingency within his late work. Such contingency, however, has a discernable form. There was nothing less ideological about Milton's own political program, even if it did stress possibilities outside the scope of Restoration England. Dobranski's reading of the *Omissa* rightly stresses its function as a deferral of meaning within the first edition; but such a deferral operates part of a larger hermeneutic strategy, one that is meant to condition and limit the reader to an active form of engagement. As such, the *Omissa* marks a contradiction, a site of struggle *with* the text that is already accommodated *by* the text. If the poems of 1671 helped readers to consider hermeneutical tactics for resisting the logic and strategies of

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nobility and refinement of Milton's burgeoning canon, further removing the traces of material production from the reader's view.

a Restoration government, they did so in a way that, paradoxically, questioned the very practice of reading and one's reliance on the material book.

"He who reads incessantly"

By the final book of *Paradise Regain'd*, the Son has managed to resist the series of bodily lures that comprise the first temptation, and has begun to engage a parallel series of political enticements (the second temptation) through which Satan aims to provoke a regal desire for public prestige and authority over earth's empires. In Milton's hands, the first two temptations of Luke's gospel turn upon the false allure of spectacle. In response to the first temptation, the Son's refusal to turn stones into bread is quickly followed with the presentation of a feast, a parody of the Catholic rite of Communion that is easily leveled by Son: "Thy pompous delicacies I contemn, / And count thy specious gifts no gifts but guiles" (2.390-1). Here, the Son's emphasis on the nature of Satan's "gifts" is crucial. As Regina Schwartz has suggested, "Jesus' criterion of purity—its dependence upon the nature of the giver—is true to the spirit informing the dietary laws: to remember the Giver" (1993: 17). Remembering the "Giver" marks an important theme throughout the paired poems of the 1671 volume.[25]

[25] In both poems, divine dispensation is echoed through the naming of the protagonists. In *Paradise Regain'd*, Milton avoids the Greek title of "Christ," instead opting for the Hebrew name "Messiah" and, more often, the decidedly English paternalism of "Son of God." See Haskin, 162. Samson is equally marked by the Giver and constantly referred to as a Nazarite. Remembering the Giver thus becomes an active process of relating their own identity to its source: an act of discernment, as the name becomes a public instrument used to invoke fear, knowledge and ultimately suppression.

Ryan Netzley has suggested that for early modern writers of religious verse, "the poem becomes an exercise in reception, what it means to receive and take without immediately treating this reception as a debt to be repaid—i.e., as a future labour" (2011: 18). Of course, Satan is also an active reader, and his activity throughout the poem helps us further distinguish the conditions of reading that Milton's text works to assemble. The struggle to acknowledge and remember the givenness of creation forms the basis of contingency that Milton sets in opposition to the Satan's instrumental method of interpretation, and, as Netzley points out, such contingency also coheres to a particular kind of textual reception.

Although Milton follows the order of events as recounted by Luke's Gospel, he instead relies on Matthew 4:7 for the Son's rebuttal to Satan's final temptation. In a choice that lends further emphasis to the space of active reading, and to the internalization of the written text, Milton has Jesus say, "it is written," rather than the "it is said" of Luke's version. Throughout *Paradise Regain'd*, God's Word is thus represented through a performance of the spatial word. The Son's scriptural vision relies on the "givenness" of the written law, but to acknowledge this posture of reception is also to recognize the tension between "free" salvation and the interpretive labour that Milton presents as a natural response to the presence of God's word. While Satan clearly "knows" passages from scripture—constantly suggesting such quotations as rhetorical support, expedient to his argument—nowhere does he appear willing to exercise the text and think about it as a complex conference of places.

Paradise Regain'd re-introduces the villain of *Paradise Lost* as one already in the act of interpretation. While "roving still / About the world" Satan overhears "the Father's voice / From Heav'n" pronouncing "his beloved Son" (1.32-33). In a sudden panic, he calls on his demonic council and begins his deliberation over their newly anointed adversary. Satan sees the Son's baptism take place, but its significance is lost on him: "on him rising / Out of the water, Heav'n above the clouds / Unfold her crystal doors, thence on his head / A perfect dove descend, whate'er it meant" (1.80-83). What distinguishes Satan's approach to such revelation is that he treats God's signs as abstract events, rather than interpreting them through the record of revelation contained within the scriptures. Satan and his minions have first-hand knowledge and experience of God's Son—"His first-begot we know, and sore have felt" (1.89)—but they are unable to bridge this knowledge with what has unfolded before them: the identification of a man both fully human ("His mother then is mortal") and "of birth divine." Satan's constant preoccupation with this particular category of interpretation is, therefore, a symptom of his detachment from the biblical text. For this reason Satan's temptations turn on identifying the Son as a strategy of evasion—not from interpretation as such, but from the textual space of scripture: "But if thou be the Son of God, command / That out of these hard stones be made thee bread" (1.342-3). The futility of Satan's interpretive labour finds its analogue in the sort of "incessant" reading that the Son warns against in his condemnation of classical learning.

While the second temptation recounted in Luke's gospel foregrounds Satan's exchange of earthly kingdoms for Jesus' worship, in *Paradise Regain'd* Milton extends this temptation by adding to it a debate over the relationship of Athenian knowledge to Judaic wisdom. Beginning with the letters of St Paul, the tension between the human wisdom of Athens and the revealed wisdom of Jerusalem was a point of ongoing debate for patristic theologians like Lactantius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Augustine; and it was, in many ways, revived with the increased circulation of classical texts that marked the early Renaissance and informed the later Reformation.[26] Nowhere in Milton's poetry is this tension more starkly addressed than in the Son's rejection of classical learning in the final book of *Paradise Regain'd*. Along with his questioning of the Greek tradition, the Son here takes aim at the physical book itself, the very object of embodied Truth that Milton had spent the early portion of his career defending. The Son's response to this temptation does not signal an end to interpretation but a caution against the kind of "incessant" reading that produces mental and physical fatigue, or "weariness." What appears as a strict condemnation of classical education, in other words, is a materially sensitive strategy for keeping the reader active, and, as the preceding temptations suggest, active reading depends upon an appreciation of contingency that follows from a paradigm of intertextuality.

[26] For the Pauline qualities of the Son in *Paradise Regain'd* see Haskin, chapter 3, "Keeping Secrets, Telling Secrets."

When the Son finally addresses the labour of reading, he follows Ecclesiastes and associates the excesses of such study with bodily fatigue: "Many books / Wise men have said, are wearisome" (4.321-22). Decades earlier, Milton had qualified this same citation in *Areopagitica*, as he made the case for free "exercise of [man's] own leading capacity" on the basis of God's "trust."

> Solomon informs us that much reading is a weariness of the flesh, but neither he, nor other inspired authors tells us that such or such reading is unlawful; yet certainly had God thought good to limit us herein, it had been much more expedient to have told us what was unlawful than what was wearisome. (938)

Before dismissing this early treatment of reading, and agreeing with Netzley that any "functional labour" in *Paradise Regain'd* is ultimately Satanic, we need to consider what is at stake for Milton in the temptation of excessive study. Along with its denigration of mere interpretive labour, the Son's Old Testament caution points to an anxiety over memory that had prominence among Renaissance classicists. Though he promoted the printing of the Latin classics, Hieronimo Squarciafico echoed Plato's *Phaedrus* when he observed in 1477 that the "abundance of books makes men less studious" (qtd in Ong 80). Accompanied by a surplus of recorded texts, it is no longer necessary for the human mind to engage in the discipline of memory work. In other words, sole reliance upon the physical book ultimately undermines its reading. Indeed, the Son's next words follow St. Paul (2 Corinthians 3:6): to read without the spirit leads to the "dead

letter," that is, the reduction of the text to a mere object, an external, inactive idol.

> . . . [He] who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior
> (and what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek)
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
> Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself,
> Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys,
> And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge;
> As children gathering pebbles on the shore. (4.322-330)

Productive reading, as it turns out, is not wholly dependent on the literal text, but on the "spirit and judgment" one brings to it. A surplus of written texts can in fact be detrimental to studious reading; it might lead to mental and physical fatigue and make further labour ineffective. This caution against relying on the physical text is not only a warning against idolizing books, but against idolizing labour. As Barbara Lewalski has observed, Milton's Jesus appears to denounce "the reading of many books and seems to suggest that only those who have no need of books can properly use them" (1966: 289-99). For Netzley this contradiction suggests a definition of reading that evades all instrumental logic and purposive ends, an ongoing activity of interpretation in which one never finally stops "paying attention" (2011: 189). However, as we have already seen, the difference between the interpretive activity of Satan and the Son is not the

degree to which either party pays "attention," but the method by which they interpret God's revelation in scripture.

Moments before the Son begins his repudiation of the written word, he launches into a damning critique of Stoicism, whose "virtuous man, / Wise, perfect in himself, and all possessing / Equal to God . . . contemning all / Wealth, pleasure, pain or torment, death and life" (4.301-305). In Lewalski's terms, the Stoic man has "no need of books." The apparent power entailed by such autonomy is also necessary for Satan's conception of personal freedom as a kind of private property, a site of purely individual toil. Milton's account of self-sufficiency in Book IV also corresponds to the earlier part of the second temptation, where Satan aligns imperial power with intellectual mastery "o'er all the world." Books, within this Stoic model, become "crude or intoxicate . . . toys," while the relation between contemplation and action is strategically dissolved.

Paradise Lost allows us to see the Son's rejection of books and interpretive labour in another light. Milton's takes the book of nature as his model for prelapsarian Eden, a place where the revelation of God's Word is not yet necessary to inform human behavior. Raphael's caution to Adam regarding the limits of knowledge in Book VIII features instructions to "be lowly wise," to which Adam fully agrees:

> But apt the Mind or Fancy is to rove
> Uncheckt, and of her is no end;
> Till warn'd, or by experience taught, she learn

That not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime Wisdom; (8.188-94)

What is decisive for the utility of study and inquiry in this account is praise, which is everywhere evident in the Garden of Eden. When Raphael suggests that "the great Architect / Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge / His secrets to be scann'd by them who ought / Rather admire," he appears to set the activity of reading against that of worship (8.70-75). "Scanning" is defined in the *OED* as "close investigation or consideration, critical examination or judgment," and is especially common in descriptions of biblical reading. Praise, rather than mere "scanning," respects divine mystery, the "secrets" of God's creation because of the way it orients its subject. Such praise does not resolve or "negate the restraining impulse" suggests Schwartz, "Rather praise subsumes the opposing categories to its larger purpose" (1993: 49). Alongside Adam's inquisitive desires, Satan's approach to knowledge demonstrates that it is not necessarily sinful to ask grand questions or to follow one's desires in the pursuit of knowledge; in Schwartz's words, "the peril of curiosity is to be myopic, rather than to look too far. . . . what is most useful is the acknowledgment of contingency, for it is the ground of gratitude" (52).

And yet, the secrecy of God is altogether different from the secrecy of his creatures. As Schwartz notes, the difference between worship and curiosity is parallel to the distinction Satan makes between "Secret gaze / Or open

admiration" when he deceives Uriel in Book III. "To look openly, as seeing subject and as object who shows, is to imitate divine seeing, expressing the creation, and thereby sustaining it" (58). At no point in *Paradise Lost* does Satan allow himself to participate in such "open admiration," choosing instead to survey God's creation in secret. Such secrecy continues to animate his appetite for knowledge in *Paradise Regain'd*, where it also conceals the identity of God's Son. Indeed, we might ask whether the Son's private activity—his careful deliberation over "which way [to] first / Publish his Godlike office now mature" (1.188)—contradicts the "open admiration" that Schwartz's reading of *Paradise Lost* celebrates. Any subjective unity within *Paradise Regain'd* is to be found in the ongoing activity of the Son, which constitutes a form of obedience through worship. As Milton, writes in *De Doctrina Christiana*,

> External worship, moreover, though it may be distinguished from internal for the sake of argument, should in practice go hand in hand with it, and the two are never separated except by the viciousness of sinners.[27]

As Dayton Haskin points out, the divided interior monologues that we witness in *Paradise Lost*, following the fall of Adam and Eve are not evident in the Son's moments of introspection. Through his education in the Hebrew tradition, Jesus "learns the humility that it often takes an actual fall to reveal to others: that human weakness, understood as vulnerability to assaults on one's spirit, opens one up to the power of God" (Haskin 159). The Son's openness, in other words, does not follow from the kind internal/external disjunction that Adam and Eve

experience as a consequence of the Fall, nor is it compatible with a static, interior "place"—that is, the way that Satan in *Paradise Lost* imagines his own autonomy through the "mind" (1.253). The Son's secrecy, by contrast, is a way of remaining open—or, keeping active—for his Father, and for this reason confounds Satan along with the disciples. To qualify Schwartz's earlier suggestion in terms of *Paradise Regain'd*, the Son's openness is not an absolute principle—rather, like all activities in the poem, it follows from a specific approach to biblical interpretation, a spatial practice that holds open the text, as well as the subject, to God's revelation.

"Contemplative, or active"

There is of course a sense in which the Son triumphs over Satan, not by actively engaging him, but by doing *nothing*. Indeed, the external, visible signs of interpretive labour in *Paradise Regain'd* all seem to belong to Satan. It is tempting to align such strenuous activity with the external nature of Satanic illusion, and to privilege the Son's interiority as the key to his virtue. Such a distinction, however, emerges from a dualistic logic that the active reading of the Son works to disrupt. To internalize or consume a text is also to be consumed by it. One's knowledge of the scriptures, in other words, does not signal an end to one's interpretive labour. Indeed, what appears as a form of fixed resistance on the Son's part is never cut off from biblical texts that he has internalized.

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[27] Quoted in Schwartz, *Remembering & Repeating*, 76.

