

Dr. Ryan Hackenbracht
Texas Tech University

The following is a recent debate over the interpretation of John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667). It began with Peter Herman and Elizabeth Sauer in their "Introduction" to *The New Milton Criticism* (Cambridge, 2012), to which David Urban responded with his essay "Speaking for the Dead" in *Milton Quarterly*. Herman then responded to Urban in a special issue of *Milton Quarterly* with "C. S. Lewis and the New Milton Criticism," which was followed by Urban's response "The Acolyte's Rejoinder." The full debate is available online (for the sake of time, I've omitted responses to Urban's first essay by Richard Strier and Joseph Wittreich).

Key players in the debate:

1. C. S. Lewis (*A Preface to Paradise Lost* [1942]) was the biggest Miltonist of the 1940s and 50s, and he established what became a majority reading of *Paradise Lost*. In Lewis's interpretation, Milton is largely orthodox and Augustinian in his theology, and the poem is a celebration of Christian virtues, namely, obedience. Milton's God is difficult to admire, Lewis claimed, because perfection is hard for us—as fallen humans—to understand.
2. William Empson (*Milton's God* [1961]) opposed Lewis and became the modern spokesman for a rival interpretive tradition dating to the Romantic poets (esp. William Blake). In Empson's interpretation, Milton portrayed God as a villain and gave to Satan all the proper virtues of a classical epic hero. Empson opposed what he saw as a "Christianizing" tendency in literary studies in Lewis and others. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), Blake declared that Milton was "a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it." Echoing Blake, Empson stated, "the reason why the poem [i.e. *Paradise Lost*] is so good is that it makes God so bad."
3. Stanley Fish (*Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* [1967]) is the biggest Miltonist of the later twentieth century. Building upon Lewis's observations, Fish argued that Milton makes Satan appealing so that we will recognize his vices in ourselves. E.g. if we applaud Satan's bold claim that it is "better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n," then that is because we too are fallen, prideful creatures. Like Satan, we are in need of moral correction.
4. The NMC (*The New Milton Criticism* [2011]) takes Empson's side and opposes Lewis (and Fish) because they believe Lewis deliberately (and immorally) overlooked Milton's heresies in order to pass Milton off as a great Christian poet, like Dante. They argue that, on the contrary, Milton challenged the politico-religious norms of Renaissance England. Moreover, they assert that Milton's poem invites being read for its contradictions, uncertainties, and inconsistencies, which mirror Milton's personal hesitations about scripture, religion, and God.
5. David Urban ("Speaking for the Dead" [2011]) is currently working on a book project that charts C. S. Lewis's expansive legacy in Milton studies. He defends Fish and opposes the NMC not only for their alleged misreading of Milton's poem, but for their (immoral) misrepresentation of Lewis. He calls out the NMC by state that their real target is not Lewis but Fish and suggesting that—out of fear—they use Lewis to attack Fish only indirectly.

3194114

THE NEW MILTON CRITICISM

EDITED BY
PETER C. HERMAN
AND
ELIZABETH SAUER



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107603950

© Cambridge University Press 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

The new Milton criticism / [edited by] Peter C. Herman, Elizabeth Sauer.
p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01922-5 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-60395-0 (paperback)

I. Milton, John, 1608–1674—Criticism and interpretation. I. Herman, Peter C., 1958–
II. Sauer, Elizabeth, 1964–

PR3588.N48 2012

821'.4—dc23

2011049970

ISBN 978-1-107-01922-5 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-60395-0 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

821

M462Z455

Contents

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>Note on editions</i>	xii
Introduction: Paradigms lost, paradigms found: the New Milton Criticism <i>Peter C. Herman and Elizabeth Sauer</i>	1
PART I THEODICIES	
1. Milton's fetters, or, why Eden is better than Heaven <i>Richard Strier</i>	25
2. "Whose fault, whose but his own?": <i>Paradise Lost</i> , contributory negligence, and the problem of cause <i>Peter C. Herman</i>	49
3. The political theology of Milton's Heaven <i>John Rogers</i>	68
4. Meanwhile: (un)making time in <i>Paradise Lost</i> <i>Judith Scherer Herz</i>	85
5. The Gnostic Milton: salvation and divine similitude in <i>Paradise Regained</i> <i>Michael Bryson</i>	102
6. Discontents with the drama of regeneration <i>Elizabeth Sauer</i>	120

PART II CRITICAL RECEPTIONS

7. Against fescues and ferulas: personal affront and the path to individual liberty in Milton's early prose
Christopher D'Addario 139
8. Disruptive partners: Milton and seventeenth-century women writers
Shannon Miller 156
9. Eve and the ironic theodicy of the New Milton Criticism
Thomas Festa 175
10. Man and Thinker: Denis Saurat, and the old new Milton criticism
Jeffrey Shoulson 194
11. The poverty of context: Cambridge School History and the New Milton Criticism
William Kolbrener 212
12. Afterword
Joseph A. Wittreich 231
- Index* 249

Notes on contributors

MICHAEL BRYSON is Associate Professor of English at California State University, Northridge. He is the author of *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King* (2004). He has also written on the relationship between sacrifice, death, and community formation in the book of Judges (in *Religion and Literature*), and has recently finished the manuscript for a new book on "The Atheist Milton."

CHRISTOPHER D'ADDARIO, Assistant Professor of English at Towson University, is author of *Exile and Journey in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge, 2007). He has also written articles on John Donne, Abraham Cowley, and John Manningham's Diary that have been published or are forthcoming in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, *English Literary Renaissance*, and various essay collections. His current book project is on perceptions of the everyday in early modern England.

THOMAS FESTA is Associate Professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz. He is author of *The End of Learning: Milton and Education* (2006) and editor, with Michelle M. Dowd, of *Early Modern Women on the Fall: An Anthology* (forthcoming). His articles on Milton, Donne, Browne, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Wordsworth have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Milton Studies*, *Studies in Philology*, *English Language Notes*, and elsewhere. His essay "Milton's 'Christian Talmud'" (*Reformation* 8) won the 2004 William Tyndale Prize, awarded by the Stationers' Company of London.

PETER C. HERMAN is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University. He is the author of *Royal Poetrie: Monarchic Verse and the Political Imaginary of Early Modern England* (2010), *Destabilizing Milton: "Paradise Lost" and the Poetics of Incertitude* (2005), and *A Short History of Early Modern England: British Literature*

Note on editions

Unless otherwise stated, all references to Milton's *Paradise Lost* are from Barbara K. Lewalski (ed.), John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), and all references to Milton's prose works are from Don M. Wolfe (ed.), *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. in 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82).

Introduction: Paradigms lost, paradigms found: the New Milton Criticism

Peter C. Herman and Elizabeth Sauer

“Conflict, ambivalence, and open-endedness” occupy a contested place in Milton studies.¹ While discontinuities in Milton’s works have long been noted, Miltonists have traditionally regarded them as anomalies, and the critics who opted to explore, without resolving, them were often designated as marginal, or outliers in the field. The predilection for coherence and resolution in Milton studies has led Nigel Smith to observe that “the nature and complexity of [Milton’s] contradictory energy is not appreciated, even by Milton specialists.”² *The New Milton Criticism* seeks to provide and encourage the appreciation Smith calls for. The chapters assembled here interrogate various paradigms of certainty that have characterized many contributions to the field. This book also intends to show through a variety of approaches how analyses of Milton’s irresolvable complexities can enrich our understanding of his writings. To be sure, as Paul Stevens recognizes, “there is a degree to which almost all Milton criticism tends to imagine itself, at some point, as the New Milton Criticism.”³ We hope, however, to earn this label by showcasing a Milton criticism resistant to reading Milton into coherence, a criticism that treats his work – *Paradise Lost* especially but not exclusively – as conflicted rather than serene, and that explicitly highlights the spirit of critical inquiry in Milton’s writing.⁴

Interpretations of the Pilot metaphor in the first epic simile demonstrate how paradigms of certitude and a will to order have traditionally shaped criticism on *Paradise Lost*. In attempting to describe Satan’s size to the reader, the Muse declares that the fallen angel is as huge as:

Some material in this Introduction first appeared in Peter C. Herman, “Paradigms Lost, Paradigms Found: The New Milton Criticism,” *Literature Compass* 2 (2005). Article first published online December 21, 2005, DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2005.00176.x. We are greatly indebted to Richard Strier for his astute, corrective, and supportive remarks on the present chapter.

that Sea-beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
 Created hugest that swim th' Ocean stream:
 Him haply slumbring on the *Norway* foam
 The Pilot of some small night-founder'd Skiff,
 Deeming some Island, oft, as Sea-men tell,
 With fixed Anchor in his skaly rind
 Moors by his side under the Lee, while Night
 Invests the Sea, and wished Morn delays:
 So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay;
 (l. 200-9)

Crucially, Milton defies expectation and his various sources by *not* supplying the anticipated or traditional conclusion.⁵ In fact, he leaves the episode unresolved, with the Pilot stranded on the whale "while Night / Invests the Sea, and wished Morn delays" (l. 207-8). Most readers assume that the whale dives and takes the Pilot with him, even though Milton's verses provide no such evidence. According to Roland M. Frye, "Just as *Leviathan* lured seamen to anchor on the seeming security of his great bulk, only then to plunge to the bottom of the sea and destroy them, so Satan had already lured his angelic followers to Hell and would so lure many deceived men and women in future ages."⁶ Roy Flannagan notes that "*Leviathan* became synonymous with Satan, and the story of mariners anchoring on his back only to be swept under to their death was as popular as the similar Will-o'-the-Wisp or *ignis fatuus* story."⁷ Bryan Adams Hampton predicts that the mariner "has unwittingly abandoned hope for returning home, finding rest, or simply surviving – a terrifying realization *he will have all too soon* when he finds himself lurching and plunging at the whims of the great creature" (emphasis added).⁸

Even when critics recognize that the story is not finished, they incline toward providing an expected ending. Christopher Grose, for example, concedes that "Milton omits the conclusion – at least it is not rehearsed," but then adds, "the ending, like the meaning of the simile, is hardly in doubt."⁹ Linda Gregerson likewise decides that the morning "will presumably disclose to the pilot his doom."¹⁰ Though Milton leaves the Pilot's fate unclear, critics almost uniformly impose a closure that the passage itself resists, and thus miss opportunities afforded by Milton's invitation to a multivalent and open-ended reading. By deliberately withholding the conventional ending, is Milton creating a moment when the reader, suddenly faced with a passage that defies expectation, must re-assess the possible significances of the passage? What might be the relations between

this simile and the other epic figures and devices that end in a similarly suspended fashion, such as the Plowman who "doubting stands" (4.983), unsure of how his harvest will turn out? William Kerrigan, who is among the few who are sensitive to the open-endedness of the Pilot simile, suggests that the "ominous lack of closure in this story" represents the "excess and uncertainty" of poetry, which allows Milton "to outwit as well as absorb philosophy."¹¹ Others will arrive at their own conclusions, but our point is that by not supplying the ending Milton leaves out, we invite a richer set of interpretations in much the same way that Shakespeareans now approach *Measure for Measure*:

Critical efforts to exorcise the play's demons, to disregard Shakespeare's illumination of the darker regions of the soul, in effect deny the play one of its boldest claims to truth. And to impose any external ... solutions ... is, in fact, to deny this play its rightful claims to greatness. Finally, it seems impertinent to consider it the duty of criticism to solve the problems that Shakespeare himself refused to solve. What remains pertinent are the problems posed.¹²

Similarly, the New Milton Criticism encourages criticism that does not solve the problems that Milton himself resists solving.

I: EARLY MILTON CRITICISM

The paradigm of imposing certainty on an unruly Miltonic text could be said to have started with the addition of Andrew Marvell's poem, "On *Paradise Lost*," to the second edition of *Paradise Lost* (1674). Faced with the vastness of the subject and the poet's nerve ("I behold the Poet blind, yet bold" [1]), Marvell, like another early reader of the poem, Sir John Hobart,¹³ feared that Milton, embittered by the loss of his sight and likely also by the failure of his revolutionary hopes, would do something terrible:

... the Argument
Held me a while misdoubting his Intent,
That he would ruine (for I saw him strong)
The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song
(So *Sampson* groap'd the Temples Posts in spight)
The World o'rewhelming to revenge his sight.
(ll. 5-10)

In the opening stanza of this encomium, Marvell registers uncertainty about the poet's intentions and perhaps also his overreaching: "the Argument / Held me *a while* misdoubting his Intent" (ll. 5-6; emphasis

added). Would Milton's overweening strength "ruine ... / The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song" (ll. 7-8)? The Samson image that follows remains deeply resonant and deeply troubling - "(So *Samson* groap'd the Temples Posts in spight) / The World o'erwhelming to revenge his sight" (ll. 9-10). Is the poem a hymn of resentment? Initially unsettled by what David Norbrook aptly characterizes as "the aggressive, iconoclastic aims of Milton's epic, which run counter to the patriotic harmony the conservative reader might ask for," Marvell's speaker realizes that his worries over the poem's impulses are unfounded, for they are "more creative than destructive."¹⁴ Moreover, nothing in this poem violates decorum, as Marvell later determines: "Thou hast not miss'd one thought that could be fit, / *And all that was improper dost omit*" (ll. 27-8; emphasis added). Though Marvell's fears about the ruining of "sacred Truths" are allegedly allayed, assurance does not overwrite his earlier anxieties. Late in Marvell's poem, *Paradise Lost* still seems to present a sense of real danger to "sacred Truths" and a sacred inner core. At line 34, one notes the strange and strong word "inviolat" set off by stops. The threat of Milton's "strength" lingers. The very fact that Marvell rehearsed such concerns suggests, along with his endorsement of Milton's versification as a vehicle for liberty and rebellion, that this poem will not necessarily repeat or endorse pieties. At the end of the century, in 1699, Milton's biographer John Toland felt compelled to defend his subject against the proliferating charges of "Heresy and Impiety."¹⁵ Faced with a poem that challenges convention and defies a definitive interpretation, some of Milton's Restoration readers and editors would do some fitting or omitting of their own.

In *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man: An Opera Written in Heroique Verse* (1677), for example, John Dryden openly rewrites Milton's epic.¹⁶ As he states in prefatory remarks, "The Authors Apology for Heroique Poetry; and Poetique Licence," "I cannot without injury to the deceas'd Author of *Paradise Lost*, but acknowledge that this POEM has receiv'd its entire Foundation, part of the Design, and many of the Ornaments, from him" (sig. B1r). Despite Marvell's assurances of the poem's observance of decorum, *Paradise Lost* evidently did not sit well with a Restoration audience, and Nathaniel Lee, in his prefatory poem, "To Mr. DRYDEN, on his POEM of PARADICE," suggests some of the reasons why John Dryden would feel compelled to revise Milton's masterwork: "For *Milton* did the Wealthy Mine disclose, / And rudely cast what you could well dispose: / He roughly drew, on an old fashion'd ground, / A Chaos, for no perfect World was found, / Till through the

heap, your mighty Genius shin'd; / His was the Golden Ore which you refin'd" (sig. A4r).

But in refining, as it were, the ore, Dryden highlights those parts of Milton's text that he finds unsettling. For example, at the end of Book 3, Milton has Satan transform himself into a cherub, and in this disguise, he suborns Uriel, "The sharpest sighted Spirit of all in Heav'n" (3.691), into revealing the location of Eden: "So spake the false dissembler unperceiv'd; / For neither Man nor Angel can discern / Hypocrisie ..." (3.681-3). This passage creates all sorts of problems, not the least being: if Satan can so easily delude the "sharpest sighted Spirit," what chance do Adam and Eve have? Dryden, however, rewrites *Paradise Lost* so as to restore certainty and resolve the problem. In his version, Uriel tells Satan the location, but the angel immediately suspects that something is amiss:

Not unobserv'd thou goest, who e'r thou art;
Whether some Spirit, on Holy purpose bent,
Or some fall'n Angel from below broke loose,
Who com'st with envious eyes, and curst intent,
To view this World, and its created Lord:

(sig. C3v)

Dryden deals similarly with the problem of Milton's God, a character who has disturbed many readers and continues to do so to this day, as the essays in Part 1 of this volume discuss in some detail. In the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope complained that "God the Father turns a school-divine,"¹⁷ and the controversy continues, the most famous example being William Empson's *Milton's God*, in which he accuses the Christian deity in *Paradise Lost* and elsewhere of resembling Stalin.¹⁸ Dryden proceeds to eliminate God entirely from his rhymed rewriting of Milton's epic, thus stabilizing potentially subversive aspects of the text. Dryden's strategy throughout this poem, as Joseph A. Wittreich writes, is "to cancel out Miltonic ambiguity,"¹⁹ to restore the poem to certainty.

