That Really Too Anxious Protestation': Crisis and Autobiography in Milton's Prose

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society, in which political discourse was increasingly tied up in the rapidly growing print culture, the "restructuring of the imaginative dynamics of individual faith" was simultaneously the restructuring of reading and interpretive practices.


25. See Achinstein, Milton and the Revolutionary Reader, 157-68.

26. Ibid., 155.

27. For a detailed account of the increased sectarianism of the 1640s and 1650s and its relation to Milton, see Christopher Hill, Milton and the English Revolution (London, 1977), esp. chapter 8. In my view we need not argue that Milton shared beliefs—much less a pipe or pint of ale—with contemporary radicals who accepted that he viewed himself as a significant part of his audience; one that needed to be strategically assessed and addressed in any public debate over religion or politics.


32. For a similarly tripartite division of the audience, see the end of The Reason of Church and Government.

33. Although, as Helgerson, "Milton Reads the King's Book," 13, points out, the title of Eikonoklastes is recognized by Milton as the "famous surname of some Greek emperors" (YP 3:343).


35. Habelman supposes that this training took place at coffeehouses, salons, and table societies, and that art criticism prepared private citizens for critical political discourse (Structural Transformation, 30-35). Following Norbeck, "Arrogance, Censorship," I see no reason why the earlier stages of this training might not have occurred in the written political debates of the Interregnum.

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"THAT REALLY TOO ANXIOUS PROTESTATION": CRISIS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN MILTON'S PROSE

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A L E X A N D E R M O R E , wh o m Milton vilified in the Second De

fence of the English People, is the first person known to have remarked

on the autobiographical passages in Milton's prose.¹ "In this very Second

Defence of yourself or the people," More writes of the tract with which he is

particularly concerned, "as often as you speak for the people your language

grows weak, becomes feeble, lies more frigid than Gallic snow; as often as

you speak for yourself, which you do oftener than not, the whole thing swells

up, ignites, burns."² More may have held a grudge against Milton, but these

observations are hard to quarrel with. In the four political tracts in which

Milton provides some kind of autobiography, once he starts talking about

himself he seems hardly able to stop: the autobiographical material in An

Apology against a Pamphlet, for example, amounts to fully a third of a work

that otherwise argues for the elimination of bishops. More does not conclude

from Milton's enthusiasm for himself that he believes his own press, however,

and his suggestions about the psychological underpinnings of Milton's auto-

biographies are shrewd:

you picture yourself dear to God, but do not believe it. . . . How handsome you are, in

your own opinion, when you imagine that you have painted those things for satirists

which you have only painted for a while, and, as you are drawn by four white horses,

imagine that all nations everywhere are transfixed with admiration for you, that all the
centuries applaud you. This is a vain delusion. (YP 4:119)

More implies that the versions of himself that Milton presents to his audience

mask his fear that he is not in fact dear to God. "Hence," More will say later,

rolling his eyes as Milton calls God as his witness, "that really too anxious

protestation."³

Although Alexander More is far from a reputable character and his own self-defenses are often luidorous, he is nevertheless a more astute reader of

Milton's autobiographies than many twentieth-century literary critics. There
is no question that Milton’s autobiographical excursions in the apolitical tracts and the *Defences* are well known; few passages of his prose are more familiar. But while these passages are continually trolled out to fill in Milton’s biography or to support biographical readings of his poems, the critical attention that they have received has been exceedingly limited. The central question would seem to be: what are Milton’s autobiographies doing in the middle of these four political tracts? Attempts have been made to answer this question, of course, but so far most such efforts have been confined to studies of individual poems. Such studies are necessarily invested in proving some connection between their particular autobiographical passage and the work as a whole, and thus the conventional explanation for these passages has long been that Milton is “giving his credentials for speaking.” This argument has dozens of variants, which come buttressed with details about classical and Renaissance oratory and pagan and Christian notions of decorum, but while such scholarship has been useful, it has rarely engaged in any meaningful way with the content of a given autobiographical passage or considered it in relation to other similar passages. In this essay, I will reevaluate both the context and the effect of Milton’s prose autobiographies. While these extraordinary passages are each dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the tracts in which they appear, and each deserves careful individual attention, none can be fully understood apart from the other three; their relationship to one another is far stronger than their relationship to the non-autobiographical material that surrounds them.