The invitation to "sit" is an important conceit that runs through Satan's rhetoric in *Paradise Regain'd*. Satan repeatedly tempts the Son to take possession of a throne (3.357), to take a seat (3.373), and thus choose a political side and settle into a recognizable identity. For the Son to continue to "stand," as he does with defiance at the end of the final book, is not therefore to rest, but represents a concerted effort to *remain active* and responsive to the Spirit. After bringing the Son to the summit of a mountain and encouraging him, by military conquest, to claim "David's royal seat" and gain control over the vast empires of the East, Satan brings the Son to the western side of that same mountain to view "great and glorious Rome, queen of the earth / So far renowned, and with the spoils enriched / Of nations" (4.45-47). Once his proposed exchange of imperial power for allegiance has been rejected as a "pious condition," Satan makes a concerted effort to understand the Son's kingship. Still preoccupied with questions of "means" and "occasion," Satan advises the Son to engage his subjects through the work of "persuasion":

> … Be famous then
> By wisdom; as thy empire must extend,
> So let extend thy mind o'er all the world,
> In knowledge, all things in it comprehend;
> All knowledge is not couched in Moses' law,
> The Pentateuch or what the prophets wrote;
> The Gentiles also know, and write, and teach
> To admiration, led by nature's light;

> And with the Gentiles much thou must converse,
> Ruling them by persuasion as thou mean'st;
> Without their learning how wilt thou with them,
> Or they with thee hold conversation meet?
> How wilt thou reason with them, how refute
> Their idolisms, traditions, paradoxes?
> Error by his own arms is best evinced. (4.221-235)

This passage moves from an argument for the equality of all knowledge under "nature" to an argument for the necessity of secular learning as the only means by which Gentiles will come to see the error of their ways. Earlier on in Book I, the Son had revealed that his work of salvation—"first / By winning words to conquer willing hearts, / And make persuasion do the work of fear"—would not entail an experiential knowledge of "Error" (1.221-22). Satan's words, on the other hand, challenge the authority of scripture by conflating knowledge and wisdom, but they also rehearse an argument from Milton's pamphleteering days: that the reading of corrupt texts aids one in the pursuit of virtue and in the persuasion of one's rhetorical opponents. Indeed, much of this debate, the liberal mode of reading and learning presented thirty years prior in *Areopagitica* seems to be countered by the Son. Missing from Satan's appropriation, however, are the virtues of temperance, patience, and deliberation that substantiated Milton's earlier claims. Such virtues are a fitting absence, for the comparative mode of reading Milton once described as "promiscuous" is not in fact practiced by Satan, but bears more of a resemblance to the Son's expansive education. "Think

not but that I know these things, or think / I know them not," he replies with defiance to Satan, "not therefore am I short / Of knowing what I ought" (4.287-8). To "know" such texts, in Milton's theology of reading, would be to recognize their limits; that is, to see them in relation to—and thus, as imitation of—"All our law and story strewed / With hymns, our songs and harps in Babylon" (4.334-7).

This way of knowing—which privileges the relations *between* texts—emerges from an exercise of scripture that is enjoined with "wisdom." In his discussion of wisdom, David Gay treats it as crucial to the inward possession of scripture and to the potential future of what he calls Milton's "scriptural society." Wisdom is here defined as "the maintenance of action as potential . . . For this reason, reading and interpretation revolutionize the reader's sense of what makes actions meaningful by supplanting the satanic norms and conventions of acting in the world" (61). Such earthly norms correspond, in Milton's writing, to the literal interpretation of scripture, which is equivalent to "resting" in the Letter of the text. In *Paradise Regain'd*, Satan's invitation to "sit" works in much the same way and is presented as a possible end to the Son's interpretive activity. Standing, on the other hand, allows the Son to remain active and, in Gay's words, maintain his potential.

In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton described this kind of activity by covertly drawing upon the hermeneutic approach of Augustine's *On*

Christian Doctrine.[28] Where the Patristic theologian's strategy eventually turned to the mediation of church doctrine, Milton limited his Protestant hermeneutic to the mediation of different biblical passages. Echoing Augustine's "analogy of faith," Milton advised his readers that if "just reason of doubt arises from the letter," they had to consider "upon what occasion everything is set down" and compare it to "other texts" (1643: 888). In *Paradise Regain'd*, Satan's invocations of scripture provide clear examples of what it means to "rest" in the Letter. When Satan is about to set down the Son on the pinnacle of the temple—a place in which it is impossible for one to stand—he treats scripture as a static object:

> For it is written, 'He will command
> Concerning thee to his angels, in their hands
> They shall uplift thee, lest at any time
> Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone'"
> To whom thus Jesus: "Also it is written,
> 'Tempt not the Lord thy God,'" he said and stood. (4.556-61)

[28] Augustine also believed that moments of contradiction within the canons of scripture were positive in so far as they gave greater opportunity for faith, as opposed to logical certainty, among Christian readers. In *On Christian Doctrine*, he writes that the ultimate goal or ideal is the love of God for God's sake. This description of "charity" is at the heart Augustine's his biblical hermeneutic: "the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and of one's neighbor for the sake of God" (88). Scripture, then, "teaches nothing but charity, nor condemns anything except cupidity, and in this way shapes the minds of men." Whatever does not fall into the category of virtuous instruction should, in short, be interpreted figuratively.

The "For it is written" that Satan uses to introduce his quotation highlights the instrumental nature of his reliance on the text. By contrast, the Son's "Also it is written" insists on the comparative nature of biblical reading, on the one hand, and presents an invitation to re-reading, on the other. As Ryan Netzley has suggested, this injunction to re-read does not appear "because we read incorrectly the first time around but rather because reading is itself a salvational and ethical activity, the habit-forming exercise whereby we acquire the very judgment that seems so valuable in Jesus' rebuke of the temptation of classical learning" (2009: 163). Again, Netzley's argument rightly locates the practical focus of Milton's theology in the operations of the reader, but risks conflating the various forms of reading represented within the text.

What distinguishes the Son's interpretive activity from that of Satan is not simply an awareness of re-reading, but an attention to the space that is mobilized through the conference of biblical places. As noted above, this difference can be found in their competing approaches to the recitation of scripture, but a similar logic occurs when Satan comments on their natural surroundings. As Satan tells his demonic council near the beginning of Book II, the goal of his interpretive struggle with the Son is, after all, "that we may hold our place" (2.125). Later, when all his rhetorical "darts" are finally "spent," Satan hurls a final taunt at the Son:

> Since neither wealth, nor honor, arms nor arts,
> Kingdom nor empire pleases thee, nor aught
> By me proposed in life contemplative

> Or active, tended on by glory, or fame,
> What dost thou in this world? The wilderness
> For thee is fittest place . . . (4.368-73)

To Satan, the wilderness suggests barrenness and political quietism. Without identifiable ends (honor, wealth, empire, etc.), reasons Satan, the Son will have no capacity for action and finds "fittest place" for his kingdom in the wilderness. What Satan cannot comprehend is that the Son's kingdom occurs in the space of "willing hearts" and is not, therefore, tied to any one place (1.222). In contrast to Satan's separation of the "place" of the mind from the "active" life of the body, it was a commonplace of seventeenth century religious discourse to understand the heart as a site of mediation between body and mind, "the locus of one's most private and intimate thoughts" (Haskin 133). Thus Mary gives an account of her own "heart" as a "storehouse long of things / And sayings," the very ground of memory and meaning (2.103-4). This invocation of memory helps further distinguish the kind of reading Milton's poem works to represent in Son's interpretive activity.

Although Satan can remember the Son of God, the lack of biblical mediation in his understanding of revelation leaves him confused and preoccupied with the question of the Son's identity. Unlike the "mind" of Satan, Mary shows the heart to be a space of hermeneutic activity, a place where memory is mediated by the biblical narrative where, as the Son claims, God "sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell . . . an inward oracle / To all truth requisite for men to know" (1.462-4). As Mary awaits the return of her son in

Book II, she does not wait passively or attempt to identify the "great purpose" that her Son "obscures"; rather, she remembers "what remarkably had passed . . . with thoughts meekly composed" (2.106-7). Mary recognizes, in other words, that her Son's obscurity is a way for him to remain open to his Father and that her own faith is sustained by the active work of memory.

"These here revolve"

While Milton's Satan praises Athens as the "mother of Arts," the Son follows after his human mother in his own education. Indeed, much of the internal contemplation that begins the Son's journey into the wilderness is modeled on Mary's account of her own election. As Haskin has argued, Mary not only weaves together the various Gospel accounts of Jesus' childhood, she is a multivalent bearer of the Word: "first to Jesus himself, then to the New Testament writers, and ultimately to Christians in every age" (138). As mentioned above, Mary's interior monologue at the beginning of Book II shows her "composing" her thoughts in a way that preserves, interprets, and combines diverse texts, working through her responsibility as one of God's elect while remaining open to the "Spirit of Truth." In the same way, the young Jesus puts together Mary's orally transmitted "texts" (1.231-258) with the written Law (1.259-67), thus encouraging readers to engage in their own practices of textual comparison and open up new possibilities for interpretation.

By harmonizing the oral, written, and, in its published form, the printed text, Milton 1671 poems demonstrate an awareness of different strategies of

memory and the mediation necessary to its transmission. While the historical shift from oral to written discourse was "essentially a shift from sound to space," observes Walter Ong, the technological advances of print further "effectively reified the word, and, with it noetic activity" (117-119). According to Ong, print "locks words into position" in a way that appears fixed and self-evident. While this account of print's objectivity fits into a standard historical narrative of modernization, it disregards the fact that such memory practices often overlap. Ong's point about the inaccessibility of oral culture from a culture of literacy is well made, but just as writing did not mean the end of oral transmission, so printing did not mean the end of writing. Even within a culture of "reified" print, with its increasing spatialization of the word, reading did not equate passive reception or coincide with a decline in "noetic activity." In their formal fragmentation, and in their representations of the memory work, Milton's 1671 poems demonstrate how the proliferation of spatialized discourse enabled its own kind of intellectual embodiment.

In her study of the relationship between manuscript production and medieval memory practices, Mary Carruthers suggests that "it is the spatial, somatic nature of memory-images that allows for secure recollective associations to be formed, according to a variety of consciously applied techniques, training, and diligent practice" (80). As Carruthers observes, the transition from oral to written or even printed texts was not immediate, nor did the shift from socially embodied memory to documentary memory entail a total reliance upon written records. Rather, material texts were used as memory aids, initiating and assisting

readers in the cognitive processes of collective memory through the spatial geography of the codex. Although the shift to printed texts in Europe is commonly portrayed as a decisive break with manuscript culture, the continuing influence of manuscript conventions on the format and marketing of printed books has been well documented.[29] In Milton's 1671 poems the recollection processes undergone by his protagonists resemble Carruthers' description of "the spatial, somatic nature of memory-images," but do so by focusing on the physical text. Reading, in other words, not only relies on memory for it coherence as a practice; it also works as a method of activating particular memories within the consciousness of the reading subject.

In many religious stories, observes Michel de Certeau, there arises a figure "who has the characteristics of memory" and "represents with such fidelity the 'popular' memory of those who have no place but have time" (86). This is, in part, because it "produces in a place that does not belong to it. It receives its form and its implantation from external circumstances"—what amounts to another time—but can only work when its object has disappeared (ibid.). In this way, memory has a utopian element built into its practice. "Far from being the reliquary or trash can of the past," he writes, "it sustains itself by *believing* in the existence of possibilities and by vigilantly awaiting them, constantly on the watch for their appearance" (87). Memory, in other words, points to some kind of potential alteration, but relies on a skillful reading of

[29] For a good introduction to the ways in which this "cultural" shift has been characterized and assessed, see Harold Love, "Early Modern Print Culture:

one's external situation—what is regularly referred to as the "occasion"—for its effectiveness. The following chapter of this study deals explicitly with the question and configuration of the occasion in both of Milton's 1671 poems. Our present concern is how both poems work to develop in their readers "an aptitude for . . . being in the other's place without possessing it [or being possessed by it], and for profiting from this alteration without destroying itself through it" (ibid.).

In both *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*, memory names a space of struggle. As Sharon Achinstein reminds us, the Restoration of 1660 was accompanied by the Crown's desire for a "grand forgetting" of the English Revolution (made evident in a bill titled "Of Free and General Pardon, Indemnity and Oblivion"). For those who continued to oppose the monarchy, the drama of myth and memory was a way of keeping hope alive and affirming collective solidarity with other dissenting groups. According to Achinstein's reading of *Samson Agonistes*, memory marks a site of coherence and subjective agency against the destabilizing "trauma" of the Restoration.[30] According to the logic of her context-based reading, however, it is plausible that the *disruption* of identity would have been an equally, if not more, appropriate tactic for the sort of survival that Milton and his dissenting audience sought. Indeed, the struggle

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Assessing the Models" in *The Book History Reader*, 74-86.

[30] Achinstein's brief use of Judith Butler to articulate the performative and discursive basis of identity misses out on the fact that part of Butler's stated aim in the essay that Achinstein is citing is to unsettle the assumption that "unity [is] necessary for political action" (2011: 480). For an early theory of what would become central to post-structuralist theories of performance see *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche writes that "there is no 'being' behind

for coherent identity seems more appropriate to the regulatory practices of the Crown and the established Church of England, the adherents of which were preoccupied with the vilification of various sects.[31] In this context, Milton's protagonists confront and resist the socially inscribed limits of identity as contingent site of expression; but they also recognize identity as a potential idol, an end to reading that too quickly settles the dialectic of self and other.

To highlight reading as a formative practice of remembering in the 1671 poems is to suspend the question of identity and re-imagine one's place in the world in terms of a vocation that is finally answerable *only* to God. When one's subjectivity is offered to God in secret, it is not simply "completed" as a hidden identity; rather, it is put into question through the exercise of scripture. Especially within a context of surveillance, remembering oneself in God entails a decisive break from the logic of identity. In Matthew's Gospel, for example, Jesus makes it clear that the social recognition attached to acts of piety is a contingent effect of God's grace rather than the constitutive purpose for such practices.[32] In both *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes,* the imperative to

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doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything" (45).

[31] See for example, the illustrated title page to the sixth edition of Ephraim Pagitt's *Heresiography, or, A description of the heretickes and sectaries sprang up in these latter times* (1661), which presents caricatures of "Anabaptists," "Familists," "Divorsers," "Jesuits," "Antinomians," and "Seekers."

[32] "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. . . . But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to the Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:5-6); "Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure

remember is presented to the Israelites through God's "remembering" of them, and is still a sign of hope to those who have fallen into the idolatry of fixed identities. According to the Son, God "Rememb'ring Abraham by some wond'rous call / May bring them back repentant and sincere" (3.434-5). In both poems, readers are thus reminded that they worship a God who will remember them.

While the narrative of *Paradise Regain'd* is less explicitly retrospective than *Samson Agonistes*, the struggle to remember is not presented as a tactic of evasion, or a return to the safety of the past in the face of temptation; it is rather a mode of orienting oneself to the present, opening oneself to an undetermined future and the possibility of acting within it. Regina Schwartz has argued that this emphasis on memory also runs through *Paradise Lost*, "where Satan offers the temptation to forget, and to forget the Creator, the Redeemer, is to fall" (1993: 5). Memory in the Garden of Eden is demonstrated through daily worship: it is a human response to the "givenness" of life and communion with God. As I have argued, in *Paradise Regain'd* a similar kind of remembering is enacted by the Son as he resists Satan through the active recollection of scripture passages. We catch a glimpse of the Son's early appreciation for the written word as he recounts his upbringing. After spending several days in Bethabara "Musing and much revolving in his breast" over how to begin his public

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their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. . . . But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:16-18).

vocation, the Son wanders into the wilderness to meditate further on his mission (1.185). Returning to contemplation, the Son is met with a "multitude of thoughts" that "swarm" violently within him. Out of this psychological chaos, he recalls the memory of his upbringing, where even as a child his "mind was set / Serious to learn and know, and thence do public good" (1.202-4). In his pursuit of this end,

> The law of God I read, and found it sweet,
> Made it my whole delight, and in it grew
> To such perfection, that ere yet my age
> Had measured twice six years, at our great feast
> I went into the temple, there to hear
> The teachers of our Law, and to propose
> What might improve my knowledge or their own. (1.207-13)

While the Son narrates his childhood as driven by a desire to achieve and uncover a particular identity, Mary perceives these "growing thoughts" and guides him to "nourish them and let them soar / To what highth sacred virtue and true worth / Can raise them, though above example high; By matchless deeds express thy matchless sire" (1.230-3). The Son's divine status, in other words, will be earned and demonstrated through his vocation, that is, to "work redemption for mankind" (1.266). Taking his mother's advice to heart, he recalls, "straight I again revolved / The Law and Prophets, searching what was writ / Concerning the Messiah, to our scribes / Known partly, and soon found of whom they spake / I am" (1.259-262). In contrast with the intellectual impulse of

his childhood, the Son is careful in his recollection to distinguish his own self-understanding from an identity that exists beyond the text: it is "they" who speak of the Messiah. The Son, meanwhile, does not assume the coherence of an unmediated identity with God, a position supported by Milton's rejection of the Trinity and his alleged Socinianism;[33] he instead focuses his energy on internalizing the scriptures.