Related efforts to address misgivings about the poem mark eighteenth-century criticism. John Dennis's defense in the 1720s of Milton against the aspersions of George Sewell exemplifies the desire for aesthetic integrity or "justness" in his reading of *Paradise Lost*, and specifically in the depiction of the epic machinery and the ontology of the angels. "Most of the Machines ... have the appearance of something that is inconsistent and contradictory, for in them the Poet seems to confound Body and Mind, Spirit and Matter," is Sewell's objection. Dennis judges the human, corporeal nature of the angels and demons as more "delightful" and as enabling "more clear and distinct Ideas of them." Milton's own rendering of the angels,

Dennis maintains, follows that of Cowley and Tasso, whose "Descriptions of those fall'n Angels [are devoid of] any real Contradiction," and further, they have taken "the trouble of shewing, that what is thought to be a real Contradiction, has but the false Appearance of one."²¹

The seeming debate between Richard Bentley and Zachary Pearce in the 1730s offers more telling examples of the compulsion to stabilize the poem. The debate, however, is "seeming" because the two are not as opposed as they initially might appear. As William Empson first noted,²² the impetus to make *Paradise Lost* conform to preconceived notions of religious orthodoxy underlies Richard Bentley's infamous theory that, "Some acquaintance of our Poet's, entrusted with his Copy, took strange Liberties with it, unknown to the blind Author ..." (sig. B1r),²³ and Bentley's edition occasioned furious opposition, the most famous example being Pearce's thorough *Review of the Text of Milton's "Paradise Lost"* (1732-3). Pearce's *modus operandi* is instructive, for he always explains how the moments Bentley objects to as unconventional or contradictory are, if only "properly" understood, perfectly traditional. Thus, the two agree on what *Paradise Lost* should be, but whereas Bentley judges that Milton's poem needs to be purged of supposedly interpolated passages that compromise its integrity, Pearce concludes that *Paradise Lost* is for the most part intact and already perfectly acceptable. Both maintain that the poem should be absolutely consistent and contain no contradictions.

For example, Bentley mightily objected to the metaphors in *Paradise Lost* on the grounds of incongruity. At the end of Book 4, Milton uses an epic simile to illustrate the confrontation between Satan and his enemies, namely Gabriel, Ithuriel, Zephon, and the remainder of the angelic squadron:

While thus he spake, th' Angelic Squadron bright
 Turnd fierie red, sharpening in mooned hornes
 Thir Phalanx, and began to hemm him round
 With ported Spears, as thick as when a field
 Of Ceres ripe for harvest waving bends
 Her bearded Grove of ears, which way the wind
 Swayes them; the careful Plowman doubting stands
 Least on the threshing floore his hopeful sheaves
 Prove chaff.

(4.977-85)

Bentley senses two problems here. First, the simile troubles him by por-tending the defeat of the angels, since Milton compares their spears to wheat ripe for the harvest. Second, the plowman who "doubting stands,"

wondering whether he has wheat or chaff, introduces incertitude. Both are anathema to Bentley. In order to eliminate the introduction of doubt, Bentley brackets "the Careful Plowman ..." in the text of his edition, and suggests that this phrase be eliminated: "Join the two pieces of Verse together: *Which way the Wind / Sways them. On the other side Satan alarmed*" (sig. T4r). Because the Plowman clause introduces doubt, the lines could not, in Bentley's view, have been written by Milton: "The pragmatistical Editor inserted the Two between; which clearly betray whose Manufacture they are" (sig. T4r). As for the rest of the simile, Bentley huffs: "What are sheaves bound up in a Barn to the Phalanx, that hem'd Satan? Where's the least Similitude? Besides to suppose a *Storm* in the Field of Corn, implies that the Angels were in a ruffle and hurry about *Satan*, not in regular and military Order" (sig. T4r). But Pearce counters that Milton's similes and epic comparisons only *seem* problematic: "that here is no Contradiction at all; for *Milton* in his similitudes (as is the practice of *Homer* and *Virgil* too), after he has shew'd the common resemblance, often takes the liberty of wandering into some unressembling Circumstances" (sig. F2v-r). Pearce rebuts Bentley's accusation of impropriety in two ways. First, he emphasizes how Milton's technique is not novel, but entirely traditional ("as is the practice of *Homer* and *Vergil*"). Second, Pearce defuses the problem of doubt by dismissing these lines as a mere flight of fancy, of no thematic import whatsoever: Milton "often takes the liberty of wandering into some unressembling Circumstances: which have no other relation to the Comparison." Pearce preserves orthodoxy by refusing to grant that these lines carry any weight at all.

In his edition of *Paradise Lost*, Bentley frequently highlighted instances where he decided that Milton contradicted himself, and as Empson pointed out, thus became an invaluable guide to the many problems in *Paradise Lost*. The fact that he regarded these problems as corruptions is less important "than the fact that he saw them at all."²³ In a sense, it is Pearce who establishes the paradigm for later criticism by continuously resolving the contradiction, as he does in the quotation above ("here is no Contradiction at all"). When Bentley objected to the famous oxymoron, "darkness visible" (1.63) because the phrase constitutes "a flat Contradiction" (sig. B3v), Pearce responds: "I cannot agree with him: *M.* seems to have us'd these words to signify *Gloom*: Absolute darkness is strictly speaking invisible; but where there is a *Gloom* only, there is so much *Light* remaining as serves to shew that there are objects, and yet that those Objects cannot be distinctly seen" (sig. B5r). Note that both deny the possibility of contradiction in Milton.

II: CONTEMPORARY MILTON CRITICISM

One could attribute these interpretive gyrations to the influence of neo-classicism, dismissing Dryden, Bentley, and Pearce as representatives of the same literary culture that embraced Nahum Tate's revival "with alterations" of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1681), except that one finds similar assumptions governing some of the best Milton criticism throughout later centuries. Christopher Ricks's study of Milton's similes in his remarkable and still deeply influential *Milton's Grand Style* provides a case in point.²⁴ Generally, Ricks successfully demonstrates that Milton composed verse as subtle as any New Critic could wish, despite the attacks of F. R. Leavis and T. S. Eliot, but when he comes to Milton's troublesome similes, Ricks draws the same conclusions as Pearce. Faced with the Plowman simile, Ricks notes that Bentley left out these lines, and he has the benefit, as obviously Bentley did not, of Empson's brilliantly iconoclastic reading of this simile as demonstrating that the poem constitutes an attack on God and a celebration of Satan's rebellion. Ricks grants that Empson has a point: "[The simile] certainly makes the angels look weak. If God the sower is the ploughman, then he is anxious; another hint that he is not omnipotent. If the laboring Satan is the ploughman he is only anxious for a moment, and he is the natural ruler or owner of the good angels."²⁵ Consequently, Ricks is faced with a doubly difficult task, as he must defend Milton's verse against the combined forces of the anti-Miltonists, who charge Milton with writing bad verse, and Empson, who reveals Milton's religious and poetic unorthodoxy. Ricks responds by neatly rehearsing Pearce's rebuttal of Bentley. Just as the earlier critic defended Milton's conventionality by aestheticizing the similes and evacuating them of all meaning – Milton "often takes the liberty of wandering into some unressembling Circumstances: which have no other relation to the Comparison, than that it gave him the Hint, and (as it were) set fire to the train of his Imagination" (sig. F2r-v) – so does Ricks determine that "Mr. Empson is jubilant, since this allows him either way to make the poem pro-Satan and anti-God. But it seems more likely that here we do have one of the epic similes, beautiful but digressive."²⁶ Both Pearce and Ricks defuse the problem by emptying the simile of any thematic significance.²⁷

For other twentieth-century Miltonists, the problem of the narrator, or narrators, poses similar difficulties. In her influential study on narrative voice, which she distinguishes from the poet himself, Anne D. Ferry argues that "[t]hroughout *Paradise Lost* we find statements by the narrator which at least in part contradict the impression made immediately upon

us by the actions or speeches of the characters. These apparent contradictions must of course be explained, if we are to be satisfied with our reading of the poem." Ferry judges that a satisfying reading experience demands the presence of a univocal, ubiquitous narrator who successfully conveys an "impression of conscious control, deliberate artistry, and carefully articulated method."²⁸ Louis Martz, and, in the following decades, William Riggs, Arnold Stein, and John Guillory subscribe to a view of the narrator as authoritative, or as Stanley Fish later puts it, "a natural ally against the difficulties of the poem."²⁹ J. Martin Evans opts for Riggs's identification of the narrator with Milton as author by eliding the distinctions between them while also announcing that the narrator is "not a single euphonious instrument but a chorus of individual and sometimes discordant voices."³⁰ The criticism we are advancing here invites the interrogation of questions like narrative authority by, as Joseph A. Wittreich states in his Afterword, "reach[ing] beyond the narrator's voice to narrative voices, and then to the questions of whether some are privileged and, more challengingly, to an assessment of the relative reliability of those often competing voices." In the case of *Paradise Lost*, the multiple, often irreconcilable, narrative perspectives are among the features that prevent the poem from adding up to one monumental whole.

Balachandra Rajan identified the commitment to coherence made by various Milton scholars, initially including himself, as a "unifying imperative."³¹ Among the examples thereof that appear in seminal works of Milton scholarship is Diane Kelsey McColley's integrationist, regenerationist defense of Eve, a character she rescues from "a reductive critical tradition," as Milton himself is said to have redeemed Eve "from a reductive literary and iconographic tradition."³² In the same year in which *Milton's Eve* appeared, Barbara Lewalski published the results of her pioneering analysis of the multiple genres of *Paradise Lost* as exemplifying the poem's capacity to blend multiplicity into unity.³³ The synthesis of the heterogeneous becomes the order of the day. In a later essay, Lewalski again reminded us that the "generic paradigms" of the poem are multiple, consisting of the heroic genres, the epic-of-wrath, the quest epic, the romance, tragedy, and others. The successful assimilation of the genres into a unified whole constitutes the multi-genre epic, which, she points out, is not marked by "the indeterminacy and inconclusiveness" that Russian genre-theorist Mikhail Bakhtin associates with early modern and later prose narratives.³⁴ One also sees some evidence of a "unifying imperative" in Gordon Teskey's prize-winning *Delirious Milton* (2006). At first, Teskey argues that "Milton's creative power is drawn from a rift at the

center of his consciousness over the question of Creation itself, forcing him to oscillate between two incompatible perspectives, at once affirming and denying the presence of spirit in what he creates."³⁵ But later in the book, instances of the predilection for certainty appear in the form of Teskey's proposition that "dissonances become harmonies," and in the statement that "[t]he very difficulty of imagining such diverse works as Milton wrote composing a unity *impels us to seek that unity on a higher plane*" (emphasis added).³⁶

In various cases, the gravitational pull toward unification in Milton studies is complemented by a methodological prudence in the scholarship, partly evident in the limited impact theoretical developments have had on the field. Post-structuralism, for example, did not gain many adherents among Miltonists, though it did produce Nyquist and Ferguson's landmark anthology, *Re-membering Milton*, which explicitly criticized Milton scholarship "for its comparative indifference to the theoretical literature and debates" of the 1970s and 1980s.³⁷ A few critics, including Herman Rapaport, Catherine Belsey, and Jonathan Goldberg applied their understanding of deconstruction to Milton, but this approach did not gain many followers.³⁸ The New Milton Criticism follows in the wake of the deconstructionist concern to explore textual moments of contradiction and ambivalence. The central difference is that the New Milton Criticism tends not to take its inspiration from French theory or philosophy, but from close readings of Milton's texts and from critical and theoretical evaluations of the interpretive histories of those texts.

Locating Milton in relation to historical, religious, and political contexts came naturally for many Miltonists after and even during the reign of the New Criticism, if one considers, for example, A. S. P. Woodhouse and Arthur Barker. The New Historicist movement, however, failed to make a significant impression on Milton studies.³⁹ Stanley Fish dismissed what he called "the New or Newer Historicism" on the grounds of its supposed incoherence: "Historicism ... is embarrassed because it refuses to do the work and indeed doesn't even know what its work *is*," and gleefully announced that the failure of post-structuralism and New Historicism does not matter because "the layered richness of Milton criticism ... continues to propel it forward no matter what the deficiencies of various new methods and nonmethods."⁴⁰ Needless to say, we disagree with Fish's blanket dismissal, though it is apparent that New Historicist theories of power, authorship, and theories about the effect of literature on historical change have not been enthusiastically embraced.⁴¹ Miltonists' discontents with the movement gave rise instead

to a Milton liberated from Foucauldian-inflected interpretations, a "self-representing" figure whose self-division leaves his authority intact and virtually uncontested.⁴²

Arguably the most forceful and uncompromising articulation of the will-to-order in Milton is Fish's *How Milton Works*. Echoing perhaps Lewalski's dismissal of "indeterminacy and inconclusiveness," Fish asserts toward the start of the first chapter, "The Miltonic Paradigm," that "conflict, ambivalence, and open-endedness – the watchwords of a criticism that would make Milton into the Romantic liberal some of his readers want him to be – are not constitutive features of the poetry but products of a systematic misreading of it."⁴³ Slightly later, he banishes the problem of doubt: "In Milton's world, however, there are no moral ambiguities, because there are no equally compelling values. There is only one value – the value of obedience – and not only is it a mistake to grant independence to values other than the value of obedience, it is a temptation."⁴⁴ To think otherwise, Fish maintains, is to be not just mistaken but irreverent, even heretical.

To be clear, in calling attention to a preference for certainty and stability in statements by various major critics, we do not dismiss or denigrate their work, but rather attempt to present some examples of a dominant paradigm and trajectory in this field of criticism. Further, we recognize that the examples of Milton criticism surveyed in the Introduction and throughout the volume represent merely a fraction of the voluminous scholarship on Milton. Even so, the treatment of the Pilot episode by critics and editors alike and the examples from the brief history of Milton criticism sketched out here suggest a degree to which Milton studies is inclined toward a unifying imperative and the reining in of contrary energies.

Indisputably, evidence of the recognition and appreciation of Miltonic contradiction and irresolution appears throughout the centuries, while surfacing most noticeably in the Romantic period and later in the work of John Peter, A. J. A. Waldock, and, among others, Denis Saurat, as Jeffrey Shoulson cogently argues in his contribution to this volume.⁴⁵ But in the mid 1980s, the lineaments of a new Milton criticism became more readily apparent in the scholarship of such critics as Mary Nyquist, Balachandra Rajan, Paul Stevens, Thomas N. Corns, and John P. Rumrich, all of whom sought to recast uncertainty as a constituent element in Milton's writings, thereby opening up opportunities to identify and work through new problems.⁴⁶ And throughout the 1990s, Joseph A. Wittreich published a powerful series of articles that expressly called for a new Milton criticism, a desire "to nudge Milton criticism into the future tense,"⁴⁷ in response to

his observation that Milton studies "has been paralyzed, indeed impoverished, by the suppression of ... conflicts or just plain avoidance of them" (1997), which he reiterated at the start of *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting "Samson Agonistes"* (2002) and in *Why Milton Matters* (2006).⁴⁸ Among the critics who anticipated or accepted Wittreich's challenge are William Kolbrener, Jeffrey Shoulson, Michael Bryson, and Peter C. Herman.⁴⁹ Yet these scholars wrote largely in isolation from each other, as have subsequent critics who studied Milton's discontinuities.⁵⁰ Nobody realized they were part of a larger group.

That is now changing because, as J. Martin Evans recently attested, something fundamental is happening to Milton criticism: "Milton's works are now beginning to be seen as sites of contention and conflict rather than unified verbal and intellectual structures or syntheses of heterogeneous ideas and values."⁵¹ Given the resistance to the imposition of unity or coherence on Milton's work, it is appropriate that the New Milton Criticism not speak with one voice. Herman and Strier, for example, disagree about the matter of intentionality in *Paradise Lost*.⁵² What unites these essays, however, is the commitment to interpretations that expose, as Stephen Greenblatt writes in a different context, "the half-hidden stress points ..., the tensions, ideological negotiations and rifts that are often plastered over."⁵³ This anthology gives the New Milton Criticism a local habitation and a name by seeking first of all to make explicit a tendency in Milton studies to rein in the parts of Milton's writings that go in surprising and unexpected directions. Secondly, we attempt to demonstrate the advantages of embracing "conflict, ambivalence, and open-endedness" by providing both a genealogy for the New Milton Criticism and illustrations of what happens when critics resist pressure to resolve ambivalences in Milton's key works.

III: THEODICIES

The question of Milton's relationship to normative Christianities has a long history and has never been further from being definitively answered.⁵⁴ Martin Larson concluded in the 1920s that Milton "had much more of the rational, the ethical, the pagan, the modern, the one-world point of view" than his Protestant counterparts,⁵⁵ but this view was not about to take root. Orthodox readings of Milton's poetics and Christianity, supported in part by the influential and formidable Anglo-American school of E. M. W. Tillyard, Douglas Bush, C. S. Lewis, and others, would – as Jeffrey Shoulson and Elizabeth Sauer point out in their contributions to

this volume – bestow a long life on the “neo-Christian” Milton, despite efforts by Christopher Hill and William Empson to investigate different sides of the poet’s relationship to religion.⁵⁶ Miltonists scrutinized the evidence available in a poem that set out to justify God’s ways. From the aforementioned John Peter, who complained about the irritating and poetically unsound practice of anthropomorphizing God, which left readers with no choice but to denounce God’s ways as “vindictive and devious,”⁵⁷ to Dennis Danielson who claimed two decades later that the aesthetic success of *Paradise Lost* depended on the depiction of God’s goodness, critics have sought to settle the lingering issue of Milton’s religious commitments. Related questions on Milton’s theodicy, on free will versus determinism, on the justness or tyranny of God’s ways, and on the politics of Milton’s Heaven have vexed critics and commentators for three centuries, since controversies over Milton’s Christianity and his literary representations of God first erupted. The following six chapters on Milton’s great poems join with scholarship on Milton’s religious and literary unorthodoxies⁵⁸ by exemplifying ways of gauging the above-mentioned issues through examinations of the “discordant” elements in the verse.