The continuities among Milton’s autobiographical passages do not mean that they form anything like a unified whole, however, and neither should we make the mistake of believing them to be cut from the same cloth as Puritan spiritual autobiography. For one thing, in the early years of the civil war, what we normally think of as spiritual autobiography did not yet exist. Those works, which narrate an author’s path from sinfulness to a conviction of regeneracy, were not in wide circulation until after the Restoration, and thus it would have been impossible for Milton to be imitating or adapting this form for his own purposes. Although the tradition of Christian autobiography that began with Augustine survived in some form throughout the Middle Ages, until the sixteenth century it tended to manifest itself in brief flashes rather than in any sustained way. According to Wayne Shumaker, “Before 1500 self-revelation tended... to be fragmentary, more or less accidental, and, more often than not, in some degree allegorized or fictionalized.” Well into the seventeenth century, prose autobiography of any sort was still quite rare in England, and when Milton wrote his apolitical tracts in 1641 and 1642 the works most similar to Puritan spiritual autobiography were the autobiographical accounts of John Lilburne. Even these, however, focused considerably more upon the punishments that Lilburne received for his non-conformist activities (the printing and distribution of banned books and his refusal to take the required oath in Star Chamber) than upon the nature of his beliefs, his relationship with God, or how he arrived at either.

Chronology is not the only problem with this purported parallel between Milton’s autobiographies and those of his near contemporaries. As even proponents of the argument acknowledge, Milton’s readers “are not told... the precise moment when he first felt the conviction of grace,” and nearly all the other markers of the spiritual autobiography are likewise missing in Milton’s autobiographical writings there is no early sinning, no hearing the call, resisting the call, believing, doubting, and finally arriving at a full conviction of salvation. Indeed, although Milton’s works may be autobiographical and written from a more or less recognizable “Puritan” perspective, they have almost nothing else in common with the later genre. Milton’s autobiographies, written right in the messy middle of life, also lack the distance of the typical spiritual autobiography, in which the real story is always in the past and told retrospectively. Instead, Milton’s autobiographical passages show a man deeply anxious about both present and future, hoping for great things but half convinced that they will pass him by.

Milton only rarely admits to this uncertainty—as he does in the apolitical tracts, where he confesses his sense of having little to show for his years—and acting to counter these few indications of insecurity is virtually everything else Milton says about himself, which promotes the popular image of him as a man of unparalleled self-confidence. No matter how thoroughly mildest and Milton finds himself, he always acts as though he were surveying a man of himself and his calling, and who has never altered in the least: it was not Milton who changed his mind about the ministry—it was the church that changed under the prelates; Milton has not abandoned poetry—he’s just deferring it while his country calls. Christopher Hill has said that Milton himself is the worst enemy of Milton biographers, and often, too, he is the worst enemy of Milton critics: even readers with a healthy amount of skepticism are frequently taken in by Milton’s self-presentation in these passages. But while there is no disputing that Milton’s works nearly always assume a tone of overwhelming self-confidence, if Milton were really so certain of his literary election (which is, to a large degree, inseparable from his spiritual election), it would seem that he would not need to declare it so insistently or at such length.