This description of the Son's studious return to the Law shows his mind already in motion through an internalized process of re-reading: what the Poet describes as "revolving," a repetitive, spatially-oriented method of interpreting the scriptures. The *OED* defines "revolving" as a "turning over in the mind, breast, thoughts." In the same way that Mary's heart figures as a storehouse for thoughts and sayings, the Son's inner contemplation is always already mediated through and contested by the scriptures. Milton again uses this term in Book IV, when Satan privileges classical texts as sources of imperial knowledge: "These here revolve, or, as thou lik'st, at home, / Till time mature thee to a kingdom's weight" (4.281-2). Indeed, there is a sense in which this description of reading implies a continual return, an internalization of the text that does not fix meaning, but reopens it again and again to new conditions of possibility. In

[33] The Son's resistance to orthodox interpretation can be thought alongside Milton's own proclivity to heresy, which followed from an arguably Socinian impulse to abandon established doctrine for the joint exercise of biblical text and human reason. Both Socinians and Arians rejected the doctrine of the Trinity on biblical grounds (with Socinians holding Christ as God's interpreter but not his equal), and Milton's texts certainly reflect a similar tension between the Son and his relation to the Godhead. For further analysis of this problematic in Milton's writing, see Michael Lieb's "Milton and 'Arianism.'"

Samson Agonistes, the term "revolve" appears once more, in the final moments before Samson's demolition of the Philistine temple.

> He unsuspicious led him; which when Samson
>
> Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,
>
> And eyes fast fixed he stood, as one who prayed,
>
> Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd. (1.1635-8)

Samson's internal activity prefigures his dramatic action—the turning over, or revolution, of the Philistine Temple.[34] Although the effects of their interpretive labours appear at odds, both Samson and the Son engage in revolutionary activities through the spatial recollection of the scriptures. But while the Son's trials occur in the isolation of the wilderness, marking out a disciplined beginning to his public mission, Samson's "inward motions" occur in the saturated space of public spectacle. Consequently, our understanding of Samson's final act is transmitted through the words of a Messenger who further distances Samson's internal activity from the reader through simile, describing him "as one" who "revolv'd." Like the secrecy of the Son, Samson's last

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[34] In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams traces the word "revolution" from the fourteenth century, derived from the Latin *volvi* (to revolve). The emergence of the political sense, though complicated, is tied to the general word "rebellion," which in premodern English was the central word for what we would now term "revolution." The words "revolt" or "revolutare" come from the Latin (to roll or revolve), which had a political sense in English from the beginning of their use. Causes for the transfer of meaning of "revolution," "from a sense of a circular movement to the sense of a political rising," could be the simple physical sense of turning over established political norms. In the seventeenth century, Cromwell's uprising was called the Great Rebellion, while the more positive (greater) event of 1688 was called the Glorious Revolution. Revolution, says

moments are the result of a vocation that is finally answerable only to God and thus representable only by analogy. Both poems thus suspend the question of identity, in order to foreground the contradiction between active, individual faith and a public space of representation that relies on the visibility and identity of its subjects.

Reading at the margins

In their first edition, Milton's 1671 poems invite a method of comparative reading that treats both texts as memory aids. Several surviving copies of *Paradise Regain'd . . . to which is added Samson Agonistes* feature marginal notations—traces of textual activity—that signal points of emphasis or keywords, or respond directly to the text.[35] In one copy from the University of Illinois Library, a reader follows the Son's example and responds to Satan's remarks (1.393-5) with a counter-argument from Scripture: "the answer was never given in any Oracle after Christ was born." Another copy from the New York Public Library features a Latin gloss added by the reader to the Son's rejection of earthly kingship in Book II (466-7), as well as two Latin citations from Virgil's *Aeneid* in Book IV (397), both of which stress the Son's courage in the face of Satan's treachery. Reviewing these signs of textual engagement in her

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Williams was still a more favorable word, and from as late as 1796 we can find that distinction.

[35] The following examples are taken from Laura Knoppers' preface to the 1671 poems, which consolidates a vast amount of Knoppers' own field research and provides an instructive analysis of marginalia from different copies of the first edition.

recent edition of the 1671 poems, Laura Knoppers gives special attention to a copy once belonging to the dissenting minister Samuel Say, a great admirer and imitator of Milton. Say's copy features little in the way of politicized marginalia, but it does feature the complete corrections of all the *Errata* in both poems; Say also attempts intertextual referencing, writing in "*Faerie Queen*" alongside (2.360) *Paradise Regain'd* and cross-referencing sections of *Paradise Lost* with the text of *Samson Agonistes*.

Similarly, in a copy from the University of Illinois, bound with the 1674 *Paradise Lost*, Knoppers locates a detailed index drawn up by the reader. Amid various terms from the volume is the entry, "England's Case 23," which corresponds to a marginal line on page 23, where Samson decries his own nation (268-71); other notable terms that have been indexed include "popular," "glory," "Riches," "Books," and "Pressages." Acts of collection and conference distinguish these material traces of reading as analogous to the "revolving" of Samson and the Son in face of political pressure. For Knoppers, indices like this one demonstrate the unity of literary and political concerns for "oppositional" readers of the 1671 poems. Here, a dissenting reader finds not only a commentary on her own political situation and the condemnation of ungodly activity, but also "models of faith and patience under persecution, for exposure of ungodly prelates and priests, and for possible violent revenge closely linked with the concerns of Dissent and republicanism in the 1670s and 1680s" (lxx). Knoppers is right to argue that the 1671 poems condition an oppositional strategy of reading, but her emphasis on the prominence of Milton's biblical

models overlooks a crucial aspect of this strategy: a commitment to practice that sees through Satan's argument for static repetition, that "the way found prosperous once / Induces best hope of like success" (1.104-5).

In the first temptation of *Paradise Regain'd*, both adversaries draw on the biblical stories of Elijah and Daniel, but the Son's process of recollection occurs through a dream (2.265-285). Although he follows these biblical models in his dream, the Son comes to recognize that his situation of fasting, though informed by the memory of these Old Testament figures, is not the same. When Satan finally presents his spread of "pompous delicacies" to the famished Son of God, we are given a sense of how the biblical practice of memory precedes and conditions reality without controlling its outcome: remembering the biblical text allows the Son to pierce through the "real" snares of temptation. As the Son witnesses, Satan, now disguised as a courtier, "spake no dream, for as his words had end, / Our Saviour lifting up his eyes beheld in ample space under the broadest shade / A table richly spread, in regal mode" (2.337-40). Satan references Elijah's desert wanderings as a positive model for the Son to follow, recalling that this "Native of Thebez wand'ring here was fed / Twice by a voice inviting him to eat" (2.313-14); moments later, Satan changes his tactic, distancing his fabulous feast from the "Meats by the law unclean, or offered first / To idols, those young Daniel could refuse" (2.328-9). In both cases, the Son resists the temptation to emulate his biblical forebears as static models that would regulate his own performance. What *is* modeled for readers of the 1671

edition is an active orientation to the written text—that of "turning over in the mind, breast, and thoughts" in response to present circumstances.

As de Certeau cautions, our critical fixation on "traces," such as marginal notes and other products of reading, often works against the historical thrust of such research, in that it "constitute[s] procedures for forgetting" where "the trace left behind is substituted for the practice" (97). In Milton's poems, this kind of reliance on the letter, as opposed to the spirit, is consonant with the worst kind of idolatry. Equally tempting, however, the idea that Milton wrote

> in anticipation of readers fluent in the idioms of Renaissance neo-Platonism, armed with learned commentary, readers whose commonplace books were filled with apt quotations from the Latin Fathers . . . [for such] idealization removes the model of resistance as a way of calibrating relations between writers and readers. (Zwicker 83)

It is likely, Zwicker continues, that Milton's contemporary audience would have been much more interested in decoding a poem like *Paradise Lost*, or for that matter, *Paradise Regain'd*, as a lens through which to interpret present-day controversies, to uncover the spiritual and political allegories that would have accorded with Milton's notoriety as an outspoken apologist for revolution and regicide. Indeed Milton's awareness of this disposition in his audience helps to explain why his post-Restoration poetry is structured and stylized in such an intricate manner: a mode of defense against readers who were only interested in uncovering deviant purposes within his writing.

The first edition of *Paradise Regain'd . . . to which is added Samson Agonistes* is not a vehicle for the dissemination of Christian ideals, but rather an appeal to dissenting readers that conditions a specific form of literary engagement, one which requires the ongoing work of memory and invites a comparative analysis of textual idiosyncrasy. The imperative to correct textual irregularities, which was consistently followed by printers, publishers and booksellers, does not simply represent a response to imperfection within an unstable context of early modern book production. Rather, it represents an ideological procedure that, from our historical vantage point, tends to fit within a narrative of modernization, thus corresponding to the consolidation and economic growth of the book trade (a small but growing corner of an increasingly free market).

In this chapter I have suggested, along with Adrian Johns, that the familiar narrative of early modern print history—that of progressive stabilization with regard to knowledge, subjectivity, etc.—is an ideological product of modern retrospection; and, along with David McKitterick, that this drive to produce (at least) the appearance of completion is characteristic of commercial approaches to the material text in seventeenth century England. When Milton's last volume of major poetry is situated within this context, it can be shown to resist this ideology of completion and, perhaps, even the sort of material "restoration" that some critics have identified with early modern reading. There is, then, an inconsistency or contradiction between the apparent "built-in" errors of Milton's poems and the arguments put forward by those like Dobranski,

Knoppers, and Achinstein, which unquestioningly celebrate the participation (or agency) of the reader in the formation of meaning. In the larger field of Milton studies, this assertion has reached a point of redundancy, but it also inadvertently forces the reader into a logic that privileges textual completion over the practice of reading. We need to treat the formal "failure" of the 1671 edition, including the *Omissa*, alongside Satan's idealistic reliance on the biblical text as a means of attaining secure knowledge.

If *Paradise Regain'd . . . to which is added Samson Agonistes* gives readers the tools for resisting an ideology of historical necessity and the "grand forgetting" encouraged by the Restored Crown, then it seems helpful to understand dissenting reading less as the product of a unified agent and more as a relation made possible by a system of commercial book production that often found itself at odds with Restoration censorship. Milton's poems work within this contradiction, resisting Royalist illusions of historical necessity while preserving them in print. The following chapter explores another strategy for keeping the reader active and deals more explicitly with the problem and potential of Milton's audience. By making the labour of its protagonist synonymous with idolatry and exploitation, *Samson Agonistes* exposes and denounces the conditions of public representation in Restoration England. Milton's dramatic poem intervenes at a formal level, attempting to distance the textual space of reading from the spectacle of theatrical production with the goal of transforming a passive audience into an active readership.

Chapter Three

"Sad friends of truth": From audience to reader in Milton's 1671 poems

> The friends of the *perhaps* are the friends of truth.
>
> (Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*)[36]

> As therefore among Papists, their ignorance in Scripture chiefly upholds Popery; so among Protestant People, the frequent and serious reading thereof will soonest pull Popery down.
>
> (Milton, *Of True Religion*)

Throughout his published career, Milton acknowledged his dependence upon a reading public. In *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), the young poet speaks of a "covenant with any knowing reader," asking that they "go on trust . . . toward the payment" of an appropriately mature, future work (843). Aware of his youth, and anticipating his career through "intent study," Milton could not be prepared for what would befall him in later years. But his early awareness of a later occasion for some great work—"Time serves not now," he suggests in the same tract—is similarly demonstrated in his early sonnets.

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[36] Jacques Derrida's reference to the "friends of truth" is taken from Nietzsche's projections of a future audience in *Beyond Good and Evil*. In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida reads Nietzsche's faith in the "coming philosophers" in terms of the German philosopher's qualifying "perhaps," and explores the conditions of impossibility that Nietzsche identifies with the "common good." Following England's Restoration, Milton may have shared some Nietzsche's sentiments, at least with respect to his audience. Derrida's attempt to engage Nietzsche on friendship (which, for the philosopher depends on the "I" and, occasionally, a "we"—what amounts to a contradictory community of solitudes) is an attempt to "honour (*faire droit*) what appears impossible" in Nietzsche's anticipations (36). This chapter addresses a similar impossibility in the audience of readers anticipated by Milton's 1671 poems.

Yet be it less or more, soon or slow,

It shall be still in strictest measure even

To that same lot, however mean or high,

Toward which time leads me . . . (9-12)

For the speaker of Sonnet 7, the weight of expectation has produced an irresistible desire for action; but the poem's final sestet transforms what first appears as inconvenient delay into time given for preparation. This discipline of waiting, in other words, has less to do with individual labour than it does with one's reception of given time. For this reason, the sonnet's concluding couplet challenges the poet's creative impulse. Its speaker must recognize that his vocation is conditioned by God's pre-emptive giving, which means that his work is, in a sense, already complete: "All is, if I have grace to use it so, / As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye" (13-14). The speaker's sense of time's fullness (*pleroma*) in Sonnet 7 prefigures the messianic moment that begins *Paradise Regain'd*: ". . . I knew the time / Now full, that I no more should live obscure, / but openly begin" (1.286-87). Here, the Son's *pleroma* coincides with the present, thus marking the savior's transition from private preparation to public action.

Blind and having narrowly escaped execution, Milton would begin his post-Restoration career in shame. Following the return of the British crown, the poet who had once staked a claim in the collective future of his audience found himself forced to defer the very possibility of an audience to the future. Among the many memorable instances of autobiography in *Paradise Lost*, the poet's

appeal to Urania, the muse of astronomy, in the proem to Book 7 enjoins his desire for theological knowledge with a plea for "fit" reception.