We begin with an essay that connects the New Milton Criticism and the literary criticism of key Romantic poets attentive to the fault-lines – and fetters – in Milton’s poetry, notably in the representation of his theodicy. Richard Strier’s interpretation in Chapter 1 of the poem’s Great Argument is comparable to Dennis Danielson’s influential reading thereof: *Paradise Lost* sets out to justify and reinforce God’s goodness. However, whereas Danielson and others maintain that the poem’s aesthetic and religious success was tied to the success of its theodicy, Strier demonstrates that Milton’s effort to represent his theodicy produces aesthetic and religious failures or what William Blake called “fetters.” Milton writes without “fetters” in depicting prelapsarian life, which was not, however, part of the project of theodicy.

Peter C. Herman frames questions of theodicy in the terms of early modern developments in litigation and the nascent legal doctrine of contributory negligence that are applied in his chapter to a compelling investigation of the issue of blame in *Paradise Lost*. Using the paradigm of the New Milton Criticism, which does not insist on Milton’s certainty or orthodoxy, Herman shows that Milton provides several answers to the question, “Whose fault?” thus establishing a vital context for an unsettling reading of the poem as indicting, rather than exonerating, God.

John Rogers reminds us that Milton criticism has consistently reinforced the stability of Miltonic belief, the standard of which is generally taken to be a consistent articulation of identifiable theological, political, or social positions. Milton indeed is largely responsible for this situation, having produced innumerable instances of the literary affect of conviction, most obviously in his representation of the political theology of Milton's Heaven. His surprisingly unsympathetic representation of arbitrary authority in Heaven works, argues Rogers, to provide a mythological point of origin for the principles of human liberty and "the most radical form of creaturely freedom he could imagine." The result is a more compelling account of the tensions at play in the poem's portrayal of God than those previously articulated.

"Eternalist" critics, Rogers recently argued,⁵⁹ tend to present a Milton whose beliefs are certain and stable, while the "temporalist" critics are more inclined to affiliate Milton with the post-structuralist ideals of openness and ambiguity. Applying this distinction, Judith Scherer Herz complicates notions of linearity, temporality, and chronology in Milton, thus challenging the claims to narrative stability founded on these features. The recurrent term "meanwhile" becomes the perfect temporal marker for a text whose undecidability is a function of its endlessly recursive structure. Herz traces the word's movement through *Paradise Lost*, with particularly close attention to Book 10, examining its spatialization of time, its questions about theodicy, its unsettling of narrative coherence, and its relation to other markers of undecidability.

The penultimate chapter in this section deals with a different set of epistemological issues while returning to the questions on theodicy raised by Strier, Herman, and Rogers. Michael Bryson revisits his pronouncement in *The Tyranny of Heaven* about Milton's antithetical relationship to Gnosticism, showing instead that the Son of *Paradise Regained* embodies a form of Miltonic Gnosticism, a poetic attempt to leave an external concept of God for a concept of God found within.

The second of the two companion poems in the 1671 volume is the subject of the final essay in Part 1. Elizabeth Sauer examines *Samson Agonistes*, a poem whose received tradition has been underwritten by the "neo-Christian" perspectives and regenerationist readings. In a text for which "there seems to be a counterstatement for every statement,"⁶⁰ efforts to settle on a definitive reading of Samson's catastrophic final act entail a suppression of *Samson Agonistes'* counterstatements, including Dalila's apologia, which, in conjunction with the dramatic poem's contentious reception history, defy the containment of its "fifth act."

IV: CRITICAL RECEPTIONS

The essays in the second part of this book study Milton's self-portrayal and his writings in terms of literary critical readings generated in Milton's own time through to the present day. The received tradition of Milton's works is marked by acts of suppression, but also reassessment and rewriting throughout the more than three centuries of Milton criticism. In the following six chapters, the recasting of Milton as poet and polemicist sheds light on the fraught nature of the critical endeavors and methodologies of Miltonists, while exhibiting what William Kolbrener describes as "a Milton whose complex and sometimes multiple intentions elude the singularity of the simplistic contextualist grasp."

Less attention has generally been devoted to the rhetorical function of uncertainty in Milton's prose than in his poetry. When the prose has been considered in this regard, as in the provocative work of Stanley Fish, it is typically with a sense that Milton intentionally contrived ambiguities with a pedagogical objective. In the opening chapter of Part II, Christopher D'Addario examines Milton's pamphlets defending domestic liberty, in order to trace the extent to which Milton transforms personal affront and doubts over the response to his writing into principled political and religious stances on liberty. Rather than exploring the personal origins of Milton's theories to elucidate the author's psychology, D'Addario probes the inherent inconsistencies that arise in a theory of individual liberty originating in distrust and assumed misunderstanding.

Shannon Miller broadens the early modern context from which Milton's work derives its significance and which it informs. One of the key developments in the field has been the contextualization of Milton's work in terms of non-canonical, extra-literary, and popular writings that resituate and compel a reassessment thereof.⁶¹ The conversation Miller develops between Milton's major epic and earlier narratives of the Garden and the Fall, particularly those in writings of Rachel Speght and Aemilia Lanyer, challenges established readings of Milton's representations of gender and structures of governance. The "traces" of the gender-inflected "influences" on *Paradise Lost* also prompt such later writers as Mary Chudleigh and Aphra Behn to respond. *Paradise Lost* thereby becomes an incitement to later reconfigurations of the gender hierarchy in Eden. Investigating the question of gender while advancing the study of Milton's theodicy discussed in Part I of this volume, Thomas Festa reads *Paradise Lost* through Eve's narrative of her birth as Edward Young appropriates it in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759). Contrary to more orthodox

interpreters from the first and last centuries of the epic's reception, Young valorizes Eve's self-discovery in ways that predict the afterlife of the epic in the later centuries.

Turning to the more recent antecedents of the New Milton Criticism and the theological positions articulated in Milton's work, Jeffrey Shoulson deftly argues that Denis Saurat's 1925 *Milton: Man and Thinker* was the underlying trigger for the Milton Controversy and played a particularly important role in the development of Empson's antithetical readings of *Paradise Lost*. Many of the most provocative and controversial claims associated with the New Milton Criticism can in fact be traced back to Saurat's sustained and comprehensive analysis of Milton's poetry and thought.

The twentieth-century critical tradition analyzed by William Kolbrener in the penultimate chapter of Part II concentrates on the contextualist methodology of the Cambridge School Historians such as Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock. The Skinnerian paradigm of "language-games" and the desire to situate texts as performative utterances within specific rhetorical contexts contributed to re-historicizing political philosophy and moving it away from considerations of "universal truths" and "perennial problems." Yet the rigors of Skinnerian methodology, which, as conceived in the late sixties, demanded "consistency of expression and perspective," may not always serve in elucidating the complexity of Miltonic texts. The development of a methodology aware of the potentially reductive tendencies of the contextualizing gesture is among the practices of the New Milton Criticism.

The final essay in "Critical Receptions" is Wittreich's Afterword, which expertly weaves the volume's contributions into a map of reading. This denouement advances the critical methodology outlined in the Introduction and offers an exemplum of the New Milton Criticism and its applications. Wittreich anticipates new directions and orientations in Milton studies and in literary history more broadly, which the New Milton Criticism opens up for the twenty-first-century reader, one who is "less taken with certainties than with new opportunities." Rather than assuming that Milton's problems are puzzles to be solved and that if "properly understood," all conflicts resolve into reassuring certitude, the essays in this volume demonstrate that we gain much more by allowing the ambiguities and ambivalences to stand and transform our interpretive experiences. In conclusion, by moving Milton's sites of contention into the center of Milton studies, we hope to establish the parameters of a vital, resonant, and destabilizing approach: the New Milton Criticism.

NOTES

- 1 Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 14.
- 2 Nigel Smith, *Is Milton Better than Shakespeare?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 7.
- 3 Paul Stevens, "Introduction: Milton in America," in Paul Stevens and Patricia Simmons (eds.), "Milton in America," special issue of *The University of Toronto Quarterly* 77, 3 (2008), 790 n. 1.
- 4 In *Re-membering Milton*, editors Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson expressed their discontents with the monumentalizing of Milton. See "Introduction," in Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (eds.), *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions* (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. xvi–xvii.
- 5 See for example, Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato* II.xiv.3 and Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* VI.37–43.
- 6 Roland M. Frye, *Milton's Imagery and the Visual Arts: Iconographic Tradition in the Epic Poems* (Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 93.
- 7 Roy Flannagan (ed.), *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), p. 360 n. 80.
- 8 Bryan Adams Hampton, "Milton's Parable of Misreading: Navigating the Contextual Waters of the 'Night-Founder'd Skiff' in *Paradise Lost*, 1.192–200," *Milton Studies* 43 (2004), 95.
- 9 Christopher Grose, *Milton's Epic Process: "Paradise Lost" and its Miltonic Background* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 152.
- 10 Linda Gregerson, "The Limbs of Truth: Milton's Use of Simile in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 14 (1980), 142.
- 11 William Kerrigan, "Milton's Place in Intellectual History," in Dennis Danielson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 264.
- 12 Harriett Hawkins, "'The Devil's Party': Virtues and Vices in *Measure for Measure*" (1978), in Catherine M. S. Alexander (ed.), *The Cambridge Shakespeare Library, Vol. 2: Shakespeare Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 44. See also A. D. Nuttall's analysis of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a play whose "suppression of dark forces is not only incomplete at the beginning ... [but] ... remains incomplete throughout": "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Comedy as *Apotrope* of Myth," *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (2000), 51, 52.
- 13 James M. Rosenheim, "An Early Appreciation of *Paradise Lost*," *Modern Philology* 75, 3 (1978), 281.
- 14 David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics 1627–1660* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 491.
- 15 John Toland, *The Life of John Milton* (London, 1699), sig. Iiv.
- 16 John Dryden, *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man: An Opera Written in Heroique Verse* (London, 1677). Critical treatments of Dryden's "opera" assume that it remained unperformed. Elizabeth Bobo, however, has discovered that

The State of Innocence was indeed performed – by puppets! (“Advertising in *The Spectator* and the Early 18th Century Promotion of *Paradise Lost*,” unpublished paper delivered at the Pacific Coast British Studies Conference, 2010.) We are grateful to Professor Bobo for allowing us to read and cite her work in advance of publication.

- 17 Quoted in Michael Bryson, *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 24.
- 18 William Empson, *Milton's God* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 146. See also Bryson, *The Tyranny of Heaven*, pp. 24–6, and Peter C. Herman, *Destabilizing Milton: “Paradise Lost” and the Poetics of Incertitude* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 107–11.
- 19 Joseph A. Wittreich, “Milton's Transgressive Maneuvers: Receptions (Then and Now) and the Sexual Politics of *Paradise Lost*,” in Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (eds.), *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 249.
- 20 John Dennis, “Letters on Milton and Wycherley,” *The Proposals for Printing By Subscription ... Miscellaneous Tracts (1721–1722)*, in E. N. Hooker (ed.), *The Critical Works of John Dennis* (1939), quoted in John T. Shawcross (ed.), *Milton: The Critical Heritage: 1628–1731* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 240, 242.
- 21 William Empson, “Milton and Bentley,” in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1960), pp. 141–84.
- 22 Richard Bentley, *Milton's Paradise Lost: A New Edition* (London, 1732). Subsequent citations are parenthetical.
- 23 Empson, “Milton and Bentley,” p. 141; Strier, private correspondence (e-mail dated 17 August 2011).
- 24 For example, Annabel Patterson begins *Milton's Words* (Oxford University Press, 2009) with a discussion of Ricks's book and how it essentially rescued Milton from the negative evaluations of T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis (pp. 1–3).
- 25 Empson, “Milton and Bentley,” p. 164. Christopher Ricks quotes Empson in *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 129–30.
- 26 Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 130.
- 27 Gordon Teskey adopts a similar strategy to nullify the problems of Milton's classical allusions when he proposes that we should ignore the resonances of Satan's resemblance to Virgil's Turnus or the Son to Hector: “the similarity is largely irrelevant because Milton is not alluding to the spirit of the earlier context” (Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006], p. 126). Nor is this approach limited to Milton. Rosamond Tuve, for example, proposed that “the aim of criticism is to eliminate strangeness,” and therefore, William Empson's views on Herbert must be rejected because of his “‘illegal’ critical practices” resulting in “‘illegitimate’ readings [that] must be detected and rebuked” (see Richard Strier, “Tradition,” *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995], pp. 24, 17).

- 28 Anne D. Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice: The Narrator in "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 17.
- 29 Louis Martz, *The Paradise Within; Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 107; William Riggs, *The Christian Poet in "Paradise Lost"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Arnold Stein, *The Art of Presence: The Poet and "Paradise Lost"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 104; Stanley Fish, *Surprised By Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost,"* 2nd edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 47.
- 30 J. Martin Evans, *Milton's Imperial Epic: "Paradise Lost" and the Discourse of Colonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 170 n.1, 113; see also Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 2–3.
- 31 Balachandra Rajan, "Surprised by a Strange Language: Defamiliarizing *Paradise Lost*" [1985], in Elizabeth Sauer (ed.), *Milton and the Climates of Reading: Essays by Balachandra Rajan* (University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 46–63.
- 32 Diane Kelsey McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p. 4.
- 33 Barbara Lewalski, "The Genres of *Paradise Lost*: Literary Genre as a Means of Accommodation," in Richard S. Ide and Joseph A. Wittreich (eds.), "Composite Orders: The Genres of Milton's Last Poems," *Milton Studies* 17 (1983), 75–103. See Balachandra Rajan's critique in *Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 111.
- 34 Barbara Lewalski, "The Genres of *Paradise Lost*," in Dennis Danielson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 84, 81–2. Balachandra Rajan argues in contrast that *Paradise Lost*, "is not simply a mixed-genre poem but a poem of which generic uncertainty may be a keynote. Critics may be understandably reluctant to admit uncertainty at the heart of a poem. A work of art thus divided is considered to be in a state of civil war. But creative indeterminacy can also be read as a sign of the authentic rather than the chaotic" (Balachandra Rajan, "*Paradise Lost*: The Uncertain Epic," *Milton Studies* 17 [1983], 105–19).
- 35 Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, p. 5.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 150, 149. See Joseph A. Wittreich's review of Teskey's *Delirious Milton* in *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, 4 (2006), 1332; and Herman, *Destabilizing Milton*, p. 7. More emphatically and recently than Teskey, Feisal G. Mohamed, in his trenchant study of Milton's pre-secular thought and current post-secular political theory and ethics, maintains that Milton "makes us keenly aware of the limits of an emphasis on ambiguity, for his writings continually subsume contrary energies." Feisal G. Mohamed, *Milton and the Post-Secular Present: Ethics, Politics, Terrorism* (Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 2.
- 37 Nyquist and Ferguson, "Preface," *Re-membering Milton*, p. xvi.