As the quotations from Alexander More suggest, and as I shall argue in the remainder of this essay, it is paradoxically a sense of unease and uncer-
tainty about his mission that leads Milton to produce autobiographical passages that say nearly the opposite. Milton's autobiographies occur at what appear to be the two most pivotal moments in his life, when he is reassessing what he believes God wants from him and questioning the wisdom of the path he has taken so far. Sometimes his autobiographies are provoked, in part, by the attacks of other pamphleteers, but Milton never confines himself to answering specific insults, and there are several examples of published attacks that Milton fails to answer (or fails to answer in a personal vein). I believe that Milton responds with autobiography when he feels most vulnerable and when his opponents' attacks hit closest to his own deepest fears. For this reason, the subject of a tract need not be "personal" (in the way we know the divorce tracts to have been personal) in order to prompt autobiography, but the subject matter is clearly not irrelevant. Milton produces his first autobiographies as he reluctantly sets aside his poetic ambitions in order to serve God with his prose, and he produces his later ones as he confronts the possibility that, having allowed him to go blind while defending the republic, God may not actually want the epic work that Milton always thought would be both his greatest achievement and his greatest gift to the deity. Milton's stridency in his autobiographies masks a deep anxiety, and the passages seem intended less to convince his audience of his literary-spiritual destiny than to convince himself. Despite Milton's best efforts, this strange handful of passages periodically lets a reader behind the public mask that he strives to hold in place; or at least they do if one knows how to read them—and between their lines.

**The Antiprelatical Tracts, 1641–1642**

Milton's first published prose works are a series of five antiprelatical tracts, the last two of which, *The Reason of Church-Government* and *An Apology against a Pamphlet*, contain half of Milton's total autobiographical output; they also represent the first time that Milton publicly attempted to describe or justify himself in print. With these pamphlets Milton was joining a debate about the proper form for Protestant ecclesiastical government that extended back as far as the English Reformation, but which had gained new momentum since the 1633 appointment of the imperious William Laud as archbishop of Canterbury. Those who opposed episcopacy found the hierarchical structure of the English church dangerously close to papacy, prone to corruption, and indifferent to the spiritual needs of the common worshipper. In the 1620s and 1630s the kind of outspoken opposition to prelacy found in Milton's tracts inspired swift and brutal punishment: for Alexander Leighton's 1628 *An Appeal to the Parliament; or, Sions Plea Against the Prelacie* (a work that was to inspire more than a few aspects of Milton's *Of Reformation*, including the arresting image of the bishops as a poisonous wen on the head of the state), Laud had Leighton arrested and whipped, his face branded, his nose slit, and one ear cut off.

If never without risk, by 1641 the political climate was safer for pamphlet writers. In November 1640 the Long Parliament met, beginning a session that was to last through the following September and include a concerted assault upon the bishops. In December 1640 the Root and Branch Petition, signed by 15,000 Londoners asking for the destruction of episcopal government and "all its dependencies, roots and branches," was delivered to the House of Commons, and the following February Archbishop Laud was charged with treason, impeached, and eventually imprisoned. At the same time, the Long Parliament had significantly loosened the restrictions on the press, and a flood of pamphlets on issues of church and state washed over London. While Bishop Joseph Hall was chosen by the Church of England to defend episcopacy in this war of polemics, one of his principal opponents was a group of reform-minded ministers whose initials spelled their pseudonym, Smeectymnuus. The two sides had been exchanging ever-longer and more tediously entitled pamphlets for several months when Milton decided to enter the fray with *Of Reformation* (1641), siding with his former tutor, Timothy Young (who put the "TY" in Smeectymnuus) and Young's associates.