> . . . still govern thou my song,
> Urania, and fit audience find, though few.
> But drive far off the barbarous dissonance
> Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
> Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
> In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
> To rapture, till the savage clamor drowned
> Both harp and voice; nor could the Muse defend
> Her son. So fail not thou, who thee implores:
> For thou art Heav'nly, she an empty dream. (7.30-39)

Where the pagan myth ends in dismemberment, the poet's invocation of "Heav'nly" Urania demonstrates his faith in the assimilation of pagan myth into Christian theology, the all-consuming fullness of divine time. Michael Lieb treats Milton's proem as a revision of the Horatian ode, containing the same structural elements. The poet's supplication identifies "the muse as guardian of the poet against the forces of chaos and disorder" with the hope that he "will be spared the pain of a sparagmos [the Dionysian ritual of dismemberment] his forbear [Orpheus] could not escape" (Lieb 1994: 63, 65). Lieb emphasizes the anxiety inherent in such an appeal, tracing its presence throughout Milton's epic. The point of Book 7's proem, he argues, is that the poet's return to "the visible diurnal sphere" is not a return to safety. Rather, the poet "finds himself stationed

within a realm fraught with the dangers equally as great as those that confronted him when he was 'rapt beyond the Pole'" (Lieb 1994: 69). Along with the poet's anxiety of dismemberment, these lines establish the inextricable relationship between audience and violence that haunts Milton's pre- and post-revolutionary output.

In *Areopagitica*, Milton defined the task of reading as the collective process of re-membering the dismembered body of Truth. Here, the "sad friends of Truth" imitate "the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris" (1644: 955). With relationships disciplined through the act of reading, rather than through the coercion of state-mandated licensing, Milton's tract suggests, "the slow-moving Reformation which we labour under" could be advanced with greater speed. "A little generous prudence," he writes, "a little forbearance of one another, and some grain of charity might win all these diligences to join and unite into one general and brotherly search after truth" (1644: 958). Compared to his humble appeal for a "fit audience . . . though few" in *Paradise Lost*, this optimistic passage from *Areopagitica* finds Milton preoccupied not with dismemberment, but with what is a necessarily social process of reconstitution, which, as we have seen in previous chapters, is guided by a metaphor of Eucharistic consumption. Understood together, Milton's pre- and post-revolutionary writings help to expand his notion of a "fit" reader to one defined by exercise in a field of representation. This chapter recognizes Milton as an author who abandoned the notion of a static or simply "appropriate" audience for his poetry. Instead, Milton's late poems project an audience whose

fitness is defined by the active labour of interpretation: that is, one that remains in practice. In the same way that Sonnet 7 transforms the young poet's sense of delayed output into the ground of responsive desire and preparation, Milton's post-Restoration poetry grapples with the difficulties of timing and occasion while exercising readers for an alternate future.

In a recent essay, David Lowenstein sums up the divergence of critical opinion regarding the dual function of the 1671 edition, *Paradise Regain'd . . . to which is added Samson Agonistes*.[37] Between the choice of the Son's spiritual warfare and Samson's physical violence, the trend in contemporary scholarship finds critics condemning the devastating act of *Samson Agonistes*, arguing instead for the supersession of *Paradise Regain'd*. This fits with a familiar assumption, that Milton's late poetry marks a turn "from politics to faith." Revealed along with the Son's identity, the argument goes, is a new kind of spiritual warfare that did not yet exist for the characters of the Old Testament. While Lowenstein's tactic is to demonstrate how the Son's apparent pacifism does not actually eliminate the use of violence or force, this chapter argues that the question of violence raised by this volume has less to do with the ethics of an isolated act, than it does with the author's political circumstances, which he understood as inappropriate limits for Protestant reading. But rather than reducing the poem to allegorical representation of Milton's biography, this

[37] See David Lowenstein, "From Politics to Faith in the Great Poems?" *Visionary Milton: Essays on Prophecy and Violence*. Eds. Peter E. Medine, John T. Shawcross, David V. Urban. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2011), 269-288.

chapter suggests that the violence of *Samson Agonistes* functions as a testing ground for Restoration subjects, and thus works to produce a form of reception that is specific to its historical moment.

Instead of external coercion—whether it amounts to a violent takeover or an invitation to "bondage with ease"—the poems of the 1671 volume make clear that what is needed for any substantial politics is a time of trial and preparation. Especially in *Samson Agonistes*, our attention should not be focused solely on the ethics of Samson's destructive act, but also on the reception and response of his Hebrew compatriots. It is their failure, not simply Samson's, which for Milton marks the limits of dissenting politics within the Restoration. With this in mind, we can understand the Son's wilderness retreat in *Paradise Regain'd* as a passage through the kind of discipline that prepares a nation to open itself to actual political transformation.

In both texts, the poet's understanding of audience remains bound to some form of violence, whether in his anticipation of the Son's sacrifice at the hands of a "herd confused" or the internal struggle through which Samson passes to fulfill his vocation as Israel's liberator. "Fit" or charitable readers are thus mixed in with what the Son calls "A miscellaneous rabble, who extol / Things vulgar, and well weighed, scarce worth praise" (3.50-2). Yet through his "fierce remembrance" of Dalila and his nation, Samson demonstrates the equally destructive potential of inward authority, thus complicating our attempts to locate some clear internal or external source of hostility. The chaos that remains latent in the Poet's depiction of Creation in *Paradise Lost* presents itself in a

volatile public who seeks after earthly idols and remains at work in Samson's troubled thoughts (3.69; 1.19-22). But like the chaos of Milton's epic, this antagonism bears the potential of new creation—a potential that is disciplined and actualized through the practice of reading. However tempting it is to set Milton (or his poetry) solely against an external culture of violence,[38] it would be wrong to reduce Milton's "public" to a brutal mob, simply at odds with the individual's private integrity. Rather, both protagonists in the 1671 volume appear caught between the divine mediation of private "motions" and a sense of public responsibility that follows from their election by God.

As many critics have recognized, both poems question the value of vocation and its relation to the public good. In his study of the Georgic ideal in seventeenth century poetry, Anthony Low argues that *Paradise Regain'd*

> sanctifies labour and thus allows humanity the opportunity to assist in the divine work of planting and harvesting, giving to his followers the grace that will allow them to find a paradise within and even make it possible for them to achieve a just society on earth. (323)

While the Son "earn[s] salvation for the sons of men" (1.167) by removing himself from society and resisting temptations of visible or "published" forms of authority, Samson's struggle is less clear cut, in part because of his thoroughly public representation. The hero's visibility at the "public mill" of the Philistines is lent further emphasis by the continued presence of an audience that has been

[38] This is one of the less compelling assumptions of Michael Lieb's *Milton and the Culture of Violence*.

written into the play, namely the Chorus and Semichorus. If the Son's "key of charity" provides readers with a way of displacing their interpretive labour and making it appear unproductive—a strategy for keeping them active—Samson figures as a textual site that opens a space for interpretation, asking readers to reconsider the effects of such labour. In this way, Milton's audience must work alongside Samson's various interpreters throughout the poem—Dalila, Manoa, Harapha, the Messenger, the Chorus, and even Samson himself. What becomes decisive for Samson, however, is not just the reading of his own situation—his election, his failure, and his bondage—but of historical time and the fortuitous occasion.

Both of the poems that comprise the 1671 volume deal extensively with the question of timing and its relationship to public action. What appears to be missing from Samson's labour is a proper understanding of *kairos*, or messianic time. While this is revealed as a defining problem for the Israelites, who repeatedly fail to lay hold of the occasion, *kairos* is rigorously debated and finally achieved in the volume's first poem, *Paradise Regain'd*. For readers of the first edition, Israel's failure to seize their moment as *kairos* follows directly after the Son's rejection of false *pleroma* (time's fullness) and the beginning of his public ministry. Although the printed order of these texts may have originated somewhat arbitrarily (likely for commercial reasons), the volume's historical disjointedness has the effect of locating readers in their present moment, on the messianic side of history, and, thus, on the threshold of public

action. As Samson's place in England's national imagination makes clear,[39] seventeenth century readers did not simply relegate the Old Testament judge to an ancient past, but used the story of Israel's judge to interpret their present.

The 1671 edition of *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* enabled Milton's seventeenth-century audience to work through the relationship between divine calling and productive labour. Such reading occurred against the backdrop of a Restored monarchy and a revived state church. John Guillory has suggested that Samson's final act of violence is a "deviant labour of destruction" against the vocational narrative of the bourgeois Protestant (1988: 152). Responding to this claim, Blair Hoxby has instead identified "an ideology of productivity" as the target of Samson's violence (2002: 217).[40] As he notes, the result was a public sphere where individual labour was neutralized in the service of England's economic prospects. In this context, Milton's focus on the alienation of Samson's "servile toil" from "Israel's deliverance, / The work to which" he is "divinely called," suggests a repoliticization of labour through a reconsideration

[39] See, for example, *Areopagitica*'s image of "a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after a sleep and shaking her invincible locks. Me thinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam, purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance, while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms" (959-960).

[40] Hoxby further suggests that, in the time of *Samson Agonistes*' publication, this ideology "was proving an effective means for Anglican Royalists and their allies in the City to counter the iconoclastic rhetoric of their opponents, to consolidate the position of the restored monarchy, and to steer public discourse away from divisive issues of political or church organization toward an ideal of prosperity

of its ends (225-6). Where earlier tracts represented the common labour of interpretation as an inherently ennobling activity, *Samson Agonistes* unfolds by revealing the fatal combination of labour and idolatry, and sets up an opposition between the practice of reading and popular forms of representation. The outward unity of labour and idolatry in Samson's performance is the first indication that the biblical hero cannot simply rely on his audience for the delivery of a revolutionary occasion. In his preface to *Samson Agonistes*, Milton describes a similar kind of dialectic at work in his poem's dramatic form, which follows the conventions of classical tragedy while simultaneously eschewing the spectacle of the Restoration theatre. In line with Milton's Protestant iconoclasm—the violent rejection of religious images as blasphemy—I argue that the destruction of the Philistine temple also follows a formal transition from theatrical spectacle to the printed book, and consequently from a passive audience to an active readership. The material irregularities of the 1671 edition highlight this transition and further define audience reception within a space of reading. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's discussion of violence as the origin of law and the condition of its reproduction, this chapter works to distinguish Samson's "destructive character" from the processes of commemoration that immediately follow his demolition of the Philistine temple.

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and productivity that promised to provide a new ground for social consensus" (217).

"Day labour, light denied"

In his classic assessment of the Protestant work-ethic, Max Weber argues that what distinguishes the "calling" in its Reformed guise from the conception of the calling within Medieval and Hellenistic societies is the newfound assertion that "the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs is the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume" (40). It is for this reason, he continues, that "every-day worldly activity" assumed a new kind of religious significance following the rise of Protestantism. While Weber's generalized conclusions may not prove applicable to Milton's late poetry, his work provides us with a consideration of the "calling" through the condition of public visibility. The question of "labouring in a calling" runs through Satan's temptations in *Paradise Regain'd,* drawing on the spiritual dilemmas of Protestant readers caught navigating the implicit distance between grace and work. *Samson Agonistes* poses the question, more bluntly, through the failure of its protagonist:

> To what can I be useful, wherein serve
> My nation, and the work from Heav'n imposed
> But to sit idle on the household hearth,
> A burdenous drone; to visitants a gaze,
> Or pitied object, these redundant locks
> Robustious to no purpose clust'ring down,
> Vain monument of strength. (564-70)

As Dayton Haskin notes, the question of usefulness, here posed by Samson, would have been especially pertinent to those seventeenth-century readers familiar with Christ's Parable of the Talents.[41] Because the parable "was characteristically redeployed as an authoritative text about 'callings,'" writes Haskin, it lent itself quite easily to the story of Samson (166). Thus, in the writings of William Perkins,[42] as well as in the marginal glosses of the Geneva Bible, Samson's enslavement by the Philistines was attributed to his failure to carry out his vocation. Milton's reworking of the Samson narrative focuses on the explicitly public dimension of Samson's election, presenting the domestic sphere as a space of failure—one that leads not simply to a feminization of the heroic figure according to the sexual division of labour, but an idolatrous form of servitude that would close him off from the possibilities of national redemption.[43] When Manoa advises Samson to accept his "offered means," his son responds, "Here rather let me drudge and earn my bread" (573). Manoa is quick to remind Samson that by remaining in bondage, he profanes his gift of strength by redirecting its purpose from national liberation to menial labour. And

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[41] Haskin compares *Samson Agonistes* with two interrelated contexts of seventeenth-century reading: "life narratives, in which the parable of the talents was sometimes invoked as a master-text in relation to which a person . . . might plot the course of her life, and the doctrine of callings, of which Weber made so much in his classic study of 'the Protestant ethic'" (169).

[42] See *A Treatise of Callings*, in which Perkins argues that Samson lost his strength "because hee went out of his calling" (Quoted in Haskin, 166).

[43] On the sexual division of labour within *Samson Agonistes* see John Guillory, "Dalila's House: *Samson Agonistes* and the Sexual Division of Labour" in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 106-122.

where such a gift should be symbolic of the giver—in this case, the Hebrew God—Samson has put his strength in service of Israel's enemies, thus bringing glory to their god, Dagon. Here, idolatry is forcefully presented in the unity of its symbolic and material effects.

By revealing the source of his strength to Dalila, Samson has violated the internal principle of his election. He has "published" his secret and thus allowed Israel's enemies to affix its meaning. Like the Poet of *Paradise Lost*, Samson has "fall'n on evil days . . . and evil tongues" (*PL* 7.25-26). His is the fate of an author whose published texts, the visible effects of his labour, have fallen into the hands of uncharitable readers. As Manoa's emphasis on the "shame" of his "house" makes clear, Samson's domestic failure is all too public. Acknowledging this, Samson responds to his father's lament like an author who has misled his audience and animated his opponents.

> . . . to God [I] have brought
> Dishonor, obloquy, and oped the mouths
> Of idolists and atheists; have brought scandal
> To Israel, diffidence to God, and doubt
> In feeble hearts, propense enough before
> To waver, or fall off and join with idols;
> Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow,
> The anguish of my soul, that suffers not
> Mine eye to harbor sleep, or thoughts to rest. (451-59)

Samson here entertains the possibility that he has become an idol. Against the incessant flow of God's grace, he resembles a static image: what, in Milton's symbolic economy, amounts to a false sign. Where Samson was once a confident participant in "God's propos'd deliverance" of Israel, his current "use" appears analogous to the place of Pharaoh in the Exodus story: that of an unwilling actor in Israel's salvation narrative. The material effects of such labour only lend credence to unfavorable public opinion. As Samson carries out "The work of many hands, which earns [his] keeping," he produces "no small profit daily to [his] owners" (1260-61). Recognizing his vulnerability to the "gaze" of onlookers, Dalila appeals to Samson by offering the domestic as a protective space, a retreat from his vulnerability in the public eye. Here, he would be "home in leisure and domestic ease, / Exempt from many a care and chance to which / Eyesight exposes daily men abroad" (917-19). Equally tempting for Samson—though perhaps more explicit in Manoa's attempt to buy off the Philistines—is the fact that his departure from public space would render his labour completely unproductive, shutting down its potential for any kind of alternative signification.