- 38 Herman Rapaport, *Milton and the Postmodern* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); Catherine Belsey, *John Milton: Language, Gender and Power* (New York: Blackwell, 1988); Jonathan Goldberg, "Dating Milton," in Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (eds.), *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 199–220.
- 39 The New Historicism's adoption of deconstruction's emphasis on textual aporias is what distinguishes this movement from the "Old Historicism."
- 40 Stanley Fish, "Milton's Career and the Career of Theory," in Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech: And It's a Good Thing, Too* (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 266. See also Stanley Fish, "Why Milton Matters; Or, Against Historicism," *Milton Studies* 44 (2005), 1–12.
- 41 Even so, the New Historicism's cousin, the "New Bibliography," which takes its cue from Michel Foucault's essay, "What is an Author?" ([tr. Donald E. Bouchard and Sherry Simon], in Donald E. Bouchard [ed.], *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977], pp. 124–7) has made significant inroads in Milton criticism; see in particular Stephen B. Dobranski's groundbreaking work on Milton and the book trade [Stephen B. Dobranski, *Milton, Authorship, and the Book Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 1999)].
- 42 Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace*, p. 12. Blair Worden observed that Milton's own self-representations "invite us to situate him in lonely eminence above the collaborative world of civil war polemic" (Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* [Oxford University Press, 2007], p. 208), but the political historical criticism of Worden, Laura Knoppers, Nigel Smith, Sharon Achinstein, and David Loewenstein, among others, has complicated that unified self-portrayal by putting him squarely in the midst of the turbulence and barbarous dissonance from which he sought to sequester himself.
- 43 Fish, *How Milton Works*, p. 14.
- 44 Ibid., p. 53.
- 45 On the reception of Milton by the Romantics, see Lucy Newlyn, "*Paradise Lost*" and the Romantic Reader (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Leslie Brisman, *Milton's Poetry of Choice and Its Romantic Heirs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973). See Balachandra Rajan's survey of Milton criticism in the 1930s and 1940s in "*Paradise Lost*" and the Seventeenth Century Reader (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947; reissued 1962), p. 11. See also Sharon Achinstein's penetrating analysis of the academic climate and literary critical wars of the mid-twentieth century in "Cold War Milton," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77, 3 (2008), 801–26.
- 46 Nyquist and Ferguson (eds.), *Re-membering Milton* (1987); Rajan, "Surprised by a Strange Language," *Milton and the Climates of Reading*, pp. 46–63; Paul Stevens, "Discontinuities in Milton's Early Public Self-Representation," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 51, 4 (1988), 260–80; Thomas N. Corns, "Some Rousing Motions: The Plurality of Miltonic Ideology," in Thomas Healy and Jonathan

- Sawday (eds.), *Literature and the English Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 110–26; Goldberg, “Dating Milton,” pp. 199–220; John P. Rumrich, “Uninventing Milton,” *Modern Philology* 87, 3 (1990), 249–65.
- 47 Wittreich, “Milton’s Transgressive Maneuvers,” p. 246; Wittreich, “‘Inspir’d with Contradiction’: Mapping Gender Discourses in *Paradise Lost*,” in Diana T. Benet and Michael Lieb (eds.), *Literary Milton: Text, Pretext, Context* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), pp. 10–60; Wittreich, “‘He Ever was a Dissenter’: Milton’s Transgressive Maneuvers in *Paradise Lost*,” in Kristin Pruitt McColgan and Charles W. Durham (eds.), *Arenas of Conflict: Milton and the Unfettered Mind* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1997), pp. 21–40; Wittreich, “Why Milton Matters,” 22–39.
- 48 Joseph A. Wittreich, “‘He Ever was a Dissenter,’” p. 36; *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting “Samson Agonistes”* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002), pp. xiii ff.; Wittreich, *Why Milton Matters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. xxii.
- 49 Bryson’s and Herman’s books, along with John T. Shawcross’s *Rethinking Milton Studies: Time Present and Time Past* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), led to Wittreich’s observation that Milton studies is “switching to a revised paradigm” (*Why Milton Matters*, p. xxii).
- 50 See, for example, Yaakov Mascetti, “Satan and the ‘Incompos’d’ Visage of Chaos: Milton’s Hermeneutic Indeterminacy,” *Milton Studies* 50 (2010), 40, 62 n.18.
- 51 J. Martin Evans, “Critical Responses: Recent,” in Stephen B. Dobranski (ed.), *Milton in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 152.
- 52 Perhaps because Milton, unlike, say, Shakespeare, oversaw the publication and revision of his works, Milton criticism is largely committed to intentionalism. Stanley Fish, for example, in the early 1990s rejected his earlier belief in meaning as a creation of interpretive communities (see the last four essays in *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980]) in favor of arguing that “meaning, intention, and biography are inextricable” (Stanley Fish, “Biography and Intention,” in William H. Epstein [ed.], *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism* [West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991], p. 15). Having presented a valuable survey of the treatment (chiefly, the suppression) of intention in literary criticism, Stephen Fallon reads Milton with intention in mind while simultaneously acknowledging the “unresolved tensions in the author” that surface unintentionally (Fallon, *Milton’s Peculiar Grace*, p. 12). Even so, some Miltonists, such as Strier but also Sharon Achinstein, have maintained that a more skeptical approach toward intentionalism “could open up Milton studies to new ideas and new resources of creativity” (Sharon Achinstein, “Cloudless Thunder: Milton in History,” *Milton Studies* 48 [2008], 10).
- 53 Stephen Greenblatt, “Introduction: New World Encounters,” in Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *New World Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. xvi.

- 54 Cf. Patrick Murray, *Milton: The Modern Phase* (London: Longman, 1967), p. 96.
- 55 Martin Larson, *The Modernity of Milton: A Theological and Philosophical Interpretation* (University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 168.
- 56 C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"* [1942] (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Empson, *Milton's God*, Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1978).
- 57 John Peter, *A Critique of "Paradise Lost"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 17; Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge University Press, 1982, reprinted 2009), p. ix.
- 58 For example, Dayton Haskin's *Milton's Burden of Interpretation* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), William Poole's *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), and Catherine Gimelli Martin's rigorous reassessment of Milton's Puritanism, *Milton among the Puritans: The Case for Historical Revisionism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).
- 59 John Rogers, "Time and Eternity and the Fiction of Miltonic Belief," *The New Milton Criticism*, Modern Language Association Convention, Philadelphia, PA, 2006.
- 60 Joseph A. Wittreich, *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 134.
- 61 Laura Knoppers and Gregory M. Colon Semenza (eds.), *Milton in Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Speaking for the Dead: C. S. Lewis Answers the New Milton Criticism; or, “Milton Ministries” Strikes Back

DAVID V. URBAN

In his July 2008 address to the Ninth International Milton Symposium, Stanley Fish responded to the purveyors of the so-called “New Milton Criticism,” a group of critics whose main assertions include, in Fish’s words,

that Milton is of the Devil’s party with or without knowing it; . . . that while the official orthodoxy of *Paradise Lost* tells one story—of disobedience, loss, and possible redemption—the energies of the verse tell quite another story and it is the better one; . . . that Milton has for too long been captured by an orthodox establishment that either ignores or aestheticizes or stigmatizes the radical forces at play in his work; . . . that Milton’s poetry and prose tell no single truth, but problematize issues of truth and fact to the point where the only message being sent is the message of instability, mutability, and indeterminacy; [and that *Paradise Lost*’s] . . . strongest image of tyranny is the heaven presided by a God who demands mindless obedience for no good reason.¹

According to self-avowed New Miltonist Peter C. Herman, the New Milton Criticism seeks “to recast Miltonic uncertainty as a constituent element of Milton studies” (“Paradigms” 14), and in John West’s words, it rejects “the critical orthodoxy that has sought coherence and certainty in Milton’s work ever since the first publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667” (693).² Fish notes that the New Milton Criticism’s main villains are C. S. Lewis and Fish himself, an assessment offered by, among others, Michael Bryson in *The Tyranny of Heaven*. Borrowing a phrase from William Empson, Bryson describes the kind of “neo-Christian” (22) critical orthodoxy that Lewis and Fish represent, sardonically concluding that “Milton *studies* have often threatened to turn into Milton *ministries*” (23). I will admit that I initially chuckled at the thought that Professor Fish—a Jew not known for regular synagogue attendance—would be considered the co-pastor of Bryson’s “neo-Christian” “Milton ministries.” But, in light of Fish’s recent *New York Times* blog articles demonstrating sympathy with Christianity—one of which (“Faith and Deficits”) prompted University of Minnesota–Morris biology professor and prominent atheist blogger P. Z. Myers to declare Fish “a gospel-thumping charlatan on a par with Pat Robertson”—I have been forced to admit that Bryson may have spoken even more accurately than he knew.

But in my irony I digress. This essay in fact does not primarily concern Fish—who can defend himself quite aptly³—but Lewis. My concern, as one speaking up for the dead, is that some of the New Milton Critics have seriously misrepresented

Lewis. They have portrayed him as a critical “strong poet” whose doctrinaire pronouncements on *Paradise Lost* have, for decades, stifled critical inquiry into the epic. Against this portrayal, I will argue that certain New Milton Critics both have engaged in simplistic historical analysis and have taken Lewis’s words out of context in order to set up a straw man portrayal of Lewis as a hegemonic critic when in fact he vastly expanded critical discussion of Milton’s epic, both through his own writing and through the diverse responses to his work.

One misrepresentation depicts Lewis as almost single-handedly dismantling what had allegedly been, for over a century, a critical consensus in favor of the Satanic school of Miltonic interpretation that was inaugurated by William Blake’s famous 1793 statement: “The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (qtd. in Teskey 389). This depiction artificially lifts Lewis up to a superlatively powerful critical status that makes his long-overdue toppling by the New Milton Critics seem all the more gloriously iconoclastic. Bryson begins this misrepresentation by stating that by the end of the nineteenth century, “Blake’s reading of Milton as being somehow of the Devil’s party. . . is dominant” (20). Bryson’s sole evidence for this claim is a single sentence from the 1882 edition of David Masson’s *The Poetical Works of John Milton*: “Satan . . . as all critics have perceived, and in a wider sense than most of them have perceived, is the real hero of the poem” (qtd. in Bryson 20).⁴

But the state of nineteenth-century critical attitudes toward Satan was more complex than Bryson indicates. Calvin Huckabay notes that although the Satanic position was the majority opinion during that century, a number of Victorian critics disputed this assertion, including Walter Savage Landor, John Wilson, J. W. Morris, Stopford Brooke, Shadworth H. Hodgson, Anna Buckland, and John Dennis (203–05), and the most persuasive and thorough of these, Wilson and Morris, analyzed Satan within the larger contexts of the epic tradition and *Paradise Lost* as a complete poem in ways that anticipate some of Lewis’s own approach. Moreover, as Allan H. Gilbert has observed, the Romantics’ admiration of Satan is surprisingly mixed. Coleridge and even Hazlitt express decidedly anti-Satan opinions in their discussions of the poetic power of Satan’s character (223–24); Shelley is disturbed by Satan’s vices—vices which make him judge Satan as inferior to Prometheus (222–23), and Shelley’s description of Satan as a “magnificent fiction” is similar to Lewis’s description of him as a “magnificent poetical achievement” (qtd. in Gilbert 222). In Gilbert’s analysis, the overall Romantic view of Satan is actually somewhat close to Lewis’s (224). Also noteworthy is Arthur Barker’s statement that while the Romantic view of Satan as hero was “expanded” by various nineteenth century authors, it was actually “given respectability” in 1900 by Sir Walter Raleigh’s book, *Milton* (421).

Bryson goes on to try to demonstrate the continuing dominance of the Blakean reading by stating that “In Denis Saurat’s 1925 publication, *Milton, Man and Thinker*, the ‘orthodox’ Milton has almost completely disappeared” (20). Bryson then says that Saurat’s “unabashedly Blakean reading” made “a reaction . . . almost inevitable,” and that “reaction came in the form of . . . [Lewis’s] 1942 publication, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*” (21). For evidence of Blakean dominance in Milton studies prior to Lewis, Bryson cites two brief statements by Saurat: “[T]here is no lack of sympathy on intellectual subjects between Satan and Milton”; and “Satan is not only a part of Milton’s character, he is also a part of Milton’s mind” (qtd. in Bryson 21).

Again, Bryson implies here that Saurat's book somehow represents the dominant pre-Lewis critical opinion on *Paradise Lost*, but all Bryson really demonstrates is that Saurat championed the Blakean position. Moreover, even Saurat's view on Satan and Milton is significantly more complex than Bryson indicates. Saurat immediately follows the second of the above quotes by stating, "And yet Satan is not the hero of the poem"—"Milton himself" is (219, 220), and Saurat goes on to aver that "Milton had Satan in him and wanted to drive him out" (220). Here we see some similarity with Lewis's own view that there is truth in the argument that Milton sympathized with Satan, who was Milton's "expression . . . of his own pride, malice, folly, misery, and lust," although, significantly, Lewis denies that Milton's identification with Satan is "peculiar to Milton" but rather is a symptom of Milton's fallen humanity (99). Gilbert goes so far as to say that Saurat "agrees with Lewis on Satan" (221), and although Gilbert overstates his point here, Bryson all the more overstates the state of Satanic dominance in Milton criticism preceding Lewis. In truth, the critical landscape was already quite mixed by the time Lewis published his work and even when Saurat published his. Indeed, writing in his introduction to *Milton* (1930), E. M. W. Tillyard notes that not only did he find "the Satanic explanation" to be "inadequate" and simplistic (1), he also discovered in the course of his research that much critical opinion, specifically in America, "had already reacted against the Satanists" (1).⁵ My point here, over and against Bryson, is that Lewis did not turn the world of Milton criticism upside down when he challenged the idea that Milton's greatest sympathies were with Satan. Rather, Lewis inserted a sustained and persuasive argument into an established critical controversy.

The second misrepresentation I will challenge is the charge that Lewis's slim book has exercised some kind of critical hegemony that has prevented subsequent discussion of tensions in *Paradise Lost*, including (but not limited to) discussion of Satan's character. This charge is leveled boldly by a senior statesman of the New Milton Criticism, Joseph Wittreich, when he flatly states that Lewis "reinstat[ed] the gag rule lifted from Milton criticism during the Romantic era" embodied, says Wittreich, in Blake's famous statement, which he quotes (*Why Milton* xxi). The pejorative term "gag rule" is strong, accusatory language offered by a venerable Miltonist. For starters, it is reckless to suggest that there ever was such a gag rule before the Romantics; indeed, Wittreich here is indulging in a sweeping generalization regarding the epic's pre-Romantic critics that has long been discredited.⁶ Wittreich's use of the term "gag rule" applies to Lewis because it implies that Lewis's book shut down dissenting voices, but in the same paragraph Wittreich himself observes that Lewis's book "incit[ed] successive reactions from A. J. A. Waldock, John Peter, and J. B. Broadbent" (xxi).

Wittreich's book revels in analyzing tensions within Milton's work,⁷ but here we see tension within Wittreich's own writing. Quite simply, if Lewis—who himself "pointed out the ironies and contradictions in Satan's utterances" (Huckabay 209) and "emphasized" *Paradise Lost*'s "variety" (Gilbert 225)—reinstated a so-called "gag rule" regarding tensions in Milton's work, then why did Waldock, Peter, and Broadbent produce their influential books—published in 1947, 1960, and 1960 respectively—in the first place? And what of William Empson's 1961 *Milton's God*? Empson surely did not consider himself gagged. Nor did Elmer Edgar Stoll in his 1944 *Review of English Studies* essay "Give the Devil His Due: A Reply to Mr. Lewis" or in his 1949 "Postscript to 'Give the Devil His Due.'" Nor did George Hamilton in his arguments against Lewis in his 1944 book *Hero or Fool? A Study of*

Milton's Satan. No, the tensions to be found within Milton's text remained an issue, and the discussion of Milton's Satan and his complexities remained active in the decades that followed Lewis's *Preface*. Indeed, in 1958 G. H. Rigter announced that "a final conclusion is not likely to ever be reached" between the Satanists and anti-Satanists (322); in 1962 Calvin Huckabay noted the lack of critical "agreement on Satan" (210); in 1966, Louis Martz proclaimed the pro-Satan argument "very much alive" (7); and in 1976, John Steadman stated that "the validity of [Satan's] title as hero has been the oldest, and possibly most persistent, of many controversies over *Paradise Lost*" (253). So much for a Lewis-inspired gag rule.

This lack of gag is also evident in prominent Milton critical anthologies and reference works of the latter half of the twentieth century. Consider Martz's popular 1966 volume on Milton in the Twentieth Century Views series. That volume includes both Empson's "Milton and Bentley"—a 1935 essay whose discussion of Satan anticipated *Milton's God*—and Waldock's entire chapter on Satan. Marts represents Lewis's book with its chapter on "The Style of the Secondary Epic"—which offers no analysis of any of Milton's characters—and the anti-Satan position is only championed by three pages in a chapter by Douglas Bush. Even more strikingly, Scott Elledge's 1975 Norton Critical Edition of *Paradise Lost* contains nothing by Lewis but includes Broadbent's discussion of Satan and generous selections from Empson's book that challenge the morality of Milton's deity. And in Elledge's thoroughly revised 1993 second edition, Lewis remains absent even as the Empson selections remain in tact. Rightly or wrongly, critical selections made for Norton Critical Editions receive a kind of canonical status in the eyes of readers, and Empson's continual representation therein, as well as Lewis's absence—rectified only by Gordon Teskey in 2005 (who also expands Empson and adds Waldock)—make the notion of Lewis's critical tyranny and his dissenters' marginalization all the more dubious. Another significant example of mainstream scholarly receptivity to the New Milton Criticism's forebears is James Holly Hanford's highlighting the work of Empson, Waldock, Broadbent, and Peter on the opening page of his Preface to the final edition of *A Milton Handbook* (Hanford and Taaffe v).

No, Lewis did not gag anyone. Rather, he furthered the conversation about various aspects of *Paradise Lost*; his own positions were persuasively argued, and if at points he overstated his case or made things too simple, Stoll, Waldock, Broadbent, Peter, Empson, et al. were quick to point out their objections. Lewis did not stifle these critics. He inspired them to develop and articulate their own positions more lucidly, and spirited response to Lewis continues to this day, as the New Milton Critics' own work displays. Such inspiration is in fact acknowledged by some of the New Milton Critics' own guard. Empson's opening paragraph proclaims that "Professor C. S. Lewis let in some needed fresh air by saying, 'Many of those who say they dislike Milton's God only mean that they dislike God' [*Preface* 126]" (9). Responding to this cue, Empson gleefully informs his audience that he has considered the Christian God "very wicked" since his boyhood (10), and from there he mounts his attack on Milton's God. Furthermore, Empson responds to Lewis throughout his book, disagreeing vehemently and often, but with a sense of respectful appreciation. In addition, John Rumrich's 1987 *Matter of Glory: A New Preface to Paradise Lost* derives both its title and its subtitle from a pair of Lewis's books (*The Weight of Glory* and *A Preface to Paradise Lost*), and while stating forthrightly his disagreements with many of Lewis's conclusions, Rumrich's Introduction observes that his book "follow[s] roughly the same course as Lewis" (6). This debt of gratitude to Lewis,

acknowledged by both the New Milton Criticism's patron saint and one of its earliest practitioners, should again give us pause before we believe that Lewis stifled critical discussion of *Paradise Lost's* tensions.