Over the next year Milton would contribute four more antiprelatical tracts to the debate. These differ from those of other contestants in the controversy in a number of ways—including their diskeligion to rely upon church fathers or to delve too deeply into historical disputes—but perhaps their most striking difference lies in the strange autobiographical passages that occur in the last two of the series. Scholars have sometimes "explained" these autobiographical passages by pointing out that *The Reason of Church-Government* is the first of Milton's tracts to bear his name, and thus might have seemed to Milton to mandate a public proffering of credentials. However, while a relationship surely exists between the presence of Milton's autobiography in *The Reason of Church-Government* and his decision to sign his name to the work, there is no more reason to think that putting his name on the title page prompted Milton to provide some autobiographical background than that writing an autobiography inspired him to stake an authorial claim. (Moreover, the notion of any easy connection between name and autobiography is immediately thrown into question by *An Apology*—a work that does not bear Milton's name.) Simply put, the autobiographical passage in *The Reason of Church-Government* is too long and inconsistent to be explained away as easily as it often is, whether as an ethical proof, a proto-spiritual autobiography, or Milton's attempt to model himself on the prophets.
of the Hebrew Bible. Although there are moments in which Milton is indeed writing within one or another recognizable tradition, the design as a whole is ad hoc, with Milton taking models for his autobiography wherever he can find them. The fact that Milton supplies a lengthy autobiographical account in this work, and not in his three previous ones (or in the many polities of the 1640s that will follow An Apology) suggests that something other than adherence to literary convention is at work. The very inconsistency of Milton's autobiography betrays the anxiety behind it, which I believe has its roots not simply in his feelings of unpreparedness or reluctance to take the public stage, but rather in a deeper uncertainty about God's plans for Milton's life—and whether or not Milton's own ambitions coincide with the divine design.

Milton's autobiographical passage in The Reason of Church-Government appears at the work's halfway mark, in what is commonly referred to as the preface to its second book (although it bears no title). He begins by lamenting the burden of knowing spiritual truths and the lack of welcome that the bearer of disagreeable information often experiences. But, he writes, [1] ... The Preface have few to say the worst that can be said, and doe the worst that can be done ... no man can be justly offended with him that shall endeavour to impart and bestow without any gain to himselfe those sharp, but saving words which would be a terror, and a torment in him to keep back. For me I have determin'd to lay up as the best treasure, and solace of a good old age, if God vouchsafe it me, the honest liberty of free speech from my youth, where I shall think it available in so dear a concernment as the Churches good. (YP 1:804)

Milton's autobiography thus begins on a relatively impersonal note, but it swiftly takes a turn to the particular. Any man might be justified in writing tracts that others find unseemly, so long as his conscience impels him and he is doing so without hope for gain. However, as Milton turns to his own situation he seems to discard the image of terror and torment for a more pragmatic motive: he is speaking boldly now so that in his senescence—when perhaps he will be unable to do so—he might look back on his life with contentment. The language Milton uses certainly makes it sound as though he is seeking "gain to himselfe" (at least of a sort), and the picture he paints of himself as a shrewd, long-term planner does not seem to have much in common with that of the man whose writing is motivated by holy terror. Although the proximity of these two images suggests that both motives might be Milton's, with the shift from third to first person Milton willfully distances himself from that first, anxious writer, as if determined to emphasize the control he has over both himself and his work.

This same pattern is repeated throughout the tract's autobiographical section: a half-formed expression of uncertainty is quickly followed by an assertion of confidence. Even when, as with his next lines, Milton seems on the verge of self-scrutiny—"For if I be either by disposition, or what other cause too inquisitive or suspicious of my self and mine own doings, who can help it?"—he rushes on:

but this I foresee, that should the Church be brought under heavy oppression, and God have given me ability the while to reason against that man that should the author of so foul a deed, or should she by blessing from above on the industry and courage of faithful men change this her distracted estate into better dates without the least furtherance or contribution of those few talents which God at that present had lent me, I foresee what stories I should heare within myselfe, all my life after, of discouragement and reproach. (YP 1:804)

Milton sandwiches his brief admission to some feelings of self-doubt between two strong declarations of what he is "determin'd" to do, and he has hardly begun to consider the reasons for his uncertainty (is it his natural disposition? or something else?) before he dismisses the entire discussion with a shrugging "who can help it?"