Without the freedom to publicly express their religious and political convictions, and without hope of advancement in the Court or in the established Church, dissenting readers would have likely found Samson's position a familiar one.[44] According to Blair Hoxby, many who opposed the tenure of Charles II

[44] Sir William Petty, for example, figured populations into his accounts of national assets, recommending that, rather than being put to death, individuals

found that they "could assert their personalities and exert their industry *only* through labour" (214). Indeed, Samson's insistence on "labour / Honest and lawful to deserve my food" would have struck a chord, even though the rest of the play serves to question the effects of Samson's stubborn solution. Instead of valorizing labour as such, *Samson Agonistes* attacks the popular Royalist assumption that a common world of goods and commerce could function as a post-political ground of belonging for English society. The poem thus emphasizes the link between the production of wealth and its political consequences: the power to wage war and trade abroad, as well as the consolidation of the Crown as a safeguard of the market.[45]

Nearly every character in Milton's poem acknowledges how Samson's work at the "public mill" collapses labour into idolatry. But while Samson's

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who transgressed the laws of the state should be condemned to slavery. Hoxby notes that, following the Restoration, the acts and Coventicles passed by Parliament to suppress religious minorities "seem to be predicated on a theory like Petty's. They provide for a sequence of punishments beginning with fines and the confiscation of property, graduating (in the case of the Quakers) to 'hard labour' in the 'Common Gaol or House of Correction,' and culminating, for repeat offenders, in transportation 'to any of his Majesty's Plantations beyond the Seas'" (2002: 212).

[45] A similar analysis of early modern reactions to a burgeoning economy, which increasingly required the abstraction of exchange relationships from *moral* categories, is David Hawkes *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature. 1588-1680*. Idolatry is for Hawkes an analogue and an avenue of critique for the growing realm of abstraction (or representation) that is generated by capitalist exchange. Idolatry is thus "a confusion of means and ends—that is to say with a violation of 'natural teleology'—[which] was typical, indeed axiomatic, in the sixteenth and seventeenth century" (5). In Hawkes' reading of literature from the period, "the people of Reformation England recognized an analogous, or rather homologous, violation of natural teleology in the growing influence of the market economy" (6). It is in this

labour has inevitably shamed his father's house and brought glory to Dagon, it has also provided the hero with bodily exercise and some degree of recovered strength, thus preparing him for a decisive moment of retribution. As the speaker of Sonnet 7 recognizes, the virtue of patience works to transform what seems like delay into preparation. When the public officer invites Samson to the "solemn feast" of Dagon, Israel's hero resists, touting Hebrew law and expressing his fatigue as an "over-laboured" slave. In his final moments on stage, Samson's reiterates that he will *not* break the law (1385-86; 1408-9; 1423-25). In this scene, Milton sets faith against the fixed effects of Samson's idolatry. Each of Samson's closing statements is joined by a supplementary possibility or qualification, which together draw out the limits of Samson's historical knowledge, and with it, the limits of personal choice and individual agency: "This day will be remarkable in my life / By some great act, / *or of my days the last*" (1388-9); "Yet this be sure, in nothing to comply Scandalous *or forbidden in our* law" (1408-9); ". . . of me expect to hear / Nothing dishonorable, impure, unworthy / Our God, our law, my nation, or myself, / The last of me *or no I cannot warrant*" (1423-26, my emphases). By acknowledging the contingency of his actions, Samson is able to evade the immediate obstacles of Old Testament law. By acknowledging God as source of Hebrew law, in other words, Samson is able to gesture beyond it. Within this messianic horizon, Samson's future work is wrested away from a necessarily idolatrous fate.

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sense, he argues, that idolatry was, for Reformers like Milton, akin to what we now refer to as ideology or false-consciousness.

In their final discussion with Samson, the Chorus dismisses the visible effects of the hero's "great act" by privileging the inward freedom of conscience over outward conformity: "Where the heart joins not, outward acts defile not" (1368). Samson's response to the Chorus draws a similar distinction, but qualifies the relationship between individual will and external constraints: "Where outward force constrains, the sentence holds" (1369-72). With regard to his final labour, Samson does not meet these conditions. He has freely decided to enter the temple based on the guiding potential of some secret impulse. Indeed, the poem adapts the biblical story to open up a space of deliberation, which later occurs for the Chorus and Manoa *via* the Messenger. Samson's public activity has put him in an exchange relationship with his audience, but with its dramatic rendering of the biblical narrative, Milton's poem transforms this individual burden into an appeal for collective responsibility. While Samson's success has risen and fallen through his production of visible signs for his people, his final moments betray a space of labour that exists beyond the idolatrous desires of his spectators. As the Chorus admits to Samson, "This Idols day hath been to thee no day of rest, / Labouring thy mind / More than the working day thy hands" (1297-99). What makes Samson's final act possible, in other words, is his ability to engage in a form of labour that escapes the idolatrous fate of his manual work. In *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regain'd*, such interpretive labour has less to do with the question of personal salvation than Weber's description of an excessively rational Protestant identity would suggest.[46] As Samson recognizes,

[46] In his chapter, "The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism" in *The*

successful action depends on one's ability to respond when occasion presents itself. Without the right attention to timing, individual labours will not be productive without becoming idolatrous.

Reading the occasion

Milton's concern with time, a well-documented characteristic of his early poetry, makes a decisive return in his late poems. Of the virtues that are praised throughout the 1671 poems, patience is embodied by the Son in *Paradise Regain'd*, as well as singled out by the Chorus of *Samson Agonistes* as the "exercise / Of saints," and "the truest fortitude" (1287-8; 654). In the former poem, the interpretive problem of timing affords Satan one of his most disarming temptations.

> If kingdom move thee not, let move thee zeal,
> And duty; zeal and duty are not slow;
> But on Occasion's forelock watchful wait.
> They themselves rather are occasion best,
> Zeal of thy Father's house, duty to free
> Thy country from her heathen servitude;
> So shalt thou best fulfill, best verify

Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber writes, "The life of the saint was directed solely toward a transcendental end, salvation. But precisely for that reason it was thoroughly rationalized in this world and dominated entirely by the aim to add to the glory of God on earth. . . . Only a life guided by constant thought could achieve conquest over the state of nature. . . . It was this

> The prophets old, who sung thy endless reign,
>
> The happier reign the sooner it begins;
>
> Reign then; what canst thou better do the while? (3.171-80)

The language of occasion saturates Milton's 1671 poems, marking the deliberations of his protagonists with a pronounced sensitivity to the unity of their temporal and spiritual conditions. With these lines from *Paradise Regain'd*, Milton alludes to the crisis of timing—and, with it, the honorable desire for "zeal and duty"—that determines Samson's agony over Israel's failure to recognize its occasion. In this scene, Satan turns occasion from a category of inner knowledge into an outward sign. Here, Milton makes explicit use of the popular emblem of Occasion, as seen in popular emblem books and in, notably, in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.[47] The *OED*'s examples further highlight the external nature of "occasion" as a cause: that which precedes an action or an effect. In its most common usage, "occasion" refers to a conjunction of circumstances (including but not limited to events or happenings) that tend toward a favorable result. The actor's success is decided by his response, which necessarily implicates him in a process of interpretation. With his memory haunted by moments of national

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rationalization which gave Reformed faith its particular ascetic tendency, and is the basis both of its relationship to and its conflict with Catholicism" (60).

[47] See especially Whitney's *Choice of Emblems*, where Occasion is represented allegorically, in line with Spenser's treatment, as a hag whose forelock of hair must be grabbed before she turns her face. In the *Faerie Queene*, Occasion is "the roote of all wrath and despight" (II.iv.10). She is therefore the enemy of temperance (represented by Guyon): Occasion either tempts one into premature action or passes beyond reach before she is recognized. In Satan's rhetoric, the Son's failure to grasp Occasion means that he has become "over-ripe" in his

incompetence, Samson interprets Israel's recent political history as a series of failed occasions.

Even with his body at rest, Samson is overtaken by "restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm / Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone, / But rush upon me thronging, and present / Times past, what once I was, and what am now" (19-22). The past, in other words, does not sit still for Samson, but instead torments him, disciplining his reading of the present by grounding it in Israel's history of failure. By representing time in this way, Samson risks assuming the identity of a spectator, thereby distancing himself from his vocation. In his commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans, Giorgio Agamben emphasizes the link between messianic calling (*klesis*) and messianic time (*kairos*). New Testament writers, he suggests, also draw a crucial distinction between *chronos* (chronological or secular time) and *kairos*, which is often translated as "occasion." Agamben interprets *kairos* as a "summary recapitulation of the past," which "produces a *pleroma*, a saturation and fulfillment of *kairoi*" (76). Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, he argues that messianic time cannot be equated with eschatology, the logic of which is to postpone the kingdom in the form of a future revelation. "The messianic is not the end of time, but *the time of the end*," it is the time that reconditions all time (62). In this framework, each instant is related to the messiah, such that "each *kairos* is *unmittelbar zu Gott* [immediate to God], and is not just the final result of a process" (76). As

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years (3.31). In this instance, Satan wrongly locates earthly events and public opinion as the object of the Son's interpretive deliberations.

Agamben makes clear, messianic time for St Paul is not a supplementary addition to chronological time. It occurs, rather, as the relation between time and its end, an inversion of the past and the future that, unlike chronological time, cannot be spatially represented. The messianic event is thus "comprised of two heterogeneous times, one *kairos* and the other *chronos,* one an operational time and the other a *represented* time, which are coextensive but cannot be added together" (70, my emphasis). Because the messianic *klesis* is caught up in operational time, it takes on the form of the "as not," which, for Agamben, results in "the revocation of every vocation."

In the 1671 poems, we are first alerted to the *pleroma* of *kairos* when the Son recounts his baptism in the first book of *Paradise Regain'd*. After searching the scriptures for clues to his identity, the Son is resigned in faith to his future work of redemption.

> Yet neither thus disheartened or dismayed,
> The time prefixed I waited, when behold
> The Baptist (of whose birth I oft had heard,
> Not knew by sight) now come, who was to come
> Before Messiah and his way prepare.

With this focused time of waiting and preparation, the Son's public career can begin in the fullness of time—that is, in immediate relation to the Father's will. Fully assuming the present moment, the time of *kairos* thus begins according to God's pronouncement.

> And last the sum of all, my Father's voice,

Audibly heard from Heav'n, pronounced me his,
Me his beloved Son, in whom alone
He was well pleased; by which I knew the time
Now full, that I no more should live obscure,
But openly begin, as best becomes
The authority which I derived from Heav'n. (1.268-272; 283-289)

Combined with Milton's setting of the poem in the present tense (1.2; 1.18), *Paradise Regain'd* opens with an explicit focus on the current moment of reading, the coincidence of the poet's song and its reception by an audience.

For the Son to begin his public ministry and work under his Father's calling, the poem requires that he demonstrate his awareness of *kairos*. In his rejection of empire, the Son reminds his adversary that *kairos* brings with it divine judgment: "My time I told thee (and that time for thee / Were better farthest off) is not yet come" (3.396-7). As Laurie Zwicky points out, this use of John 7:6 enjoins biblical *kairos* with public action (274). The beginning of the Son's public vocation, in other words, cannot be separated from the unfolding of *kairos*. His final rejection of false *pleroma* on the pinnacle of the temple corresponds to *kairos* in all its fullness. As Jesus stands firm, we are presented with a glimpse of that unity which marks the beginning and end of history: the Satanic fall meets its end in God's final judgment (4.560-95). In its original format, the Son's triumph is immediately followed by *Samson Agonistes*. If Milton's brief epic is concerned with the "perfect moment," observes Blair Hoxby, then what is at stake in *Samson Agonistes* is a "second chance" (167).

Indeed, this sense of repetition is conveyed through Samson's very name, the etymology of which is "there the second time" (Haskin 177). By proceeding from *Paradise Regain'd* to *Samson Agonistes*, the 1671 volume suggests a reconditioning of Old Testament temporality, inviting readers to reconsider the represented time of public action (*chronos*) through the lens of *kairos*. In this way, the timing of England's second chance for Reformation finds its analogue in the timing of Samson's second chance to deliver Israel from Philistine bondage.

National occasion

By the time *Samson Agonistes* was published, Samson had already appeared in Milton's writing as an emblem for the English nation in *Areopagitica*. The 1645 tract imagines "a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after a sleep and shaking her invincible locks" (959). While this vision of Samson draws on the hero's regeneration, Royalist texts like George Starkey's *Royal and Other Innocent Bloud Crying Aloud to Heaven For Due Vengeance* (1660) considered revolutionary Reformers such as Milton alongside the Philistines. Similarly, Matthew Griffith's *The Fear of God and the King* (1660) drew the parallel between the captive Samson and the condemned Charles I, looking forward to the Restoration as God's revenge on a seditious nation (Gay 101). *Samson Agonistes* again casts Israel's judge as a representation of the English nation, but it does so by rendering a tragic disjunction between the hero's performance and the reception of his native audience. As Manoa tells the

Chorus, moments after his son has departed offstage, Samson embodies "a nation armed the strength contained" (1493-94). Samson is at once a symbol of Israel's potential strength and a symptom of its actual weakness.

According to the Chorus, Samson has consistently sought "just occasion to provoke / The Philistine" (237). For all his effort, such attempts have been ineffective: "Israel still serves with all his sons" (240). In his defense, Samson does not assume the blame, but highlights the collective failure of Israel to seize hold of his "offered" deliverance. "Had Judah that day joined, or one whole tribe, / They had by this possessed the towers of Gath, / And lorded over them whom now they serve" (265-68). The Chorus responds to Samson's retelling of his heroic resistance by remembering other biblical judges, Gideon and Jephtha, each of whom presented the Israelites with occasions for victory that resulted in political failure. "[A]dd me to the roll," suggests Samson, recognizing the historical pattern that has emerged and will continue through the book of Judges.

Unlike Samson, Dalila understands her Philistine audience and they, in turn, admire her. The Philistines are thus able to lay hold of the various occasions that she produces. Samson, on the other hand, produces moments of deliverance that are routinely ignored. His failure of interpretation is also a failure of memory. Again joining violence to memory, Samson sets his potential for "fierce remembrance" against what he sarcastically calls, "the pious works" that will make Dalila "memorable / Among illustrious women, faithful wives" (955-7). Samson's frustration reflects the fact that, in her "matrimonial treason," Dalila has succeeded precisely where he has failed. She has not respected the

domestic bounds of the household, but has launched her attack on her people's enemy at his most vulnerable, at the time "when men seek most repose and rest" (406). Her story will be "recorded" because she "chose / Above the faith of wedlock-bands" in order "to save / Her country from a fierce destroyer" (985-6). All that is left for Samson, according to Dalila, is to envy her success, the apparent unity of her individual "piety" and its public reception, along with the skill and loyalty she "was judged to have shown." Where Dalila succeeds in the realm of representation, and its corresponding national interpretation, Samson is forced to come to grips with the fact that his audience's failure is also his own.