But Wittreich is not the only New Milton Critic to accuse Lewis of stifling inquiry into the epic's tensions, and the accusations of these other New Milton Critics are frankly troubling—troubling about the accusers, I mean. If Wittreich's "gag order" comment is a piece of unfortunate overstatement, the characterization of Lewis offered by Bryson and Herman is nothing short of egregious misrepresentation. Bryson states that "Lewis's argument . . . is made with the express intent of, as he puts it, 'prevent[ing] the reader from ever raising certain questions'" (21). Bryson continues gravely: "Thus is the goal of nearly all orthodoxies summed up" (21). Here, Bryson uses Lewis's own words to insinuate baldly that the aim of Lewis's book is to deter readers from wrestling with the kinds of major interpretive issues that might cause readers to stray from the narrow path of neo-Christian critical orthodoxy.

But if we look at Lewis's quotation in context, we see that he is hardly doing that. Lewis follows his brief summary of Augustinian theology with the following:

It is my hope that this short analysis will prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions which have, in my opinion, led critics into blind alleys. We need not ask "What is the Apple?" It is an apple. It is not an allegory. It is an apple, just as Desdemona's handkerchief is a handkerchief.

(69)

We may ask ourselves: what reader of Milton ever "thought himself impaired" by Lewis suggesting that he not spend undue energy ruminating over what the apple is? And if Lewis somehow did discourage further critical inquiry into the apple, do we regret such silence?

Lewis goes on to mention the *only* other question he says need not be asked:

We can also dismiss that question which has so much agitated some great critics. "What is the Fall?" The Fall is simply and solely Disobedience—doing what you have been told not to do: and it results from Pride—from being too big for your boots, forgetting your place, thinking that you are God. This is what St. Augustine thinks and what (to the best of my knowledge) the Church has always taught; this Milton states in the very first line of the first Book.

(69)

Here Lewis offers basic clarification about a basic theological issue, an issue not challenged by Milton's *Christian Doctrine*, whose chapter "On the Fall of Our First Parents" (382–84) explicitly equates humanity's fall with Adam and Eve's disobedience in eating the first fruit in a way that parallels Lewis's above summation. Nowhere here does Lewis dismiss the psychological complexities of Eve's temptation and Adam's fall or whatever emotional sympathies Milton and his readers might have for these characters or for Satan.

Indeed, when we look at Lewis's quotation in context, it becomes clear that the "certain questions" that Lewis was trying to prevent readers from raising involve matters of basic background information. This is a universal pedagogical tactic that

teachers use to empower their classes to discuss more complex interpretive issues during limited class time. My own undergraduate Milton professor, for example, began his coverage of *Paradise Lost* by reading portions of Genesis 2 and 3. He did this, he remarked with obvious annoyance, because some years earlier a student had inquired who Adam and Eve were—he had never heard of them before. Professor Cirillo was indeed seeking to prevent us from asking certain questions. Lewis should not be accused of intellectual tyranny for employing a tactic that all teachers—and scholars—use.

Bryson's mischaracterization of Lewis is particularly serious because this inaccurate portrayal has been rather widely disseminated. In his 2004 review of *The Tyranny of Heaven* in *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Herman quotes Bryson's aforementioned quotation of Lewis and then approvingly paraphrases Bryson's position: "While Lewis published those words in 1942, they continue to guide Milton criticism" (2). Herman then further perpetuates and indeed expands on this mischaracterization of Lewis in the opening chapter of his own 2005 book, *Destabilizing Milton*. There, Herman responds to Fish's assertion that writings by past great Miltonists—including Lewis—have opened and continue to open up new paths of literary analysis for later scholars (see Fish, "Milton" 268). Herman responds:

Yet, the banality of stating that their work is pathbreaking is alleviated (I hope) by the recognition that paths point in certain directions, not others, and these borders mark the limits of acceptable inquiry, a fact that C. S. Lewis makes explicit when he asserts, with breathtaking candor, that the whole point of his Augustinian approach to Milton's epic is to "prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions."

(7)

We see here that Herman, like Bryson, uses a quotation by Lewis, taken out of context, to characterize Lewis's book's *raison d'être* as being the stifling of critical inquiry. And this inaccurate portrayal is disseminated even further (albeit unwittingly) in Bill Goldstein's *Renaissance Quarterly* review of *Destabilizing Milton*, which, paraphrasing Herman, notes "C. S. Lewis's remark that his *Preface to Paradise Lost* is designed to 'prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions'" (651). Finally, in the concluding sentence of a *Literature Compass* essay surveying the New Milton Criticism, Herman again takes the same Lewis quotation out of context to offer this preposterously overreaching and self-congratulatory binary: "If C. S. Lewis wrote *A Preface to Paradise Lost* with the intention of preventing 'the reader from ever raising certain questions,' the New Milton Criticism encourages all questions, regardless of where the answer will take the reader" ("Paradigms" 19). All this because Lewis tried to get critics to stop quibbling about what the apple is! But seriously—this misrepresentation has found its way into at least two important books and three influential journals, and I suspect it will resurface in a forthcoming volume entitled *The New Milton Criticism* that Herman has co-edited. But in the interest of defending an important Miltonist's integrity, I would like to put a stop to this misrepresentation. To use Bryson's own words, "The time has come to say 'enough'" (25).⁸

The irony of all this misrepresentation is not only that Lewis's book has in fact elicited such diverse critical response and indeed expanded the scope of Milton studies in untold ways; we should also remember that Lewis wrote his book in part to respond to Saurat's exhortation that readers "study what there is of lasting origi-

nality in Milton's thought and especially to disentangle from theological rubbish the permanent and human interest" (111; cf. Lewis 64). Again, note the irony: it is Saurat here who encourages readers to dismiss a hugely important framework for critical inquiry—and we should consider how impoverished Milton studies would be had Saurat's advice been heeded. Indeed, as Lewis observes, "Milton's thought, when purged of its theology, does not exist" (64). But despite his vehement disagreement with Saurat, Lewis makes clear that he and "all lovers of Milton" are in debt to Saurat for raising the questions he did, adding that although he finds "very different answers to these questions, my debt to Professor Saurat is not the less. . . . even those of us who disagree with him are, in one sense, of his school" (91). There is a basic civility here in Lewis's tone that merits imitation, a tone that is evident, as I mentioned earlier, in Rumrich's *Matter of Glory*. But if some of the New Miltonists cannot bring themselves to acknowledge their own debt to Lewis and rather simply see him as an outmoded and tyrannical old god that they, the "band of titans" (Sherry 43), needs must pull down, they at least owe it to their readers to represent Lewis fairly.

In any event, if certain New Miltonists seem content to oversimplify Lewis's *Preface*, this oversimplification is regrettably consistent with their oversimplification of much of the history of Milton studies. As I have sought to demonstrate thus far in this essay and its notes, practitioners of the New Milton Criticism—whom Herman contends "base their arguments on a combination of close-reading and historical research" ("Paradigms" 15)—have oversimplified the pre-Romantic discussion of Milton, the nineteenth-century discussion of Milton, the early twentieth-century discussion of Milton, and the post-Lewis discussion of Milton. This is more than a little ironic, for a prime tenet of the New Milton Criticism is that contemporary Milton studies continues to oversimplify Milton (Herman *Destabilizing* 1–21; "Paradigms" 11–16), a charge that is indeed another oversimplification (Sherry 43–44). And in their depiction of the current landscape of Milton studies, certain New Miltonists again bemoan the excessive influence of Lewis's specter, stating that the "ruling deities" of the Milton Society of America "are C. S. Lewis et al." (Herman, *Destabilizing* 3) and asserting that the dominant paradigm of Milton studies for the past four decades has been Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin*, which they consider "a methodologically radical update of Lewis's reading of *Paradise Lost* as a literary monument to mainstream Christianity" (Rumrich, *Milton* 4; cf. Bryson 22).

This association between Lewis and Fish is yet another oversimplification, evidenced by the paucity of Fish's book's engagement with Lewis and its degree of interaction with Waldo, Empson, Broadbent, and Peter. I remember that when I first read Rumrich's above statement about Fish and Lewis, I returned to *Surprised by Sin*, expecting to see Lewis's influence throughout; I was shocked to see how little Lewis actually comes into play therein. According to *Surprised by Sin*'s index, Fish cites Lewis on only seven pages, three of which are dedicated to challenging Lewis's criticisms of the style and content of Books 11 and 12 (300–02). Significantly, only twice does Fish appear to agree with Lewis, and in both cases Lewis is mentioned only briefly (145, 269). Indeed, Lewis's striking lack of clear influence on Fish's book seriously challenges the claim that *Surprised by Sin* is an updating of Lewis's argument, but certain New Milton Critics continue to press the connection between the two beyond the evidence. Herman argues, for example, that Fish "turns Lewis' observation" that "many of those who say they dislike Milton's God only mean that they dislike God into a deliberate, pedagogical strategy for instructing the

reader as to his or her genuine state" ("Paradigms" 12). But *nowhere* in *Surprised by Sin* does Fish refer to the Lewis quotation that Herman highlights or anything resembling it. Moreover, in his original preface to *Surprised by Sin*, Fish writes that Waldock and Joseph Summers—two Miltonists who challenged Lewis on important points—were the critics who "most influenced" him (lxxii). Lewis is not mentioned. For the record, Fish cites Empson on eight pages, Broadbent on nine, Peter on seventeen, and Waldock on twenty-five. Fish's book is, of course, largely a response to Waldock, and he disagrees significantly with the others as well, but Fish's conscientious and thorough engagement with Waldock's and their arguments as he shapes his own contrasts with his surprisingly sparing interaction with Lewis and his tepid enthusiasm for him.

Having thus noted that Lewis's sway over Fish's seminal work is something considerably less pervasive than the aforementioned New Milton Critics have suggested, I offer this concluding rumination: I suspect that the New Milton Critics invoke the deceased, old-fashioned, excessively orthodox old god Lewis (in straw man context, particularly in Bryson's and Herman's cases) and his allegedly supreme influence on Fish in order to make, by association, easier prey of Fish, a still-living, frustratingly enduring, and—perhaps most gallingly for his opponents—internet-savvy and perpetually hip old god who stands as the ultimate target of the New Milton Criticism's iconoclastic scholarly reformation.⁹ But as I stated earlier, this essay was written to speak up for the dead. Fish can defend himself quite aptly.

Calvin College

NOTES

¹ I cite the opening paragraph of Fish's unpublished address and thank him for sending me a copy of his manuscript. Thanks also to Feisal Mohamed for his careful reading of and helpful suggestions for this essay while in progress and to James Doelman, Stephen Fallon, Scott Howard, Brian Ingrassia, Kent Lehnhof, John Leonard, Gregory Machacek, William Moeck, Louis Schwartz, John T. Shawcross, John Timmerman, William Vande Kopple, Sara van den Berg, and Hugh Wilson for their insights, encouragement, and/or admonitions at later stages of its composition. I also offer my deep gratitude to Calvin College, whose Calvin Research Fellowship assisted me during my initial composition of this essay and whose sabbatical program benefited me during the essay's final revisions.

² For a very recent argument that responds to the New Milton Criticism and its detractors by suggesting that Milton is not so much a poet of uncertainties, but rather "dueling certainties," see Fallon. I thank Professor Fallon for sending me a copy of his manuscript.

³ See, for example, Fish's Preface to the second edition of *Surprised by Sin*, his 2003 address to the Conference on John Milton that responded to criticisms of *How Milton Works*, and "The New Milton Criticism."

⁴ Bryson mistakenly cites this quote as from page 18. The degree of Masson's support for the Satanic position is open to interpretation. In his 1880 publication of vol. 6 of his *Life of John Milton*, Masson defines what he means by a "hero":

If "the hero" of an epic is that principal personage who figures from first to last, and whose actions draw all the threads, or even if success in some sense, and command of our admiration and sympathy in some degree, . . . then not wrongly have so many of the critics regarded Satan as "the hero" of *Paradise Lost*. (554)

Here, Masson offers a possible definition of the word “hero” and notes that Milton’s Satan more or less fits the criteria for that definition. But this definition does not argue that Milton himself was in sympathy with Satan any more than it argues that Shakespeare’s primary sympathies were toward Iago or Macbeth.

⁵ Tillyard unfortunately does not list these critics, but earlier twentieth-century critics who rejected a Satanic interpretation include More, who offers no positive words about Satan but simply writes that he “stands for pride and evil ambition” and “represents malice and hatred and every passion most abhorrent to the love and loving kindness of Eden” (250–51); Hanford, who notes the “fundamental perversion” of Satan’s “will” and “intellect” in Book 1 (*Milton* 150; in a later edition of the same work, Hanford says “Satan can be heroic only in hell” [Hanford and Taaffe 162]), observes the irony of Satan’s “false triumph” over humanity, and downplays the grandeur of his opening speech, noting the “sophistry” of “his logic, even with himself” (“Dramatic” 188); and Greenlaw, who, pointing out that Satan’s beauty is already degraded even when first seen in hell, observes Satan’s “gradual dimming of beauty” (culminating in Satan’s transformation into a serpent with his followers in hell in Book 10), which exemplifies “Spenser’s point that soul is form and doth the body make” (353). Greenlaw suggests a parallel example in Spenser’s depiction of the false Florimel (353). Addressing a similar point, Hanford cross-references Milton’s own work as he discusses the “progressive change” in Satan’s appearance, something Milton “carefully marked . . . as evidence of the manner in which the soul transforms the body for better or for worse to its own essence (see *Comus*, lines 453–75)” (*Milton* 156–57).

⁶ In 1942 Arthur Barker noted that “Few of us still believe that the paradoxical interpretation of *Paradise Lost* set forth by Blake and Shelley . . . sprang fully armed from the miraculous marriage of Heaven and Hell effected by Romantic inspiration over the dead body of Neo-classicism” (421). Barker asserts that, despite Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* essays, “interest in the Satanic books was almost as great in the eighteenth century as the nineteenth” (428), and he examines Leonard Welsted’s, William Smith’s, Edmund Burke’s, James Beattie’s, and Hugh Blair’s discussions of Satan’s sublimity. Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric* was particularly important because Blair viewed Satan with a “wondering terror” combined with “sympathetic admiration” (Barker 432) and “emphasize[d] his humanity” (Barker 436). Blair’s work anticipated the work of Blake and Shelley because although Blair still considers Adam Milton’s hero, “Satan fascinates him, and seems worthy of pity and admiration; and when the principles which Milton erects against Satan (not only in theological disquisitions but in the description of Paradise and the dramatic account of the Fall) have ceased to be felt as facts, there will be nothing to hinder the triumph of the devil’s party” (Barker 436).

Moreover, John Shawcross notes that Blake and Shelley’s presentations of Satan as hero were preceded by well-known statements by John Dryden, Charles Batteux, and William Godwin, and he adds to their list the anonymous author of *A Journey through the Head of a Modern Poet, being the Substance of a Dream, Occasioned by Reading the Sixth Book of Virgil*, a 1750 publication in which Milton is depicted in hell and says “*the Devil really was my Hero*” (qtd. in Shawcross 104).

⁷ See also Wittreich’s *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting Samson Agonistes*.

⁸ Bryson makes this statement to articulate his concern with what he considers the continued dominance of the neo-Christian paradigm in Milton studies.

⁹ New Miltonist challenges to *Surprised by Sin* and its alleged place as the dominant paradigm in Milton studies are seen throughout the Introduction of Rumrich’s *Milton Unbound* and Rumrich’s earlier “Uninventing Milton,” and in Bryson 22–25. Herman also challenges Fish throughout his Introduction to *Destabilizing Milton*, although he focuses more on various other writings, including Fish’s comparatively recent *How Milton Works* (16–19; cf. Herman “Paradigms” 13–14).

WORKS CITED

- Barker, Arthur. “‘And on His Crest Sat Horror’: Eighteenth-Century Interpretations of Milton’s Sublimity and His Satan.” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 11 (1942): 421–36.
- Batteux, Charles. *Principes de la littérature*. Vol. 2. Paris, 1764.