Like his Hebrew compatriots, Milton's Samson has a tendency to instrumentalize his election, and frequently uses the language of occasion to suit his own interests. He suggests that, before entering captivity, he saw the potential for national liberation in his "marriage choices." But, as Manoa cautions his son, it is difficult to distinguish the proper instance of advantageous action from the conditions of self-interest and temptation.

> . . . [T]hou didst plead
> Divine impulsion prompting how thou might'st
> Find some occasion to infest our foes.
> I state not that; this I am sure, our foes
> Found soon occasion thereby to make thee
> Their captive, and their triumph; thou the sooner
> Temptation found'st, or over-potent charms
> To violate the sacred trust of silence

Deposited within thee . . . (421-29)

Samson's rhetorical maneuvers have masked an obvious occasion for the Philistines to make Samson "Their captive, and their triumph." When he meets the Philistine giant Harapha, Samson must contend with his adversary's reading of this failure—the disjunction between the national hero and his audience—as sign of God's disinterest.

Presume not on thy god, whate'er he be,
Thee he regards not, owns not, hath cut off
Quite from his people, and delivered up
Into thy enemies' hand, permitted them
To put out both thine eyes, and fettered send thee
Into the common prison, there to grind
Among the slaves and asses thy comrades,
As good for nothing else . . . (1156-63)

Samson responds, first, by acknowledging his faults, and second, by recognizing the priority of his divine audience. Israel is "deaf," Samson is "blind," but God's "ear is ever open; and his eye / Gracious to readmit the suppliant" (1172-3). Such words would have registered for Milton's Protestant audience as a gesture toward the new covenant begun in *Paradise Regain'd*. Rather than dwelling on the immediate effects of his labour under the Philistines, Samson reminds readers of the superiority of grace to works and asks them to consider their actions within broader temporal conditions.

The language of occasion presents readers with an interpretive guide to the events that surround them, but as Samson demonstrates, occasion can become an idol. If "*kairos* is nothing more than seized *chronos*," as Agamben puts it, then the successful reception of occasion depends on the active disposition of the subject. Rather than passive expectation, the patience that Samson finally achieves also resembles a form of preparation. Recognizing the givenness of the occasion represents a crucial site of discipline in Israel's political history, and is a necessary part of relating to the Hebrew God. When Samson finally seizes the occasion and brings mass violence against the Philistines, he is tragically "tangled in the fold / Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoined / Thee with thy slaughtered foes . . ." (1665-67). Fate, or the "law" of necessity, has required Samson to meet his end in the course of slaughtering Israel's foes. By inhabiting this representational space, however, Samson is able to undo the logic that binds Israel to the Philistine nation.

In his controversial essay, "Critique of Violence" (1921), Walter Benjamin explores the relationship between positive law and state violence. Samson's massacre has been hailed as an instance of "divine violence" by several recent commentators.[48] Whether or not this designation is appropriate to Milton's poem, it provides useful definition of violence that can help us better

[48] See Sharon Achinstein, "Red Milton: Abraham Polonsky and *You Are There* (January 30, 1955)" in *Visionary Milton: Essays on Prophecy and Violence*, eds. Peter E. Medine, John T. Shawcross, and David V. Urban (Pittsburgh, PN: Duquesne University Press, 2011), 45-61. See also Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Samson Dagonistes" in *Citizen Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 181-204.

understand the significance of Samson's act. Benjamin's early essay articulates a type of violence that operates outside the cycle of law and guilt: a violence that, I argue, is suited to the iconoclastic mode of reading that *Samson Agonistes* works to produce.

Divine violence and *Samson Agonistes*

Violence, in Benjamin's theory, occurs at the instance that any positive law is put into place. "Law-instating violence" falls under the category of "mythic violence" because it unfolds arbitrarily, as though by fate. "Law-preserving violence" is a byproduct of mythic violence; it is tautological in the sense that it legitimates violence for the sake of its own name and reproduces the law by re-asserting its binding function through state institutions and policing. These overlapping forms of violence work together to produce a subject accountable to the law. Against this framework of law and subjectivity, Benjamin posits "divine violence." "If mythical violence is lawmaking," he writes,

> divine violence is law destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythical violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood. (1921: 297)

Benjamin's theory of divine violence marks an attempt to articulate a non-coercive form of violence that occurs outside of the framework of the law and, similarly, outside of the instrumental logic of means and ends that defines the

activity of its agents. Guilt is perhaps the most effective means for the law's reproduction. In her reading of Benjamin's essay, Judith Butler highlights the distinction between the guilt necessary to legal accountability and the divine violence of the Jewish God who, for Benjamin, is "decidedly *not* punitive." Rather than a binding law, she writes, Benjamin understands the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," as

> mandating only that an individual struggle with the ethical edict communicated by the imperative. This is an imperative that does *not* dictate, but *leaves open* the modes of its applicability, the possibilities of its interpretation, including the conditions under which it may be refused. (2006: 205)

The commandment is not coercive, but is rather an occasion for interpretive struggle, from which, Benjamin writes, "no judgment of the deed can be derived" (1921: 298). As he acknowledges in the essay's conclusion, divine violence will not be recognizable with the certainty that can be attached to mythic violence "because the expiatory power of violence is not visible to men" (300). While Benjamin's interpretation of this commandment does not necessarily align with early modern interpretations, which would have certainly enforced it as a positive law, his description of mythic violence addresses the cycle of visibility and coercion that Milton's blind protagonist violently opens up for his audience. Following the conventions of classical tragedy, Milton's Samson can only act off-stage. Israel's response, on the other hand, *is* a visible form of commemoration that inevitably reproduces its conditions of captivity.

As an act of negation, Samson's annihilation of Dagon's temple is decisive, but it loses its force in the very moment it becomes memorialized. Attempts to turn this negation into a positive content tend to focus on the ideal of "free" interpretation at the expense of Samson's overt nationalism.[49] In a recent book, Julia Reinhard Lupton argues that *Samson Agonistes* advances a particular kind of sovereign decision that is "not yet captured by its statist institutionalizations" (184). In his final act of judgment, Samson "embodies the element of violence eluded or evaded in most accounts of citizenship internal to liberalism." Samson's destruction of Dagon's temple, Lupton continues, enacts what Benjamin defines as divine violence. The hero therefore "reclaims his strength from its captivity as pure labour and uses it to destroy the structure of publicity itself" (197). Such violence does not "resolve" but "precipitates" what the political theorist Carl Schmitt calls a "state of emergency," which has the potential to unite Israel and the "vulgar . . . who stood without" the temple against a common enemy: the "choice nobility . . . [of] each Philistian city round" (1654-59). For this reason, Samson's massacre cannot be reduced to an act of genocide. Rather, along with the nation of Israel, it serves to liberate the Philistine multitude from its captive status within a public space defined by elite representatives. In her final argument, Lupton points toward the free space of interpretation that is enabled by Samson's negative performance. Together, she

[49] To such readings, *Areopagitica* can provide a helpful corrective. As we saw in the first chapter, Milton's pre-revolutionary depiction of a free market of ideas has a particular ideological content that works to condition readers into Reformed subjects whose interpretive labours guide national progress.

writes, the imperatives of acting and reading thus "establish the agenda ('things having to be done') for the interpretive community that assembles around Samson's tomb" (202). This "interpretive community" has, however, been exactly the problem throughout the play. The audience's interpretive struggle is everywhere marked by the threat of reified readings that would turn this unrepresentable act into a positive content. Rather than a site of free interpretation, Samson's violence initiates his audience into a specifically *textual* space: a space of reading, premised on the iconoclastic destruction of theatrical representation.

"Fierce remembrance wake"

The conclusion of *Samson Agonistes* illustrates how the rituals that allow Israel to memorialize Samson's heroic narrative lead to national idolatry and thus, gestures towards the continuation of Philistine domination. As Laura Knoppers suggests, "Samson's act of iconoclasm against the Philistines enhances the tendencies toward idolatry in his own people" (1994: 21). Israel's process of commemoration resembles Derrida's description of archiving as a process of remembering that is inextricably linked to forgetting, repression, and exclusion. Like Benjamin's elucidation of mythic violence as law-instating and law-preserving, Derrida identifies the archive's in-built "*eco-nomic*" function: "it keeps, it puts in reserve, it saves, but in an unnatural fashion, that is to say in making the law (*nomos*) or in making people respect the law" (1996: 7). By its own logic, the archive must work against history in order to preserve and protect

it. Memory, then, resembles an aporetic repetition that effectively reproduces and projects its own violent conditions into the future: "The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out to the future" (1996: 68). At the same time the very notion of repetition entails a past that is present or stable enough to be made reproducible through the law's preservation. The singularity of the repressed artefact, notes Derrida, thus returns in the form of a specter. The violence of the archive—the disruption of circulation that is its condition of possibility—haunts its boundaries. In this way, every act of memory also takes the form of anticipation, signaling a pledge, a "token of the future."

While the commemoration of Samson as a national hero limits the emancipatory possibilities of Israel's immediate future, Manoa's closing response to the Messenger's news suggests that a disciplined reading of the occasion would provide Israel with a way forward:

> . . . To Israel
> Honor hath left, and freedom, let but them
> Find courage to lay hold on this occasion;
> . . .
> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble. (1714-24)

Echoing the final words of Samson, Manoa calls for "courage" and emphasizes the negative power of Samson's final act. But the optimistic response of the Chorus is premature. In its assertion that "All is best" the Chorus dialectically completes Manoa's reading. In this way, the Chorus removes itself from *kairos*, or messianic time, by claiming a moment of *pleroma*, of spiritual fullness. By lapsing into the rhyming convention of a Shakespearean sonnet, the Chorus foreshadows its future bondage (1745). Manoa, meanwhile, understands that the memory of Samson may inspire action from "valiant youth" and "inflame their breasts," but his focus on commemoration risks negating the occasion that he recognized in Samson's martyrdom several lines earlier. Here, the domestic fantasies articulated by both Manoa and Dalila appear to be realized.

> I with what speed the while
> (Gaza is not in plight to say us nay)
> Will send for all my kindred, all my friends
> To fetch him hence and solemnly attend
> With silent obsequy and funeral train
> Home to his father's house: there will I build him
> A monument, and plant it round with shade
> Of laurel ever green, and branching palm,
> With all his trophies hung, and acts enrolled
> In copious legend, or sweet lyric song. (1728-37)

But while Dalila's domestication of Samson would have cut him off from the public, Manoa represents the commemoration of Samson as a collective, national

activity. Sharon Achinstein has treated this conclusion as an affirmation of collective memory in the face of historical tragedy, drawing comparisons to the experience of Puritans and other religious Dissenters following the Restoration. While such parallels may, at times, be helpful, they neglect the way in which collective memory in *Samson Agonistes* gives way to idolatry and effectively neutralizes Israel's collective potential through an evasion of interpretation. For Manoa, Samson's destructive end resembles a moment of textual completion: "Samson hath quit himself / Like Samson, and heroic'ly hath finished / A life heroic" (1209-11). Achinstein treats this statement as proof of "the rightful assumption of a name now filled with true significance, the identity won through performance" (2002: 181). Such commemoration, in her reading, is a communal act that secures God's recognition through the active construction of identity. But by the poem's conclusion, the occasion that Manoa first identifies has been displaced through what appears to be an idolatrous celebration of heroism. It thus becomes one of the many repressed moments that will continue to haunt Israel's captivity.

"Or do my eyes misrepresent?"

When readers of the 1671 edition come to the end of *Samson Agonistes* they discover an extra section of verse labeled, "*Omissa*." The content of the *Omissa* reiterates the expressed fantasies of Manoa and the Chorus several lines prior to Samson's offstage destruction. Unsure of what has just happened—that is, what the "hideous noise" or "universal groan" represents—Manoa and the Chorus are

caught in a moment of interpretive crisis. “What shall we do,” asks Manoa, “stay here or run and see?” (1520). While Manoa suspects the worst for his son, the Chorus imagines a positive outcome for Israel that would effectively alleviate their condition of interpretive uncertainty:

> What if his eyesight (for to Israel’s God
> Nothing is hard) by miracle restored,
> He now be dealing dole among his foes,
> And over heaps of slaughtered walk his way?
> *Manoa*. That were a joy presumptuous to be thought.
> *Chorus*. Yet God hath wrought things as incredible
> For his people of old; what hinders now?
> *Manoa*. He can, I know, but doubt to think he will;
> Yet hope would fain subscribe, and tempts belief. (1527-35)

According to Stephen Dobranski, “these ten lines threaten to alter the outcome of Samson’s fate and, when read at the back of the book, retroactively evoke the status of miracles in *Paradise Regained*” (2002: 31). For Dobranski, the importance of the *Omissa* is that it highlights a temptation within the text that must be rejected by its readers. The result is a sharpening of what Dobranski understands to be Milton’s conclusion:

> Whereas we glimpse a miraculous vision of Samson’s reconstitution in the *Omissa*, the poem instead concludes with a problematic image of his final act . . . which, we know from the Book of Judges, ironically fails to effect a lasting political change for Israel. (2002: 41)

In the *Omissa*, in other words, the iconoclasm of Samson finds yet another image to break. In his analysis, however, Dobranski characterizes this process of reading as one that encourages readers to participate in material form of textual "restoration" by following the *Omissa*'s instructions and writing the missing lines into the body of the text. This affirmation of the reader's agency appears alongside Israel's idolatry. Instead of considering how this format assists the poem with its structural critique of Restoration culture, Dobranski argues that this small instance of textual correction corresponds to moment of political agency. In this way, he enjoins "fit" reading with a visible end, presuming that the reader's participation signals a moment of completion rather than an oppositional process of interpretation.

Along with its emphasis on reading as form of textual participation, the 1671 edition of *Samson Agonistes* also considers interpretive activity in relation to public forms of representation. The preface to *Samson Agonistes*, "Of That Sort of Dramatic Poem which is Call'd Tragedy," comes at the midpoint of the 1671 volume, immediately following the edifying conclusion of *Paradise Regain'd*. By focusing on the moments of preparation leading up to the Son's public ministry, Milton's brief epic locates salvation in the life of Jesus rather than in his death. In the context of its original publication, the question of typology—whether Samson represents a type of Christ—arises, in part, because of the peculiar sequence of the two poems. We are, therefore, encouraged to ask whether Samson undergoes a type of passion, or, on the other hand, we are meant to understand the Old Testament hero as a kind of antitype to the Son. The

typological relationship between Samson and Christ has been a source of contention among Milton scholars for some time, and, indeed, the original edition of Milton's poems invites a comparative reading.[50] As Dayton Haskin observes, the 1671 volume's "story of the death of Samson stands in the place where, had Milton given a whole volume of the same size to the life of Christ, the story of the Crucifixion would have occurred" (164). Haskin further argues that it is the strange placement of the poems, out of chronological order, that unsettles this typological comparison and makes it equally "difficult for readers to suppose that the emergence of an antitype closes a narrative and fixes the meaning of the antecedent type" (164).