- Beattie, James. "Illustrations on Sublimity." *Dissertations Moral and Critical*. Dublin, 1783. 369–425.
- Blair, Hugh. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. London, 1783. Vol. 2.
- Blake, William. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. *William Blake's Writings*. Ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978. 74–97. Rpt. in Teskey 389.
- Broadbent, J. B. *Some Graver Subject: An Essay on Paradise Lost*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960.
- Brooke, Stopford. *Milton*. London, 1879.
- Bryson, Michael. *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004.
- Buckland, Anna. *The Story of English Literature*. London, 1882.
- Bush, Douglas. "Characters and Drama." *Paradise Lost in Our Time*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1945. Rpt. in Martz 109–20.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. London, 1757.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Unassigned Lecture Notes [Milton and *Paradise Lost*]." *Lectures 1808–19 on Literature*. Ed. R. A. Foakes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1987. 425–29. Rpt. in Teskey 391–92.
- Dennis, John. *Heroes of Literature*. London, 1883.
- Dryden, John. "Dedication of the *Aeneis*." *The Works of Virgil*. London, 1697.
- Elledge, Scott, ed. *Paradise Lost*. A Norton Critical Edition. 1st ed. and 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1975 and 1993.
- Empson, William. "Milton and Bentley." *Some Versions of the Pastoral*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1935. Rpt. in Martz 19–39.
- . *Milton's God*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1961.
- Fallon, Stephen M. "Reading Milton Reading: Beyond the New Milton Criticism." MLA Convention. Philadelphia. 29 December 2009. Address.
- Fish, Stanley. "Faith and Deficits." *New York Times* "Think Again" Blog. Posted on March 1, 2009. Web. 5 June 2009.
- . *How Milton Works*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001.
- . "Milton, Thou Shouldst be Living at This Hour." *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing Too*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994. 267–72.
- . "The New Milton Criticism." Ninth International Milton Symposium, London. 7 July 2008. Address.
- . Response to plenary panel discussion *How Milton Works*. 2003 Conference on John Milton. Murfreesboro, TN. 25 October 2003. Address.
- . *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Gilbert, H. Allan. "Critics of Mr. C. S. Lewis on Milton's Satan." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 47 (1948): 216–25.
- Godwin, William. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Dublin, 1793. Vol. 1.
- Goldstein, Bill. Rev. of Peter C. Herman, *Destabilizing Milton: Paradise Lost and the Poetics of Incertitude*. *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 650–52.
- Greenlaw, Edwin. "Spenser's Influence on *Paradise Lost*." *Studies in Philology* 17 (1920): 320–59.
- Hamilton, George Rostrevor. *Hero or Fool? A Study of Milton's Satan*. London: Allen and Uwin, 1944.
- Hanford, James Holly. "The Dramatic Element in *Paradise Lost*." *Studies in Philology* 14 (1917): 178–95.
- . *A Milton Handbook*. New York: Crofts, 1926.

- and James G. Taaffe. *A Milton Handbook*. 5th ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1970.
- Hazlitt, William. “Lecture III. On Shakespeare and Milton.” *Lectures on the English Poets*. Ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover. London: Dent, 1902. 44–68.
- Herman, Peter C. *Destabilizing Milton: Paradise Lost and the Poetics of Incertitude*. New York: Palgrave, 2005.
- . “Paradigms Lost, Paradigms Found: The New Milton Criticism.” *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): RE 176, 1–26.
- . Rev. of Michael Bryson, *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton’s Rejection of God as King*. *Early Modern Literary Studies* 10.1 (May 2004): 8.1–10. Web. 10 August 2004.
- and Elizabeth Sauer, eds. *The New Milton Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011 (forthcoming).
- Hodgson, Shadworth H. *Outcast Essays and Verse Translations*. London, 1881.
- Huckabay, Calvin. “The Satanist Controversy of the Nineteenth Century.” *Studies in English Renaissance Literature*. Ed. Waldo F. McNeir. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1962. 197–210.
- A Journey through the Head of a Modern Poet, being the Substance of a Dream, Occasioned by Reading the Sixth Book of Virgil*. London, 1750.
- Landor, Walter Savage. “Southey and Landor.” *Imaginary Conversations*. Ed. Charles E. Crump. London: Dent, 1941. Rpt. in Teskey 395–96.
- Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. London: Oxford UP, 1942.
- . *The Weight of Glory*. New York: Macmillan, 1949.
- Martz, Louis L., ed. *Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Twentieth Century Views. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1966.
- Masson, David. *The Life of John Milton*. London, 1880. Vol. 6.
- Milton, John. *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. Gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe. Vol. 6: *Christian Doctrine*. Ed. Maurice Kelley. Trans. John Carey. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1973.
- More, Paul Elmer. “The Theme of *Paradise Lost*.” *Shelburne Essays*. 4th series. New York: Knickerbocker P, 1906. 239–53.
- Morris, J. W. *John Milton: A Vindication, Specially from the Charge of Arianism*. London, 1862.
- Myers, P. Z. “The Bible is Not an Economics Textbook.” Pharyngula blog. 3 March 2009. Web. 5 June 2009.
- Peter, John. *A Critique of Paradise Lost*. New York: Columbia UP, 1960.
- Raleigh, Walter. *Milton*. New York: Putnam, 1900.
- Rigter, G. H. “Milton’s Treatment of Satan in *Paradise Lost*.” *Neophilologus* 42 (1958): 309–22.
- Rumrich, John Peter. *The Matter of Glory: A New Preface to Paradise Lost*. Pittsburgh, PA: U of Pittsburgh P, 1987.
- . *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- . “Uninventing Milton.” *Modern Philology* 87 (1990): 249–65.
- Saurat, Denis. *Milton, Man and Thinker*. New York: Dial P, 1925.
- Shawcross, John T. “An Early View of Satan as Hero of *Paradise Lost*.” *Milton Quarterly* 32 (1998): 104–05.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. Preface to *Prometheus Bound*. *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*. Norton Critical Edition. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 205–09. Rpt. in Teskey 393.
- Sherry, Beverley. Rev. of Peter C. Herman, *Destabilizing Milton: Paradise Lost and the Poetics of Incertitude*. *Milton Quarterly* 41 (2007): 43–46.

- Smith, William. *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime*. Dublin, 1739.
- Steadman, John M. "The Idea of Satan as the Hero of *Paradise Lost*." *Proceedings of the American Philological Society* 120 (1976): 253-94.
- Stoll, Elmer Edgar. "Give the Devil His Due: A Reply to Mr. Lewis." *Review of English Studies* 20 (1944): 108-24.
- . "A Postscript to 'Give the Devil His Due.' " *Philological Quarterly* 28 (1949): 167-84.
- Teskey, Gordon, ed. *Paradise Lost*. Norton Critical Edition. 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 2005.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. *Milton*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1930.
- Waldock, A. J. A. *Paradise Lost and Its Critics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1947.
- Welsted, Leonard. *The Works of D. Longinus*. London, 1712.
- West, John. "New Directions in Recent Milton Criticism." *Literature Compass* 6/3 (2009): 693-705.
- Wilson, John. "Christopher under Canvas." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 72 (1852): 133-62, 373-96.
- Wittreich, Joseph. *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting Samson Agonistes*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne UP, 2002.
- . *Why Milton Matters: A New Preface to His Writings*. New York: Palgrave, 2006.

**CRITICAL FORUM: C. S. LEWIS, DAVID URBAN,
AND THE NEW MILTON CRITICISM**

C. S. Lewis and the New Milton Criticism

PETER C. HERMAN

I am not going to tax the reader's patience by repeating John Milton's mistake in *Eikonoklastes* and giving a tedious, point-by-point rebuttal of every single statement David Urban makes in his recent diatribe against the New Milton Criticism. Three examples should suffice, I hope, to establish the range of error in this piece. (Urban's tasteless joke about Stanley Fish's religious observance and his self-satisfaction with his "irony" merit a raised eyebrow, but not discussion.)

First, it is very odd that Urban would turn to an unpublished conference paper by Stanley Fish for his initial description of the New Milton Criticism's aims, which is sort of like turning to *The Reason of Church-Government* to learn about the history of bishops in England or to *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* for an understanding of royalism (assuming for a second that both remained in manuscript). Urban could have used my *Literature Compass* article, or the introduction to my *Destabilizing Milton*, or Joseph Wittreich's *Why Milton Matters*. Urban could have even asked me for a copy of *The New Milton Criticism's* introduction (surely a forthcoming publication would have more authority than a conference address Fish has evidently decided against publishing). Second, according to Urban, Michael Bryson wrongly asserts that the Satanist position dominated the nineteenth century, and Urban cites an essay by Calvin Huckabay proving that "the state of nineteenth-century critical attitudes toward Satan was more complex than Bryson indicates" (96). But Huckabay in fact argues the opposite case: "these dissident [anti-Satanist] voices were in the minority during the nineteenth century. Two of Milton's last and most influential biographers of the era, Richard Garnett and Sir Walter Raleigh, reflected the deep and abiding opinion of the majority that in reality Satan is the hero" (205-06). And third, Urban bases his claim that C. S. Lewis did not influence Fish's *Surprised by Sin* on the paucity of references in Fish's index (101). But indices are not always an accurate indicator of influence: Michel Foucault's fingerprints are all over Stephen Greenblatt's famous article, "Invisible Bullets," yet not one note refers to him. Perhaps Greenblatt could have done a better job of indicating his sources. Perhaps Fish should have done the same. That does not mean that Foucault did not influence the former, or Lewis the latter. Nor is the index to *A Preface to Paradise Lost* without flaw: Lewis blames Blake for all the subsequent ills of Milton criticism ("After Blake, Milton criticism is lost in misunderstanding" [133]), yet this citation escapes indexing.¹

But the main issue I want to address here is not Urban's ability to read criticism, or the accuracy of indices. It's Urban's frequently repeated accusation that Michael Bryson, Joseph Wittreich, and I have grossly misread C. S. Lewis.

The key is this statement from Lewis: "It is my hope that this short analysis will prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions which have, in my opinion, led critics into blind alleys" (70). Urban (rightly) summarizes Bryson's and my position on this sentence: we use "Lewis's own words to insinuate baldly that the aim of Lewis's book is to deter readers from wrestling with the kinds of major interpretive issues that might cause readers to stray from the narrow path of neo-Christian critical orthodoxy" (99). Exactly so, and one would think that the plain sense of "prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions" would amply justify our sense that Lewis wants to stop discussion, not encourage it. One is tempted to ask: "What part of '*prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions*' does David Urban not understand?"

The answer, however, is more interesting than critical obtuseness. To understand more fully what is at stake, I want to summarize the line of argument that culminates in Lewis's desire to "prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions." Lewis clearly states his thesis at the chapter's start:

Milton's version of the Fall story is substantially that of St. Augustine, which is that of the Church as a whole. By studying this version we shall learn what the story meant in general to Milton and to his contemporaries and shall thus be the more likely to avoid various false emphases to which modern readers are liable.

(66)

Lewis then delivers an eleven-point summary of Augustine's views, which he believes Milton follows to the letter. Two are particularly relevant:

8. The Fall consisted in Disobedience. All idea of a magic apple has fallen out of sight. The apple "was not bad nor harmful except in so far as it was forbidden" and the only point of forbidding was to instill obedience, "which virtue in a rational creature (the emphasis is on *creature*; that which though rational, is merely a creature, not a self-existent being) is, as it were, the mother and guardian of *all* virtues" (*De Civ. Dei*, XIV, 12). This is exactly the Miltonic view.

9. But while the Fall *consisted in* Disobedience, it *resulted*, like Satan's, from Pride (*De Civ. Dei*, XIV, 13). Hence Satan approaches Eve through her Pride . . . and secondly (this is more important) by urging her selfhood to direct revolt against the fact of being subject to God at all. "Why," he asks, "was this forbid? Why but to keep ye low and ignorant, His worshippers?" ([*PL*] IX, 703)

(68-69)

There is no possible room for argument or augmentation; no possibility of a differing interpretation of the Fall or that Milton might have a different take on the Fall. These are the facts of the poem, says Lewis, and there can be no disputing them. Hence, "raising certain questions" about these points (Lewis gives only one example, see below) leads only to "blind alleys."

Lewis's absolute certainty in this passage results from his belief that *Paradise Lost* is a poem of the utmost simplicity and "desolating clarity" (71). Indeed, Lewis cannot understand what all the fuss is about. "How are we to account," Lewis asks in

seeming incomprehension, “for the fact that great modern scholars have missed what is so dazzlingly simple” (71). The controversies over the poem, Lewis posits, must be due to some sort of neurosis:

I think we must suppose that the real nature of the Fall and the real moral of the poem involve an idea so uninteresting or so intensely disagreeable to them that they have been under a sort of psychological necessity of passing it over and hushing it up. Milton, they feel, must have meant something more than that!

(71)

We should not ignore the brilliance of Lewis’s rhetorical effects, the way he employs folksy terms (“too big for your boots”), the assumption of unity with his readers (“How are we to account . . .”; “I think we must suppose . . .”), his dismissal of the intellectual acuity of his opponents (they must be under “a sort of psychological necessity”) to foreclose discussion and, well, prevent questions from being raised. Urban, for his part, swallows Lewis hook, line, and sinker, so much so that he takes Lewis’s recitation not as an interpretation of *Paradise Lost*, but as a matter “of basic background information” (99), on par, he claims, with such matters as plot and the list of characters:

My own undergraduate Milton professor, for example, began his coverage of *Paradise Lost* by reading portions of Genesis 2 and 3. He did this, he remarked with obvious annoyance, because some years earlier a student had inquired who Adam and Eve were—he had never heard of them before. Professor Cirillo was indeed seeking to prevent us from asking certain questions. Lewis should not be accused of intellectual tyranny for employing a tactic that all teachers—and scholars—use.

(100)

The problem, however, is that just about everything that Lewis claims is beyond question, as unarguable as the *dramatis personae*, as Urban says, is in fact deeply questionable at all sorts of levels. Let me give a few examples.

Lewis claims that “Milton’s version of the Fall story is substantially that of St. Augustine, which is that of the Church as a whole” (66) and that this version of the Fall represents “what St. Augustine thinks and what (to the best of my knowledge) the Church has always taught” (71). My question, which both Lewis and Urban would prevent, is: *which church*? Lewis’s assumption that there is a single “Church” that enjoyed universal acceptance, whose teachings are uniform and seamlessly transmitted over time, is nonsense. To state the blindingly obvious, there was no single “Church” in the ancient, medieval, or early modern world whose teachings “have been held ‘always and everywhere and by all’” (82; Lewis does not identify the quotation’s source). Rather, after the Reformation (itself hardly a unified event), there were multiple, competing churches, each claiming the mantle of truth, each rejecting the other as false, and at least one thoughtful person at the time recognized the problem. As John Donne, simultaneously plaintive and playful, asks:

Show me, dear Christ, Thy spouse so bright and clear.
 What, is it she which on the other shore
 Goes richly painted? Or which robbed and tore
 Laments and mourns in Germany and here?
 Sleeps she a thousand, then peeps up one year?
 Is she self-truth and errs? Now new, now outwore?
 ("Holy Sonnet 18" 1-6)

One cannot imagine that the further splintering of Protestantism during Milton's life made the situation any clearer.

Lewis and Urban are not much more expansive when dealing with the Fall and Milton's treatment of it. Lewis, Urban writes, "offers *basic* clarification about a *basic* theological issue, an issue not challenged by Milton's *Christian Doctrine*," and, Urban continues, "the 'certain questions' that Lewis was trying to prevent readers from raising involve matters of *basic* background information" (99; my emphases). After establishing these "basic" facts, the class can then move on to "more complex interpretive issues" (100). Yet when one looks at the ostensibly "background information" even cursorily (which of course is more than Lewis or Urban would allow), nothing about it is "basic."

Let's begin with "the apple." Lewis claims that "the apple" has no significance in itself, and inquiries into "the apple" represent exactly the sort of question he hopes to "prevent": "The idea that the apple has any *intrinsic* importance is put into the mouths of bad characters. . . . We need not ask 'What is the Apple?' It is an apple. It is not an allegory. . . . Everything hangs on it, but in itself it is of no importance" (69-70; emphases in the original). Urban follows Lewis, asking rhetorically "what reader of Milton ever 'thought himself impaired' by Lewis suggesting that he not spend undue energy ruminating over what the apple is? And if Lewis somehow did discourage further critical inquiry into the apple, do we regret such silence?" (99).

But the reader who spends a little time ruminating over this problem (which again is more than Lewis and Urban want) would quickly realize that matter is vastly more complex than these two would allow. First, Milton's Raphael uses an odd locution to describe how the apple works. In Book 7, God tells Adam immediately after his creation (curiously, Raphael does not describe Eve's birth) that the fruit of the forbidden tree "*works* knowledge of good and evil" (7.543; my emphasis).² The verb, "works" can mean to "construct, produce, effect" (OED def. 3), suggesting that there might very well be, contra Lewis, something "*intrinsic*" to the fruit itself.

Following this line of thought raises the question of why God would want to prevent his creatures from acquiring this knowledge. As Satan puts it,

knowledge forbidden?
 Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord
 Envy them that? Can it be sin to know,
 Can it be death? And so they only stand
 By ignorance, is that their happy state. . . .
 (4.515-19)

Doubtless, Lewis (and Urban) would immediately dismiss such questions as evidence of Satan's evil. Except that Satan correctly interprets the impetus behind God's command when he says he will

excite their minds
 With more desire to know, and to reject
 Envious commands, invented with design
 To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
 Equal with gods.

(4.522–26)

According to Genesis, after the Fall, “the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore, the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden” (4.22–23).³ Why indeed does God want to keep his creations from understanding Good and Evil? Why does Milton have Satan accurately paraphrase Genesis? What is the relationship between this injunction, Raphael’s advice to Adam that he “be lowly wise” (9.173), Milton’s desire in the proem to Book 3 that he equal “Blind Thamyras and Blind Maeonides, / And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old” (35–36), all except for Homer (“Maeonides”) known for acquiring transgressive knowledge, and his praise of the England so many years earlier in *Areopagitica* as a nation “prone to seek after knowledge” (957)?