In *Paradise Regain'd*, the Son's crucifixion is yet to occur, but, as we learn from the Messenger, Samson's performance has all the trappings of a public spectacle. In his preface to *Samson Agonistes*, Milton locates his poem in the tradition of Gregory Nazianzen's Greek tragedy, *Christ Suffering*. With this reference, argues Erin Henrikson, "*Samson Agonistes* is posited as an alternative not just to a Miltonic *Christus patiens*, but to the tradition of *representing* the passion as one of Christ suffering" (174, my emphasis). Although it takes a dramatic form, the author's preface makes clear that his dramatic poem is not to be publicly performed. In her study of Reformation aesthetics, Henrikson

[50] For a collection of recent opinions on the place of Samson, some of which deal with the question of typology, see *Altering Eyes: New Perspectives on Samson Agonistes*, eds. Mark Kelley and Joseph Wittreich (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002). See also Joseph Wittreich, *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting* Samson Agonistes (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002).

persuasively argues that Milton's writing embodies an alternative passion, one which arises from a "theology of brokenness." In place of late medieval representations of the crucifixion (such as the passion play), Milton substitutes a living, obedient Son.[51] For Laura Knoppers as well, the Son's private retreat into the wilderness in *Paradise Regain'd* is meant to replace the outward show of a traditional, Christ-like martyrdom. The Son's separation from the public sphere provides a decisive contrast to the martyr-spectacle of Charles I's execution and departs from the ceremony of "Charles II [who] enter[ed] London in a lavish and magnificent triumphal progress" (Knoppers 1994: 36, 40). Throughout the poem, theatricality is instead associated with Satan, whose strategy depends on dramatic props and ploys. He first appears to the Son as "an aged man in rural weeds"—a false Shepherd, the head of an idolatrous church—and later "as one in city, or court, or in palace bred" (1.314, 2.300). In addition to his disguises, Satan's disjunction between inward "anger and disdain" and outward confidence maintains another level of theatricality throughout the bulk of the poem (1.466). For Milton, such martyrdom had been appropriated by Charles I and championed by the Royalist majority following the Restoration. In the same way that Milton's *Eikonoklastes* responds to Charles I's *Eikon Basilike*, *Paradise Regain'd* rewrites Charles I's supposedly Christ-like martyrdom.

[51] Henrikson thus joins Joseph Wittreich in seeing Samson as a counter-type of Christ, one "whose violent and idolatrous death is to be rejected in favor of a passion that does not involve veneration of physical suffering and the wounded body, does not culminate in death, and cannot submit to idolatry" (193).

Instead of a retelling of Christ's passion, readers are presented with *Samson Agonistes*, a tragedy that assumes dramatic form at the same time that it works to dismantle the visual apparatus that would have conditioned its reception. Milton's late-career bias towards theatrical modes of representation can also be understood as one of many popular reactions to the activities of Charles II and his courtiers. As Gary S. De Krey has put it, "No English court has ever been so intimately associated with the theatre as that of the Restoration" (61). Along with the political transitions that occurred in 1660 came the reopening of theatres by the King's Company and the Duke's Company, and the legalization of women's performance on the English stage. Against this popular appetite for theatrical entertainment, Milton's preface to *Samson Agonistes* reflects his overriding concern with the nature of his reading audience. After describing classical tragedy as "the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems," he locates power of tragedy in its affective content, and draws explicitly on Aristotle's theory of catharsis. Scolding his contemporaries for having embraced the "intermixing" of comic and tragic elements on the Restoration stage, Milton presents *Samson Agonistes* in opposition to the common taste and public opinion. By modeling his dramatic poem on the tragic poets—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—Milton works against the grain, not simply "to gratify the people," but by raising "pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those such-like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well-imitated" (707-8). At once gesturing back to the Greek tradition

and forward to the cathartic potential of his dramatic poem, Milton's preface reconfigures the genre specifically for an audience of readers. Rather than a dramatic model to be followed, Milton's Samson is a text awaiting collective interpretation. Not only is the public theatre implicitly transformed through the poetic rendering of Greek tragedy, it is also depicted as the poem's ideological centre. "The building," relays the Messenger,

> was a spacious theater
> Half round on two main pillars vaulted high,
> With seats where all the lords and each degree
> Of sort, might sit in order to behold;
> The other side was open, where the throng
> On banks and scaffolds under sky might stand;
> I among these aloof obscurely stood. (1605-11)

The sight of Samson in this highly charged, political space is enough to excite the Philistine audience into shouts of praise to Dagon. After he has fulfilled their requirements for performance, Samson is allowed to rest between "two massy pillars / That to the arched roof gave main support," and gives his final words to the crowd:

> Hitherto, lords, what your commands imposed
> I have performed, as reason was, obeying,
> Not without wonder or delight beheld.
> Now of my own accord such other trial
> I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater;

As with amaze shall strike all who behold. (1640-45)

In this speech, Samson draws his elite audience into the present moment and acts to destroy the supports of their public theatre, Dagon's temple. This last performance eliminates this limited space of public representation, the ideological locus of Israel's enemies. Samson's violence, in other words, strikes his enemies precisely where they are most powerful: at the very site of cultural production. We, along with Manoa and the Chorus, are again reminded of our interpretive condition when the Messenger describes the actual violence of the event with a list of natural similes.

This uttered, straining with all his nerves he bowed,
As with the force of winds and waters pent,
When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro
He tugged, he shook, till down they came and drew
The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath. (1646-52)

As the Messenger's explicitly poetic description illustrates, the cataclysmic violence of Samson's act cannot be directly expressed or explained. Attempts to represent such an act spin off into ponderous analogies and imaginative conceits. Along with Manoa and the Chorus, the reader is left to imagine the disaster, thus finding herself in a new kind of interpretive situation.

"The revocation of every vocation"

Rather than a moment of transcendent irruption, Samson's final act repositions his people as actors within an immanent horizon. In this way, he embodies what Benjamin has elsewhere called "the destructive character," whose only activity is that of "clearing away." This character is by nature iconoclastic. As Benjamin writes,

> No vision inspires the destructive character. He has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what has been destroyed. First of all, for a moment at least, empty space, the place where the thing stood or the victim lived. Someone is sure to be found who needs this space without its being filled. (1931: 301-302)

Benjamin also emphasizes the contradictory position of the destructive figure: he is an exposed "signal" to others who has "no interest in being understood." While public representation emerges as a crucial dilemma for Samson, this burden is finally abandoned before he disappears off-stage. Articulating a hidden or inward change, Samson discovers an opening between himself and the Hebrew God; that is, Samson enters into a specifically *textual* space. First refusing to comply with the demands of the Philistine lords, Samson wrestles with the possibility of the occasion and, by the time the Officer has returned, threatening violent coercion, has decided to "do it freely" (1373). After this period of deliberation, Samson enters the public space of the Philistine temple to provide a spectacular proof of Dagon's power. On the Philistine stage, the identity of labour and idolatry achieves its apotheosis in Samson's feats of

strength. Although we cannot be sure whether of Samson's motives are misguided, or whether his sense of God's will is deluded (this uncertainty is, after all, the point), we can see a difference in Samson's political position. The occasion to which he responds occurs within the bounds of his imprisonment, and it is from *within* these limits—limits which have conditioned the collapse of labour into idolatry—that Samson is able to disrupt the cycle of law and guilt that has defined the political life of his people.

The distinction between Samson and his compatriots follows the distinction Benjamin makes between the destructive character and what he calls "traditionalists." While it is common for traditionalists to "pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them," the destructive character passes on "situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them" (1931: 302). In this way, Samson's demolition of the Philistine temple delivers a pivotal, unrepresentable situation to his people. As we have seen, the response of Manoa and the Chorus is a process of commemoration that fixes Samson's identity and determines their future. By the end of Milton's poem, they have exchanged this textual space of reading for the theatrical space of visible signs and proofs. By focusing on the conservation of his memory, in other words, Israel abandons its interpretive situation.

In his final scene, Samson gestures towards a vocational understanding that prefigures its description in the New Testament and coalesces with the socio-economic conditions of Milton's historical moment. According to John Guillory, Samson's brutal final act instantiates him as a fully privatized

individual. “There is an irreducible contradiction,” writes Guillory, “between the possible meanings of Samson’s final act, as a determinate compulsion to repeat, and as the ‘free’ indulgence in the absence of the law, of what the law forbids to the individual – violence” (1988: 165). With this violation of the Hebrew law, argues Guillory, this narrative is bound to class victory and enables the alliance of aristocratic and bourgeois property. Responding to Guillory’s assertion that *Samson Agonistes* is “determined by a contradiction between the demands emanating from the poem’s two fathers,” Manoa (the “social”) and God (the “psychic”), Dayton Haskin points out that the servant-master model, upon which Guillory relies, is repeatedly upended in the New Testament. Vocational labour, as it is expounded in the parables of Jesus often subverts “the ways of thinking about God that have to do with satisfying His demands” (169). Guillory argues, however, that the poem’s competing paternal demands correspond to the parable of talents and the parable of labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-16), both of which depict the relation between God and man as that of a master-employer and a servant-employee” (158). As Haskin counters, “To think of God as one who makes demands is to reveal one’s lack of understanding of a radically new ‘dispensation,’ in which God’s unconditional love precedes all human efforts and renders them superfluous” (169). Where Guillory reads Samson’s final feat as a “desublimation” that transforms Samson’s talent (strength *via* election) into symbolic capital (fame), Haskin refuses to reduce every aspect of the play to its ideological principle of production.

In Guillory's reading of *Samson Agonistes*, Max Weber's Protestant work ethic provides a necessary foundation of historical interpretation. For Weber, the development of this ethic rests on the transformation of Pauline *klesis* (calling) into the modern conception of *Beruf* (both vocation and worldly profession) that is found in Martin Luther's New Testament translation. According to Weber, writes Agamben, "the Pauline text does not convey any positive valuation of worldly professions, but only an attitude of 'eschatological indifference'" (20). The Early Church's belief that God's kingdom was imminent rendered unnecessary a material transformation upon one's conversion. While Luther began with this view of eschatological indifference, suggests Weber, he gradually assumed a different understanding of "the importance of an individual's concrete profession being that of a command placed in him by God to fulfill the duties that correspond to the world position imposed on him" (Agamben 21). For Agamben, Weber's reading of Luther is accurate, but Weber fails to grasp the full meaning of *klesis* in St Paul's letters. *Klesis,* writes Agamben, is "not a matter of eschatological indifference, but of change, almost an internal shifting of each and every single worldly condition by virtue of being 'called'" (22). For St Paul, the messianic community has no specific content or identity; rather, it is constituted by its passage through its "nullification."

> But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they

> that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing *it*: for the fashion of this world passeth away. (I Corinthians 7:29-31)

In this sense, the messianic pushes "each thing toward itself through the *as not*, the messianic does not simply cancel out this figure, but it makes it pass, it prepares its end" (25). Agamben is careful to point out that, to *use* this negative function is not to *possess* it. Living "messianically" thus "signifies the expropriation of each and every juridical-factical property" of identity "under the form of the *as not*" (26).

With the poems of 1671, Milton demonstrates his commitment to a political subject that does not coincide with the Restoration conditions of identity, whether private or collective. Together, *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regain'd* attempt to foster what Agamben has defined as a "remnant." Because the remnant is not any kind of "numeric portion or substantial positive residue" it resists the sedimentation of any specific identity.

> The remnant is not so much the object of salvation as its instrument, that which properly makes salvation possible. . . . The "dimunition" (*hettema*) that makes Israel a "part" and a remnant is produced for the salvation of the *ethne*, the non-Jews, and foreshadows its *pleroma*, its fullness as the all, since, in the end, when the *pleroma* of the people will have come, then "all of Israel will be saved." (56)

This definition depends upon a conception of time that we have noted in Agamben's discussion of *kairos* and *chronos*. The remnant is the "figure" or

"consistency" assumed by the people in the decisive moment and, as such, is for Agamben the only real political subject. This rejection of identity, especially in its quantitative form, also imbues Agamben's reading of vocation in the writings of St Paul as irreducibly messianic.

Against the identity-based logic of a hostile public, Samson's destruction of the Philistine temple produces a textual opening—an expansive space where spectators can become readers. Such space also delivers the reading subject into an unrepresentable conception of time initiated by the Son in *Paradise Regain'd*. As we have seen, Agamben relies on St Paul to demonstrate the relationship between messianic time and its negative function within one's vocation. *Samson Agonistes* evokes a similar tone with its strong focus on the "end." As David Gay has observed, the Hebrew characters of the poem are noticeably "end-conscious," and the term itself appears fifteen times in the poem (117). This preoccupation with ends joins Israel to the Philistines in a form of idolatry that Milton directly opposes to "fit" reading. There is an obvious parallel here, between this emphasis on interpretive process and the material function of the *Omissa*. It is compelling to see this material feature as an invitation to re-read, the effect of which is to *delay* the reader's appetite for an ending or revelatory moment. But such reading also produces a temporal space of its own: a space of interpretation that is not simply a deferral of meaning, but the condition of an altogether different kind of desire, one that, after Benjamin and Agamben, might be called "messianic."

In its material format, the 1671 text enables its readers to enter an interval, a temporal space of deliberation that resists a clear, ideological endpoint just as it resists the possession of a static identity. "A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables," writes Michel de Certeau. "Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contracted proximities" (117). De Certeau's distinction between place and the space opened by its practice corresponds to the difference between the inward dispositions of Samson and Satan. The *Omissa*, then, works as a built-in mechanism that prevents readers from turning the space of reading, opened by the text, into what Satan in *Paradise Lost* calls, "A mind not to be changed by place or time" (1.253). Like the Son in *Paradise Regain'd*, Samson articulates his inward state as an active orientation toward divine dispensation. The "rousing motions" that Samson begins to feel before departing for the Philistine temple are again evinced in the Messenger's description of him "as one who prayed, / Or some great matter in his mind revolved" (1382; 1637-38).

Milton's development of interiority in the 1671 poems retains a strong degree of tension with the public representation of his protagonists. But rather than simply collapsing external categories in favor of individual authenticity, *Samson Agonistes*, in particular, works to release the captive imaginations of its audience and thus initiates a new kind of interpretive situation. Here, the theatrical model of popular spectatorship is demolished. Amid the rubble, Milton

redefines his audience as a social remnant, a non-identical collective of readers. In the shared labour of reading, Milton gestures towards the future, to a form of unrealized social potential that resists the idolatry of Restoration politics. Samson's crisis of vocation becomes for its audience a crisis of reading, but this crisis is not born out of subjective or hermeneutic anxiety. As Israel's hero works inwardly to nullify every worldly condition, so Milton calls his readers to become "joint-heirs with Christ" to a world that is slowly passing away.