On the other hand, if the knowledge produced is not intrinsic, but experiential, meaning knowledge of evil arises from doing something forbidden, then we have a different assortment of problems. Did God sufficiently arm Adam and Eve about the nature of the threat arrayed against them? Does the fact that Eve gets most of her information while hiding behind a bush (9.277) qualify the effectiveness of what she overhears? Concomitantly, did Raphael do as good a job as he ought with Adam? Among other problems, his final words consist of an embarrassed disquisition on angelic sexuality, and not a powerful reminder of who lies in wait for them, and what Satan has in mind. Unsurprisingly, and perhaps to the dismay of Lewis and Urban, distinguished critics are divided on this issue. Christopher Tilmouth, for instance, in a recent collection of essays, argues that the first couple are not sufficiently prepared, because “the reality underlying *Paradise Lost* is that its ethic of free, rational choice can only truly be realized by those who already possess *Areopagitica*’s full and conscious sense of moral antitheses. . . . Paradoxically, prelapsarian man needs access to a postlapsarian consciousness” (55). In the same volume, Paul Hammond suggests that Eve is in fact fully equipped to resist Satan’s blandishments (80). But Lewis and Urban would stifle these questions and the subsequent debate they have engendered. So yes, I think the reader would regret being “prevented” from considering them, Urban’s snigger notwithstanding.

Turning to the question of obedience, Lewis, and his acolyte again reduce complexity to simplicity. According to Lewis, “The Fall is simply and solely Disobedience—doing what you have been told not to do” (70), and nothing else matters: “Eve’s arguments in favour of eating the Apple are, in themselves, reasonable enough; the answer to them consists simply in the reminder ‘You mustn’t. You were told not to’” (71), a point Stanley Fish reiterates in *How Milton Works* when he bluntly states that in Milton’s world, “there are no moral ambiguities, because there are no equally compelling values. There is only one value—the value of obedience” (53). Consequently, there is no need to consider this “basic” (Urban’s term) matter further. Superficially, they are right: God certainly said not to. However, if one ignores Lewis’s attempt to “prevent the reader from ever asking certain questions,”

one finds that Milton has structured the narrative of *Paradise Lost* to invite fundamental questions.

Thinking about the question of knowledge ineluctably brings us to the fact that God creates Eve as Adam's intellectual inferior.⁴ One might wonder why God creates an opening for Satan by endowing Adam and Eve with unequal intellectual gifts, although it is perfectly clear from Eve's channeling *Areopagitica* in Book 9 that she is a lot smarter than Adam allows. Infamously, Adam complains to Raphael that Eve may be a sexual fantasy come true, but she is "inferior, in the mind / And inward faculties" (8.541–42), and so, Adam thinks that Eve does not answer his request to God for a companion "fit to participate / All rational delight" (390–91). Furthermore, Eve is smart enough to realize that she is not smart enough for Adam, admitting in her opening speech her sense of inferiority: Adam is "Preeminent by so much odds" and consequently, "Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find" (4.447, 448). Lewis asserts that Eve's fall resulted, "like Satan's, from Pride" (69), but this is not what happens. The intellectual gap between Adam and Eve is crucial because that is how Satan will convince Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Satan, having taken over the serpent's body, describes how the fruit has vastly increased his intellect: after eating,

Thenceforth to speculations high or deep
I turned my thoughts, and with capacious mind
Considered all things visible in heav'n,
Or Earth, or middle, all things fair and good.
(9.602–05)

Lewis is on seemingly firmer ground when dealing with Satan's motivations. The muse, at the start of Book 1, says that Satan's "pride" led to his being "Cast out from Heav'n, with all his host" (37), and in his soliloquy at the start of Book 4, Satan admits that "pride and worse ambition threw me down" (40). But Raphael's narrative gives a very different motivation, and as Richard Strier notes, "The narrator [Raphael, in this case] wants us to think in political terms about the situation" (175). According to the angel, God suddenly changes heaven's political structure: "on this holy hill / Him have anointed, whom ye now behold / At my right hand, your head I him appoint" (5.604–06), and God concludes the (second) elevation of the Son with a threat:

him who disobeys
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep engulfed, his place
Ordained without redemption, without end.
(611–15)

This sudden shift in heaven's political structure causes Satan to revolt: "New laws thou seest imposed; / New laws from him who reigns, new minds may raise / In us who serve, new counsels to debate" (5.679–81). As no less a figure than Blair Worden writes,

like the new monarchies of the Renaissance about whose evils the
republican had so much to say, the monarch of heaven has brought

off a fundamental transition in the balance of power. . . . Like the Renaissance monarchs, God (the Father) has come to treat his kingdom as a possession rather than a trust. . . . As in Milton's Europe, so in Milton's heaven, the revolution in political power has been accompanied by a revolution in political theory.

(236, 238)

God, in other words, has started acting like a tyrant, and Satan justifies his revolt in much the same language that Milton and others used to justify their revolt against Charles I.

Lewis recognizes only *one* motivation for Satan's revolt, whereas Milton gives us *two*: pride *and* politics. Whether one chooses to call this another example of Miltonic incertitude—meaning, Milton giving us twinned narratives that provide radically different views on the same events with no way of choosing between them, or what Stephen Fallon nicely calls “dueling certainties” (qtd. in Urban 102n2), seems to me a distinction without a difference. The important point is that Lewis elides politics as a motivation for the Fall in heaven, just as he elides Eve's sense of intellectual inferiority as a contributing factor to the Fall in Eden, and what is worse, Lewis discourages the reader from considering the matter further.

Even stranger, Lewis would have us believe that for Milton, obedience is the poem's core principle, that the “great moral” (Addison's phrase) of *Paradise Lost* can be reduced “*I must do as I am told*” (71). But does it make sense that the same man who warned against becoming a “heretic in the truth” (952) if you believe something because authority says so, and who defended one of the greatest acts of political disobedience Europe had known (the judicial execution of a monarch who asserted that he was above the law), would suddenly become “the great apostle of blind obedience”?⁵ In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton said that no power “is unaccountable, unquestionable, and not to be resisted” (1033). The rejoinder may be that Milton is talking about civil power, and that is certainly true. But Milton goes out of his way to parallel the heaven of *Paradise Lost* with earthly tyranny. “Who more than thou,” Gabriel says to Satan, “Once fawned, and cringed, and servilely adored / Heav'n's awful Monarch?” (4.958–60), which not only pretty clearly indicates that fawning, cringing, and servilely adoring is standard practice in heaven, but echoes Milton's description of monarchy in *The Ready and Easy Way* as requiring “the perpetual bowings and cringings of an abject people” (1119). Does this tell the entire story? No, and that is the point: it is as reductive to assume that Milton is unqualifiedly against obedience as to assume that he is unqualifiedly for obedience. The key is to try and capture the full complexity and not reduce *Paradise Lost* to the simplistic nostrums “we remember from the morning of our own lives” (71).

It should be clear that there is a pattern to the questions Lewis and Urban seek to “prevent”: they lead to readings of *Paradise Lost* that put pressure on this pair's fundamental beliefs.⁶ These questions invite readers to look critically at every element of Milton's poem, including the nature of God, and the implications remain deeply unsettling to this day. Which brings us to the contribution the New Milton Criticism seeks to make.

While Miltonic contradiction, tension, and unconventionality have been noted over the centuries, the general tendency among Miltonists has been to resolve the conflicts, to create unity out of disunity, and to restore Milton as a “Christian” poet,

whose orthodoxy, Lewis claims, “was accepted . . . by many generations of acute readers well grounded in theology” (82). Yet as Joseph Wittreich notes in his response to Urban’s provocation (see next article), the history of Milton criticism is more the history of coaxing *Paradise Lost* back to the more comfortable precincts of orthodoxy. The New Milton Criticism seeks to move the conflicts and contradictions in Milton’s work to the center of Milton criticism while resisting the gravitational pull toward certainty. Lewis and Urban, on the other hand, using partial readings and the occasional outright error, would create a Milton devoid of tensions and religious challenge. Even worse, by seeking to “prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions” (70), they would turn readers away from the very questions that make *Paradise Lost* such a continually vital, vibrant poem. Lewis and Urban would squelch the conversation before it has begun, and I do not think anybody, New Milton Critic or not, should find that acceptable.

San Diego State University

NOTES

¹ I am grateful to Joe Wittreich for pointing out this lapse.

² All references to Milton’s work will be to the Modern Library edition.

³ None of the editions I consulted on this passage (Lewalski, Flannagan, Hughes, Fowler, Teskey, and Rumrich et al.) points out that Milton has Satan paraphrase this passage from Genesis. Flannagan glosses these as yet another example of Satan’s evil: “Satan is of course imputing his own motive, envy, to God, who certainly has no need or reason to be envious of his creations” (458 n154).

⁴ These paragraphs draw on *Destabilizing Milton*, 127–54 and 83–106.

⁵ I owe this phrase to Richard Strier (private correspondence).

⁶ Lewis’s role as an apologist for his version of Christianity is common knowledge, and it obviously infects his views on “Christianity” and *Paradise Lost*. Urban is a different matter, and readers should know that as a condition of his employment at Calvin College, Urban must adhere to certain beliefs. The “What We Believe” section of the college’s website states: “All of our tenured faculty members are required to be members of the Christian Reformed Church and to sign the Form of Subscription which includes assent to the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort and the Heidelberg Catechism” (<http://www.calvin.edu/faith/believe>; accessed June 30, 2011). As Calvin College materially supported the research for Urban’s essay, he can hardly be expected to produce work that departs from these beliefs, or to endorse work that does. In fact, “raising certain questions” can be a firing offense even for a tenured professor at this institution, as evidenced by the case of John Schneider, who published an article which “raised questions about the traditional, literal reading of Genesis about creation, the story of Adam and Eve, and the fall of humanity out of an initial idyllic state” (Jaschik). For this offense, Prof. Schneider was asked to leave because, in the words of Calvin College’s administration, his “recent and proposed scholarly work addressing issues in genetic science and Christian theology, as they relate to human origin, have engendered legitimate concerns within the college community and its constituencies” (qtd. in Jaschik).

WORKS CITED

- Donne, John. *John Donne’s Poetry*. Ed. A. L. Clements. New York: Norton, 1966.
 Fish, Stanley. *How Milton Works*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001.

- Hammond, Paul. "Milton and the Poetry of the Fall." Hammond and Worden. 67-90.
- Hammond, Paul, and Blair Worden, eds. *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.
- Herman, Peter C., *Destabilizing Milton: Paradise Lost and the Poetics of Incertitude*. New York: Palgrave, 2005.
- . "Paradigms Lost, Paradigms Found: The New Milton Criticism." *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): 1-26.
- Herman, Peter C. and Elizabeth Sauer. "Paradigms Lost and Found: The New Milton Criticism." *The New Milton Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, forthcoming 2012.
- Huckabay, Calvin. "The Satanist Controversy of the Nineteenth Century." *Studies in English Renaissance Literature*. Ed. Waldo F. McNeir. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1962. 197-210.
- Jaschik, Scott. "Fall from Grace." *Inside Higher Education*. 15 August 2011. http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/08/15/a_professor_s_departure_raises_questions_about_freedom_of_scholarship_at_calvin_college.
- Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. 1942. Rpt. New York: Oxford UP, 1970.
- Milton, John. *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*. Ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon. New York: Modern Library, 2007.
- . *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: Odyssey P, 1957.
- . *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Alastair Fowler. London: Longman, 1971.
- . *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Barbara K. Lewalski. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.
- . *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Gordon Teskey. New York: Norton, 2005.
- . *The Riverside Milton*. Ed. Roy Flannagan. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- Strier, Richard. "Milton's Fetters, Or, Why Eden is Better than Heaven." *Milton Studies* 38 (2000): 169-97.
- Tilmouth, Christopher. "Milton on Knowing Good from Evil." Hammond and Worden. 43-66.
- Urban, David V. "Speaking for the Dead: C. S. Lewis Answers the New Milton Criticism; or, 'Milton Ministries' Strikes Back." *Milton Quarterly* 45 (2011): 95-106.
- Wittreich, Joseph. *Why Milton Matters: A New Preface to his Writings*. New York: Palgrave, 2006.
- Worden, Blair. "Milton's Republicanism and the Tyranny of Heaven." *Machiavelli and Republicanism*. Ed. Gisela Block, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. 225-46.

The Acolyte's Rejoinder*: C. S. Lewis and the New Milton Criticism, Yet Once More

DAVID V. URBAN

As I begin my formal response to *Milton Quarterly's* December 2011 forum and its articles by Peter Herman, Joseph Wittreich, and Richard Strier, I feel the need to state that, whatever my substantive disagreements with my interlocutors, I maintain my personal affection for all three, each of whom I've enjoyed interacting with for some years. This is especially germane in the case of Herman, whose recent article I will address most directly. Herman's entertaining sense of humor and his zest for scholarship have long made him one of my favorite people in Milton studies, and I especially value my experience while contributing to his *Approaches to Teaching Milton's Shorter Poetry and Prose*. I can state unequivocally that his work as an editor was nothing short of outstanding, and I will always treasure both how he helped me sharpen my essay in that book and his kindness toward me when severe family health issues prevented me from contributing to his recent *Approaches to Teaching Milton's Paradise Lost*.

I remember Herman's strong qualities when I consider Strier's criticism that, in "Speaking for the Dead," I fail "to distinguish between Lewis at his best and Lewis at his stuffiest" (271). I will take Strier's admonition to heart as I respond to Herman, for, having experienced both Herman's aforementioned excellence as an editor and his sometimes zany humor, I can say with certainty that "C. S. Lewis and the New Milton Criticism" isn't Herman at his best, although it may well be Herman at his stuffiest. For example, before Herman begins rebutting several examples of my alleged argumentative misconduct, he attempts to besmirch my character and turn readers against me by using a rather blatant ad hominem fallacy, the first of many that appear in his essay. Herman states, "Urban's tasteless joke about Stanley Fish's religious observance and his self-satisfaction with his 'irony' merit a raised eyebrow, but not discussion" ("C. S. Lewis" 258). That Herman, he sure knows how to hurt a guy. My scholarly accomplishments are as meager as his are numerous, and he chooses to attack me for my jokes, one of the few things in this life in which I have some documented achievement, having been voted "Best Sense of Humor" by my graduating junior high class (to this day my highest accolade). But how, exactly, is it "tasteless" for me to mention that Fish doesn't exactly fit the religious profile for what Bryson derisively calls "Milton ministries" (23)? And how is it tasteless to note the hyperbolic idiocy of P. Z. Myers calling Fish "a gospel-thumping charlatan on a par with Pat Robertson"? Herman may note that my acknowledgements name fifteen scholars who read my essay before it appeared in *Milton Quarterly* ("Speaking" 102), and not one of them found the joke tasteless (and I asked several of them about that specific matter). Nor did the readers and editors at *Milton Quarterly*. Nor did the session audience at the 2009 Conference on John Milton, to whom I presented an earlier version of this paper and who laughed heartily at the joke. Nor did

Stanley Fish, who sent me a brief note of congratulations for my article in late May 2011. For those of us who have enjoyed Herman's own entertaining (and not, in my experience, tasteless) brand of humor, it indeed "raises an eyebrow" that Herman starts off with this stuffy rhetorical thrust—essentially calling me tasteless for pointing out the irony of other people's mischaracterizations of Fish. Indeed, given his disrespectful past posture toward Fish in *Destabilizing Milton*, Herman's show of indignation here amounts to a rather embarrassing display of false moralizing.

But I understand why Herman chooses to begin his essay with this ad hominem attack—it is because he is unable to substantially refute my actual arguments against him and the other New Milton Critics whom I critique. His second paragraph, in which he tries to refute me on three separate points, exemplifies his argumentative failure. He states, "it is very odd that Urban would turn to an unpublished conference paper by Stanley Fish for his initial description of the New Milton Criticism's aims" ("C. S. Lewis" 258). Hardly. The paper was, of course, Fish's keynote address to the 9th International Milton Symposium (2008), an address that many of *Milton Quarterly's* readers attended. So I was connecting with my audience regarding a controversy with which they were familiar. My essay was submitted to *Milton Quarterly* in September 2009 and presented at the Conference on John Milton the following month, when Fish's address was still fresh to many Miltonists. What *does* seem "very odd," however, is that Herman then laments my alleged failure to use his *Literature Compass* article discussing the New Milton Criticism, when in fact I quote that very article immediately after Fish's quotation. Perhaps Herman is suffering from a "sense of injured merit" that I cite Fish first, but we do live in a market economy of sorts, and I wanted my article to get read by my target audience. Herman also complains that I didn't request the introduction to his then-forthcoming volume, *The New Milton Criticism*. I accept that criticism and indeed wrote Herman twice to request an advance copy of that introduction to aid my writing of this present essay, which I wrote before that volume appeared. Herman never responded to my e-mails, a snub which causes his original complaint—as well as his earlier declaration that "the New Milton Criticism encourages all questions [including, I presume, 'would you please send me a copy of your introduction?'], regardless of where the answer will take the reader" ("Paradigms" 19)—to lose some legitimacy.