Conclusion

Milton and the limits of reading

> All really tested hope, therefore, and all really militant optimism, must go through the ever more searching and destructive experience of the historical process.
>
> (Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*)

From a contemporary perspective, the glaring irony of Milton's "tolerationist" pamphlet is impossible to ignore. The 1673 tract's title page is dominated by one word, which for Milton marks the limit of Protestant reading: "POPERY." *Of True Religion* stakes its claims on Protestantism's absolute opposition to the "Romish Church" and a distillation of the "main Principles of the true Religion: that the Rule of true Religion is the Word of God only: and that their Faith ought not to be an implicit faith, that is, to believe, though as the Church believes, against or without express authority of Scripture" (420). If Protestants were to adhere to these two principles, Milton continues, not only would they avoid the various "Debates and Contentions, Schisms and Persecutions, which too oft have been among them"; they would also "more firmly unite against the common adversary" (Ibid.). True heresy, we discover, lies not in differences of worship or in errors of doctrine, but is in the "Will and choice profestly against Scripture" (423). Reading scripture is a way of resisting spiritual idleness—that is, untested or "implicit faith"—which is as much an obstacle to salvation as it is a gateway for "popish" superstition.

But so long as all these profess to set the Word of God only before them

> as the Rule of faith and obedience; and use all diligence and sincerity of heart, by reading, by learning, by study, by prayer for Illumination of the holy Spirit, to understand the Rule and obey it, they have done what man can do. (423-424)

Based on these qualifications, such men, "the Authors or late Revivers of all these Sects and Opinions" are not God's enemies but should instead be considered "painful and zealous labourers in his Church" (426). Conscience appears throughout Milton's writing as a space of negotiation and liberty, but in *Of True Religion*, we confront its limits, for "we have no warrant to regard Conscience which is not grounded on Scripture" (432). Thus Protestant opposition to Popery can dispense with notions of privacy and the supposed rights of the individual. The fundamental problem with Catholicism, explains Milton, is that it always decides in advance of the individual, dividing its subjects from their God-given capacity for conscientious labour.

While Milton's politics of reading turned from construction to destruction, following end of the England's Commonwealth and Charles II's Restoration, he remained preoccupied with textual interpretation throughout his career. My first chapter explored how Milton's early writing fashions reading as a form of labour that is necessarily unproductive. Not only does reading replace "work" as a means of attaining the free gift of salvation, it also has the potential to unite England in the collective labour of Reformation, a political project whose value exceeds any kind of mercenary exchange. Along with its vision of a unified nation of readers, *Areopagitica* clearly spells out why this labour of

interpretation is an ethical imperative:

> Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out and sort asunder, were not more intermixed. (939)

By disrupting this process, the licensing of books would remove this "working out" of salvation from the purview of believers. It thus constitutes "a particular disesteem to every knowing person alive, and most injurious to the written labours and monuments of the dead . . . [and] seems an undervaluing and vilifying of the whole nation" (949). Reading is ennobling, in this sense, because it instills a sense of shared value, an anticipation of surplus in the form of Reformation, among its participants.

At this early point in his career, Milton's anticipation of social capital was equivalent to the advance of England's Reformation, a conspicuous cause, which he imagined as an international competition. "Let not England forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live," he wrote in the parliamentary address of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (864). In his divorce tracts, Milton's conception of interpretive labour as unregulated rests on a contradiction between private leisure and public vocation that only the "key of charity," embodied in the interpretive posture of Christ, can resolve. Milton's free market model requires that conscience be active in public life, but as *Areopagitica*

reveals, some degree of leisure is necessary for conscientious activity in the first place. At the authorial level, the licensor represents the threat of an "unleisured" participant, just as the unfit companion interrupts the process of labour's reproduction within the domestic sphere. Unlike those whose material labour is subsumed by the unquestioning output of the printing house—a cause that unites author, publisher, and the wage-labour of the print shop—the licensor interferes with production from its outside. In this way, Milton's logic of Protestant interpretation, along with his strong opposition to any kind of extra-textual authority, reveals the secret alliance between reading and commerce in the bourgeois individual.

Since Stanley Fish, Milton has often been associated with a horizon of reading that is untranscendable, where the conditions of an interpretation can always be traced back to an interpretive horizon.[52] Context, politics, even history, for Fish are not objects of study so much as they are moments of interpretive strategy. In this way, they betray attempts locate a constitutive ground or limit that supports a particular reading of the text in question. In Chapter 1's analysis of *Areopagitica*, I sought to historicize this appeal to interpretation as an immanent requirement of bourgeois ideology, which, at the expense of material labour, draws on the tensions of Protestantism (namely, its

[52] As Fish writes in his preface to the second edition of *Surprised by Sin* "The doctrine of inner light marks out the area of interpretive labor; the doctrine of the single Truth names the goal of that labour, but withholds explicit directions for attaining it. The resulting life of strenuous indeterminacy is the condition of all creatures . . . who are not only free to interpret God's commands but unable to do anything except interpret them" (xliv).

contradiction between grace and works) while adopting its aversion to extra-biblical mediation and, by the same logic, opposing the external constraints of custom or regulation. If critics like Fish fail to give proper attention to the material conditions of book production, print historians like Ong are equally at fault for adhering to a narrative of modernization that treats the printed text as a complete object, a material shift that, for him, corresponds to a closure of consciousness. The material irregularity of the 1671 edition of *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* has for this reason been glossed as an error, the correction of which depends on the interpretive agency of astute readers. In my second chapter, I suggested that this depiction of the reader as a material corrector—that is, an extension of the print shop's imperative to present a text available for purchase—must be considered alongside Satan's method of reading, which not only confuses the Book of Nature with the Word of God, but also seeks to arrive at a position of secure, extra-biblical knowledge. If the "paradise within" that Milton names at the end of *Paradise Lost* is depicted in *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*, it is anything but an inactive place. Instead, in Milton's later works, readers encounter an expansive space of conscientious reading and "revolving," a space that Samson violently reopens and the Son actively redeems. As I have sought to demonstrate in the preceding chapters, the production of such space, in the act of reading, was also a political and theological strategy. The 1671 poems, in particular, work to reveal the contradiction between faithful reading and the mass resignation to history encouraged by the Restoration state.

Milton's late poems attempt to make textual interpretation constitutive of the radical Protestant subject, a ground of potential for an undisclosed future. Both *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* reveal how the textual condition that Milton is trying to produce in his audience is a historically contingent production, one that is suited to a particular class of Protestant readers. By drawing recent discussions of book history and print culture together with contemporary Milton criticism's emphasis on the politics of reading, I have tried to show how the kind of interpretive agency emphasized by Fish and other reception theorists arises from a distinctly Protestant hermeneutic, which Milton assumes and alters in response to the social, economic, and political conflicts that characterize seventeenth century England.

My third and final chapter focused on the disjunction between state-endorsed visibility and the inward motions of Milton's fit reader. In the shift from audience to reader in the poems of 1671, I located Milton's attempt to retain the social (as it first appears in *Areopagitica*) as form of potential that depends on the willingness of his readers to inhabit a specifically textual space. The original edition of the 1671 poems stands as an attempt to recondition readers for precisely this vocation. *Samson Agonistes*, in particular, draws the representational space of the public theatre into opposition with the textual space of the English Protestant subject. To explain this contradiction and its relationship to the brutal destruction of Samson's final act, I relied on Walter Benjamin's theory of divine violence and briefly touched on the material format of the first edition of Milton's last poems. The point of this violence, I argued, is

not simply to produce a moment of ethical ambivalence for the conscientious reader or to test the patience of the poet's audience; it can also be found in the 1671 volume's formal features. *Samson Agonistes* delivers an interpretive situation that is radically incompatible with the immediate situation of Milton's audience. It requires, in other words, something *other* than the visible forms of identity and commemoration that are relied upon by Israel and its Philistine oppressors. For this reason there is no spectacle, no unmediated access to Samson's thoughts and actions in the final moments before he levels the temple. Part of what makes the poem so compelling is the way in which it works as a formal analogue to Samson, transforming a popular mode of entertainment from the inside out. In this context, reading becomes synonymous with both iconoclasm and faith: it destroys sites of idolatry in order to open new spaces of deliberation.

With this in mind, the *Omissa* assumes a new kind of significance. Not only does this material feature require the reader to become an active agent in the textual correction, echoing the call of *Areopagitica* to collaborative reconstruction of Truth; it also produces a space of interpretation that could not occur without the printed text—that is, against the formal constraints and distractions of popular spectacle, the *Omissa* extends the interpretive situation that Samson violently delivers to Milton's fit reader. Rather than simply deferring the reader's expectations, the *Omissa* locates the reader within an altogether different kind of situation.

In isolation, Samson's moment cannot be properly messianic. Israel's

Old Testament liberator cannot possess an understanding of *kairos* necessary to distinguish between secular occasion (*chronos*) and divine guidance. In *Paradise Regain'd*, however, the Son resists Satan's deployment of the familiar emblem of Occasion. Where the captive Samson understands time as punctured by moments of opportunity for collective action, the Son recalls his personal development as a sequence of events, which allows him realize the fullness of time at the moment he overcomes private temptation. The result is the beginning of his public ministry. Following Agamben, my final chapter understood *kairos* (or messianic time) not as an additional time, but instead as the negative relation between time and its end, a relation of faith that reconditions all time. Agamben's conception of time provides a new way of approaching the counter-intuitive sequencing of *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* in the 1671 edition. Milton's poem is not simply a classical tragedy, but a messianic revisioning of the Old Testament story, which responds to the limitations of Restoration England and points to the possibility of a future remnant of readers. By articulating this utopian impulse within Milton's 1671 poems, my aim has not been to evade the historical conditions of their material production and reception; it has been, rather, to historicize the sort of reading subject that Milton's texts work to produce: a fit reader, perhaps best represented in the class potential of the "middling sort," which rose to new prominence through the social and political crises of the mid-seventeenth century.

Milton's literary achievements rest upon his refashioning of Protestant hermeneutics into a condition of active dissent and revolt against a coercive

state, but they also suggest the inextricable link between theology and politics in the early modern period. Milton, as Christopher Hill has repeatedly emphasized, "was not a modern liberal Christian" (1979: 444). If reading constitutes an ethical activity, whether through the imagination of "alien subjectivities" or through the experience of self-contradiction, it remains an ideological practice, the value and form of which have changed over time.[53] Private reading conditions subjects because it is based upon a fundamentally responsive activity: that is, following the insight of Louis Althusser, like religious ideology, reading, in its modern guise, "is indeed addressed to individuals, in order to 'transform them into subjects,' by interpellating the individual" (120). Despite the vast difference of their historical circumstances, Althusser's description of subjectivity is also the insight upon which Milton's 1671 poems build: private

[53] The argument for reading as constitutive of ethical activity remains prominent, despite the fact that contemporary readers have, for the most part, continued to treat books as objects for private consumption. The phrase "alien subjectivites" comes from Feisal G. Mohamed's recent book, *Milton and the Post-Secular Moment: Ethics, Politics, Terrorism*. In his second chapter, Mohamed treats the ethics of reading in *Areopagitica* as the product of rhetorical excess, "a cover for its ideology of hegemony of an emerging reforming class" (54). Against this, he follows Gayatri Spivak, who grounds the possibility of an ethics in unrecognized Other, and suggests that "Reading is not only an ethical activity, it is the ground of ethical activity in its initiation of the call by which positive political change can occur, because it is only through the kind of reading sometimes fostered in the humanities that we are invited to imagine alien subjectivities" (62). As much as reading might be an ethical activity, it is also an ideological procedure carried out on an ideological object. Although I find Mohamed's attempt to "desecularize" Milton compelling, this appeal to an ethics of openness that is grounded on the practice of reading, often takes the neutrality of reading for granted. Any discussion of Milton's ethics of reading must also contend with *Of True Religion*, where such ethics confront their limits. With Milton, in other words, we have seen that reading is not a posture of postmodern pluralism, but a

reading is the condition of production for free Protestant subjects.

In Milton's increasing attention to fit readers, I located the potential of a non-identical collective, the subject of recent discussions by Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou. St Paul represents for both philosophers a figure that demonstrated the ability to think the social or "universal" without recourse to some prior condition of belonging, whether a people, a city, an empire, a territory, or a class. Rather than objective victory, it is "subjective victory," writes Badiou, "that produces hope" (95). A subject is born out of her commitment to what Badiou calls, a "truth event," while the corresponding domain of ethics, in this program, is determined by a subject's fidelity or faithfulness to such an event. According to Badiou, this is what the Resurrection of Christ means to St Paul. If, as I have argued, Milton can be said to oppose a certain "identitarian" logic in his conception of Protestant reading, it is only because he opposes such activity to Restoration practices of government surveillance and state repression. This is to say that the definition of reading that these chapters articulate is strategic and historically contingent rather than absolute. For Badiou, contemporary understandings of "identity" refer to a static condition of belonging, while "subjectivity," by contrast, entails a responsive and excessive kind of agency.

Early modern Protestant poetry highlights the subject's reception of God's free gift of grace as a political and theological problem. Against laws that

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formal practice that is conditioned by its opposition to other types of cultural consumption.

divide, enumerate, and name, and against the sacramental tradition of Roman Catholicism, the fit readers of Milton's texts work within defined limits to produce a space in which right reception (that is, *free* reception) can take place. Badiou's analysis of St Paul's universal subject locates a similar logic. In his reading of Romans 6:14 ("for you are not under law, but under grace"), Badiou understands a restructuring of the subject according to a logic of becoming: "For the 'not being under the law' negatively indicates the path of the flesh as suspension of the subject's destiny, while 'being under grace' indicates the path of the spirit as fidelity to the event" (63). Here a potential dissolution of various identities is indicated first by a negative declaration; the "but," on the other hand, "indicates the task, the faithful labour in which the subjects of the process opened up by the event (whose name is 'grace') are the coworkers" (64). As Terry Eagleton has recently suggested, Badiou's work "grasp[s] the vital point that faith articulates a loving commitment before it counts as a description of the way things are" (2009: 119). Perhaps, then, Milton's late poems can, after all, be understood as signaling a turn towards faith. We should, however, be careful not to dismiss such faith as a departure from politics. If, following Badiou, England's Reformation can be considered a truth event for Milton, then the fit reader is one who remains open and loyal to its unseen potential. It is in this sense that the young poet's stirring advice to his compatriots in *Areopagitica* can again be imagined echoing throughout the spiritual darkness that, for Milton and other dissenting readers, characterized the Restoration:

> The light which we have gained, was given us, not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge. It is not the unfrocking of a priest, the unmitering of a bishop, and the removing of him from off the Presbyterian shoulders that will make us a happy nation. No, if other things as great in the church and in the rule of life both economical and political be not looked into and reformed, we have looked so long upon the blaze that Zwinglius and Calvin hath beaconed up to us that we are stark blind. (956)

Where history recollects this vision as irony, Milton 1671 poems confront such blindness as yet another occasion for the reader's political awakening.

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