The second point Herman seeks to rebut is my statement that the Satanist position in the nineteenth century was "more complex" (96) than what Michael Bryson describes in his very brief statement that the Satan-as-hero position was "dominant" in the nineteenth century (20). In my article I state: "Calvin Huckabay notes that although the Satanic position was the majority position during that century, a number of Victorian critics disputed" the Satanic position, and I list seven critics that Huckabay discusses (96; see Huckabay 203–05). Nevertheless, Herman contends: "But Huckabay in fact argues the *opposite* case: 'these dissident [anti-Satanist] voices were in the minority during the nineteenth century. Two of Milton's last and most influential biographers of the era, Richard Garnett and Sir Walter Raleigh, reflected the deep and abiding position that in reality Satan is the hero' [205–06]" (258, *italics mine*). I'm perplexed that Herman considers Huckabay's point "the opposite" of mine. Both my statement and Huckabay's note that the Satanic position was the majority position in the nineteenth century. Both Huckabay and I note a minority anti-Satanist position. By noting this minority position—which Bryson does not mention—I state that things were "more complex" than Bryson's unmitigated assertion that the Satanic position was dominant. So not only does Herman

misrepresent both me and Huckabay, he also tries to obfuscate the existence of challenges to the nineteenth-century majority Satanist position, an obfuscation that runs counter to Herman's aforementioned statement regarding the New Milton Criticism's encouragement of "all questions." That there were nineteenth-century (and eighteenth- and twentieth- and twenty-first-century) challenges to majority opinions regarding Milton's Satan is really quite elementary. As Strier writes to me in his response, "I am sure that you are right that the history of Milton criticism since the eighteenth century has been one of profound disagreement, often centering on the figure of Satan. Anyone who denies this is clearly wrong" (271).

Next Herman challenges my alleged "claim that C. S. Lewis did not influence Fish's *Surprised by Sin* [based on] the paucity of references in Fish's index (101)" ("C. S. Lewis" 258). Again, Herman misrepresents me. I never argue that Lewis "did not influence" Fish's book. Of course Lewis influenced it somewhat. Rather, I dispute the truism—originated by John Rumrich and restated by Michael Bryson and Herman—that *Surprised by Sin* is "A methodologically radical update of Lewis's reading of *Paradise Lost* as a literary monument to mainstream Christianity" (Rumrich 4; see Urban, "Speaking" 101–02). This exaggerated connection between Fish and the conservative Christian Lewis is, I have suggested, a tactic used by some scholars to make Fish an easier target for iconoclastic toppling ("Speaking" 102). In any case, my contention that Lewis's *Preface to Paradise Lost* is not *Surprised by Sin*'s supreme critical influence is not simply a matter of index mentions but, more importantly, Fish's lack of sustained engagement with Lewis in comparison with Fish's engagement with various other scholars, particularly those whom Fish explicitly mentions as his prime influences. Herman ("C. S. Lewis" 258), Wittreich (270), and Strier (272) each assert Lewis's strong implicit influence throughout Fish's book, but we should not accept such assertions without detailed evidence of Lewis's significance to Fish, something that no one, to my knowledge, has ever actually *demonstrated*.

On the contrary, I can briefly outline in this and the next paragraph several ways in which Lewis's alleged supreme influence can be disproven. First, there is the lack of explicit evidence. As I noted in "Speaking for the Dead," Fish interacts with Lewis very sparingly throughout *Surprised by Sin*, and he states agreement with him even less. Moreover, in the original preface to *Surprised by Sin*, Fish explicitly states that his two greatest influences were A. J. A. Waldock and Joseph Summers (lxxii), two scholars who challenged Lewis on significant matters. And while Wittreich makes a legitimate connection between Lewis and Fish when he notes that Lewis asserts that Milton manipulates his readers (Wittreich 270)—and indeed Fish cites Lewis to this effect late in his book (302),¹ we should note that early in his book Fish himself explicitly credits Summers's influence upon his own emphasis on the "guilty reader" whom the Miltonic narrator corrects and guides (2, 142). We may also note that, in the preface to the second edition of *Surprised by Sin*, Fish states that his book seeks to integrate the orthodox interpretive tradition, "stretching from Addison to C. S. Lewis and Douglas Bush" (ix), with the Satanic/unorthodox tradition represented by Blake, Shelley, Waldock, and Empson (ix–x). But if there is a member of that orthodox tradition with whom Fish most closely aligns himself, it is not Lewis but rather the all-but-forgotten Jonathan Richardson the Elder, whose "description of [*Paradise Lost*'s] demands," says Fish, "*accords perfectly with my own*" (54, my emphasis).

I discuss at length elsewhere ("Surprised") the degree of Richardson's influence on Fish, but briefly we may note three major interpretive emphases of Fish's

where Fish agrees with Richardson but departs starkly from Lewis's positions. First, although Lewis harshly deprecates Books 11 and 12 of *Paradise Lost*, famously calling them an "untransmuted lump of futurity" (125), Fish upholds their value in a full chapter of sustained analysis, explicitly drawing upon Richardson to demonstrate their import to the reader (292; see Richardson 484, 516). Second, whereas Lewis is fairly disparaging of Milton's poetic presentation of God the Father (126–27), Fish defends this presentation throughout Chapter 2, again explicitly citing Richardson as he discusses Milton's depiction of heaven and its relationship to his readers (89; see Richardson 99). Finally and perhaps most significantly, Lewis is adamant that *Paradise Lost* "is not a religious poem" that enables a reader to have "his devotion quickened" (127). For Lewis, reading *Paradise Lost* is not "a religious exercise" (128). But Fish's book specifically argues throughout that "for the Christian reader *Paradise Lost* is a means of confirming him in his faith," an assertion that he makes in agreement with multiple citations from Richardson (55).

The remainder of Herman's essay seeks to address what he calls my contention that he, Bryson, and Wittreich "have grossly misread C. S. Lewis" ("C. S. Lewis" 258). I must again offer clarification. I do not argue that they have *misread* Lewis; I argue that they have *misrepresented* him. Regarding Herman, this representation specifically involves his (and Bryson's) practice of taking out of context a single phrase by Lewis (that his discussion of Milton and Augustine will hopefully "prevent the reader from ever raising certain questions" [Lewis 69]) and using that phrase to assert that "the aim of Lewis's book [*A Preface to Paradise Lost*] is to deter readers from wrestling with the kind of interpretive questions that might cause readers to stray from the narrow path of neo-Christian orthodoxy" (Urban, "Speaking" 99; also qtd. in Herman, "C. S. Lewis" 259). In his response to my article, Strier tells me, "You are certainly right that the line about preventing questions has been taken out of context and used in a somewhat irresponsible way" (271). But Herman concedes nothing. Instead, he unapologetically reaffirms that preventing questions is precisely the focus of Lewis's book ("C. S. Lewis" 259), something that would have surprised proto-New Milton Critic A. J. A. Waldock, who in 1947 stated that "Lewis's grand object" in *A Preface* "is to show what Milton meant his poem to be" (16). Herman goes to great lengths to prove his point, indulging in rhetoric more appropriate to a t-shirt slogan than an academic article ("What part of 'prevent the reader from asking certain questions' does David Urban not understand?" [259]), veering off topic with well-developed red herrings that evade his original misrepresentation of Lewis,² and offering several more ad hominem attacks against me, seeking to discredit me instead of simply admitting his misrepresentations. But none of Herman's elaborate efforts can change the basic fact that the "certain questions" Lewis sought "to prevent" number *only two* (see Lewis 69 and Urban, "Speaking" 99).

Ironically, Herman's misrepresentations of Lewis actually "prevent"—or, more accurately, *interfere with*—legitimate objections to Lewis's analysis of *Paradise Lost*. As I have noted before, I think it entirely appropriate to argue that in places Lewis "overstate[s] his case" and makes analysis of *Paradise Lost* "too simple" ("Speaking" 98). This is what critics such as Waldock, J. B. Broadbent, John Peter, William Empson, and, yes, Stanley Fish have argued.³ Herman and Strier are "at their best" in their respective responses when they examine Lewis and/or Milton in context and offer close critical analysis of Milton's text in response to Lewis's critical pronouncements. Herman's misrepresentations and vitriol aside, I think his analysis regarding matters of obedience and pride (262–64; cf. Strier 271) raises legitimate

points, and it challenges me to refine my own position. I still affirm that Lewis's statement that the Fall is disobedience amounts to "basic clarification about a basic theological issue" ("Speaking" 99; cf. Bell 863–66),⁴ but I would agree with Herman and, even more so, Waldock (39–41) that it is indeed too simple to call pride Eve's sole motivation for her disobedience, and I think Strier fairly notes the "dogmatic and dismissive" manner in which Lewis asserts his position regarding disobedience (271). But given the New Milton Criticism's stated identification with the dogmatic and dismissive Denis Saurat,⁵ I think it fair to ask whether or not the New Milton Critics' concern over Lewis's tone amounts to concern regarding critical overstatement in general or only critical overstatement that opposes their own positions.

I should also briefly address Herman's litany of misrepresentations and "guilt by association" fallacies against me beginning on page 260. No fewer than six times, Herman accuses Lewis and me (whom Herman calls Lewis's "acolyte" [262] in an attempt, among other things, to deny me my own critical voice) of preventing or stifling various paths of inquiry—Lewis for using his (admittedly regrettable) "prevent certain questions" phrase and me for pointing out Herman's exaggerations regarding the significance of that phrase. It should be obvious by now that, in stating our positions forthrightly, Lewis and I have not prevented inquiry but rather we have spurred on debate—that is, of course, what scholars are supposed to do. But Herman continues to fling the mud of misrepresentation, digging himself a deeper hole while never once admitting his original misrepresentations. Herman's hole reaches its nadir when, in one final gasp of rhetorical desperation, he blames my so-called preventing of questions on my Christianity and my employment at a particular Christian college (264–65).⁶ I need hardly state how unprofessional and logically irrelevant this tactic is. It is also sadly ironic that Herman, who seeks to portray himself as the liberator of Milton studies, here tries to silence me by using circumstantial ad hominem fallacies, even citing an internet post that misrepresents my college's stance and history on matters of intellectual inquiry—as if this were substantively relevant to the veracity of my arguments in "Speaking for the Dead."⁷ As I state in this essay's third paragraph, Herman cannot successfully refute my essay's main arguments (both of which Strier notes are correct), so he uses ad hominem fallacies to "prevent" interrogation of his scholarly tactics. To put things charitably, this is not Peter Herman at his best,⁸ and his tactics are unworthy of a scholar of his accomplishments. In his attempts to degrade me, he denigrates himself.

Let me be clear: I wrote "Speaking for the Dead" because, while I was working on a broader project on responses through the decades to Lewis's *Preface*, I noticed that the depictions of Lewis by certain New Milton Critics simply weren't accurate. Herman should know that I actually find the New Milton Criticism's contention regarding the fundamental tensions in Milton's writings to be intriguing and even persuasive in certain areas. But a clear line must be drawn between *legitimately analyzing* tensions within an author's texts and *misrepresenting* sources in an effort to further one's argument. As I have demonstrated, certain New Milton Critics have engaged in misrepresentation, and similar misrepresentation has been noted by various scholars over the years.⁹ Finally, given Herman's stated (but not always demonstrated) commitment to scholarly inquiry, I invite him to participate with me in a public forum where we can collegially discuss the aims, successes, and shortcomings of the New Milton Criticism and its critical forebears. I promise not to prevent any questions pertaining to Milton (questions about my employer and my personal life will be politely declined), and I'm sure we'll have an enlightening discussion should

Herman agree to participate. And who knows? If I'm humorous enough, Herman might even laugh at my jokes.

Calvin College

NOTES

★ My title is intended ironically, taken from Herman's disparaging reference to me as Lewis's "acolyte" ("C. S. Lewis" 262). Thanks to Michael Bauman, Scott Howard, Brian Ingrassia, Paul Klemp, John Leonard, and Samuel Smith for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this essay.

¹ In "Speaking" 101, I failed to note this explicit point of agreement.

² For example, on 261–62, Herman spends four paragraphs discussing, ostensibly, the importance of "the apple." (We may remember that one of the two questions Lewis said he wanted to "prevent" was "What is the apple?" [69].) But Herman quickly veers off into other matters that, however interesting, don't involve this question. In developing this red herring, Herman (262) cites both Tilmouth and Hammond, but these citations have nothing to do with what "the apple" is.

³ More recently, Dennis Danielson has legitimately noted that, in *Preface*, Lewis engages in oversimplification in his task as an intellectual historian:

[I]n his eagerness to transport readers out of their modern spiritual and intellectual landscape and into that of an earlier, more devout and more doctrinally rigorous age, Lewis, overgeneralizes the beliefs of that age in a way that can occlude the particularities of the very text he sets out to illuminate. (53)

⁴ Both Herman (261) and Strier (271) chafe at my use of the word "basic" as if I use it to dismiss further inquiry. But they should note the first *OED* definition of the adjective "basic" is: "Of, pertaining to, or forming a base; fundamental, essential." Something which is "basic" is something which is essential to address; it does not preclude, as I note, "more complex interpretive issues" ("Speaking" 100).

⁵ For a discussion of Saurat's critical dogmatism, see Urban, "Speaking" 100–01.

⁶ If Herman Google searches enough members of the Milton Society of America, he will discover that one of its most prominent members is a proud Calvin graduate—as is the George Vasmer Leverett Professor of Physics at Harvard University.

⁷ For starters, it is absurd for Jaschik to imply that "no deviation from Genesis as literal truth [can] be tolerated" at Calvin. That simply isn't the approach to Genesis of either the science division or the religion department at Calvin College.

⁸ It appears that Herman wrote his essay without taking the requisite time to refine his argument. Signs of a "rush job" abound, including his misattribution of Genesis 3.22–23 to 4.22–23, and his misattribution of two scenes in *Paradise Lost* Book 8 to Book 9 ("C. S. Lewis" 262).

⁹ Most prominently, as reviews by Gallagher, Low, Leonard, and Urban have demonstrated, Wittreich has relied on misrepresentation of his source material to put forth his arguments in three major books.

WORKS CITED

- "Basic." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford UP, n.d. Web. 4 April 2012.
- Bell, Millicent. "The Fallacy of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*." *PMLA* 68 (1953): 863-83.
- Bryson, Michael. *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004.
- Danielson, Dennis. "Intellectual Historian." *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*. Ed. Robert MacSwain. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. 43-57.
- Fish, Stanley. *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*. 1967. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Gallagher, Phillip J. "On Reading Joseph Wittreich: A Review Essay [rev. of *Interpreting Samson Agonistes* by Joseph Wittreich]." *Milton Quarterly* 21 (1987): 108-13.
- Hammond, Paul. "Milton and the Poetry of the Fall." Hammond and Worden 67-90.
- Hammond, Paul, and Blair Worden, eds. *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.
- Herman, Peter C. "C. S. Lewis and the New Milton Criticism." *Milton Quarterly* 45 (2011): 258-66.
- . *Destabilizing Milton: "Paradise Lost" and the Poetics of Incertitude*. New York: Palgrave, 2005.
- Herman, Peter C., and Elizabeth Sauer, eds. "Paradigms Lost, Paradigms Found: The New Milton Criticism." *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): RE 176, 1-26.
- . *The New Milton Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012.
- Huckabay, Calvin. "The Satanist Controversy of the Nineteenth Century." *Studies in English Renaissance Literature*. Ed. Waldo F. McNeir. Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1962. 197-210.
- Jaschik, Scott. "Fall from Grace." *Inside Higher Education*. Web. Posted 15 August 2011.
- Leonard, John. "Milton and Women [rev. of *Feminist Milton* by Joseph Wittreich]." *Essays in Criticism* 39 (1989): 72-84.
- Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. London: Oxford UP, 1942.
- Low, Anthony. Rev. of Joseph Wittreich, *Interpreting Samson Agonistes*. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 86 (1987): 415-18.
- Myers, P. Z. "The Bible is Not an Economics Textbook." *Pharyngula* blog. Posted March 3, 2009.
- Richardson, J., father and son. *Explanatory Remarks on Milton's Paradise Lost. With the Life of the Author and a Discourse on the Poem by J. R. Senior*. London, 1734.
- Rumrich, John Peter. *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Shoulson, Jeffrey. "Man and Thinker: Denis Saurat, and the Old New Milton Criticism." Herman and Sauer. 194-211.
- Strier, Richard. "How Not To Praise C. S. Lewis: A Letter to David Urban from a 'New Milton Critic' Who Admires CSL." *Milton Quarterly* 45 (2011): 271-72.
- Tilmouth, Christopher. "Milton on Knowing Good and Evil." Hammond and Worden 43-66.
- Urban, David V. Rev. of *The Uncertain World of Samson Agonistes* by John T. Shawcross, "Exiled from Light": *Divine Law, Morality, and Violence in Milton's Samson Agonistes* by Derek N. C. Wood, *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting Samson Agonistes* by Joseph Wittreich, and *Altering Eyes: New Perspectives on Samson Agonistes* ed. Mark R. Kelley and Joseph Wittreich. *Religion and Literature* 36 (2004): 119-28.
- . "Speaking for the Dead: C. S. Lewis Answers the New Milton Criticism; or, 'Milton Ministries' Strikes Back." *Milton Quarterly* 45 (2011): 95-106.

———. “Surprised by Richardson: C. S. Lewis, Jonathan Richardson, and Their Comparative Influence on Stanley Fish’s *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in ‘Paradise Lost’*.” *Appositions: Studies in Renaissance/ Early Modern Literature & Culture* 5 (2012): 1–28 Web. <http://appositions.blogspot.com/2012/07/david-v-urban-surprised-by-richardson.html>.

Waldock, A. J. A. *Paradise Lost and Its Critics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1947.

Wittreich, Joseph. “Speaking for Myself.” *Milton Quarterly* 45 (2011): 267–70.