No one may be able to help Milton's tendency to overanalyze himself and his actions, but he quickly transforms the habit from a possible weakness into a strength: with an extraordinary act of projection he abruptly casts his narrative into the future, imagining a scenario in which he has chosen not to pen his antiprelatical tracts. Some critics have argued that, with his insistence upon his own foresight, Milton is styling himself as a Hebrew prophet. However, while Milton does occasionally ventriloquize those voices crying out in the wilderness, this analysis is not wholly accurate: for one, the only thing that "he foresee's" is his own spiritual and emotional state, and Milton makes no bets as to whether the church will be brought out of danger by the work of faithful men or whether their absence and neglect will lead to its oppression. Whatever concern Milton may have for the church's welfare, in this passage his focus is less upon the institution's fate than upon his own. Thus, in reproducing for his reader the voice of his conscience (as he imagines it speaking to the version of himself who has declined to write pamphlets in God's service), Milton supplies a rebuke for both possible outcomes. First, envisioning a church imperiled, he has his conscience scold,

Timorous and ingratefull, the Church of God is now again at the foot of her insulting enemies: and thou bewaist, what matters it thee for thy bewailing? . . . when the cause of God and his Church was to be pleaded, for which purpose that tongue was given thee which thou hast, God listen'd if he could heare thy voice among his zealous servants, but thou wert dumb as a beast; from hence forward be that which thine own brutish silence hath made thee. (YP 1:804-5)
Then Milton considers the other possibility:

Or else I should have heard on the other ear, slothful, and ever to be set light by; the Church hath now overmuch her late distresses after the unweared labours of many her true servants that stood up in her defence; thou also wouldst take upon thee to share amongst them of their joy; but wherefore thou? with what word or deed of thine which might have hasten'd her peace; what ever thou dost now take, or write, or look is the ahims of other mens active prudence and zeal. Dare not now to say, or do; anything better then thy former sloth and indigency... what before was thy sin, is now thy duty to be, asleep, and worthless. (YP 1:805)

Far from conceiving of himself as a voice crying out in the wilderness, Milton is anxious about all the other voices that might be raised without his joining the chorus. In recounting this period of his life in the *Second Defence*, he will say, similarly, that the bishops "had become a target for the weapons of all men," and "all mouths were opened against them" (YP 4:623, 621). Whether or not the church recovers from her enfeebled state, there is glory to be won, and Milton, terribly aware that he is a latecomer to this particular vineyard, seems oppressed by the fear of missing out on it entirely. (And indeed, the very same month that Milton published *The Reason of Church-Government* the bishops were ousted from the House of Lords.)

But although Milton appears genuinely concerned about his belatedness, and speaks slightly of his own effort and courage—describing his actions as "this little diligence" and only "something more than wishing"—the church's welfare (YP 1:805–6)—soon a new explanation for his uneasiness emerges: *this* sort of writing is really not what he has prepared himself for. He hopes, however, that he will meet with an understanding reader:

To [the reader] it will be no new thing though I tell him that if I hunted after praise by the ostentation of wit and learning, I should not write this out of mine own season, when I have neither yet completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies, although I complain not of any insufficiency to the matter in hand, or were I ready to my wishes, it were a folly to commit any thing elaborately composed to the careless and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times. Next if I were wise only to mine own ends, I would certainly take such a subject as of it self might catch applause, whereas this hath all the disadvantages on the contrary... Lastly, I should not frame this manner of writing wherein knowing my self inferior to my self, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand. (YP 1:807–8)

Milton never makes a claim but he deletes or emends it, seemingly torn between asserting the value of his current work and denying its artistic pretensions. The subject of Milton's tract may be "no new thing" to the learned reader, but if Milton were seeking praise for his work—which he could gain if he wanted to!—he would not be writing while his studies are still incomplete. On the other hand, if he were better able to produce something that he felt was a true work of both learning and art, that, too, would be unreasonable: the age is too restless and distractible for such a thing. The upshot of all of this seems to be that Milton's work should be taken as evidence of his sincerity and selfless intentions: since it cannot redound to the glory of his craftsmanship or talent, it must speak only to his sense of duty.

However, as earlier, Milton seems eager to leave the middle of the present behind. Rather than dwelling on what he might or might not be able to do right now, he quickly turns first to his past and then to his future:

And though I shall be foolish in saying more to this purpose, yet since it will be such a folly, as wisest men going about to commit, have only confessed and committed, I may trust with more reason, because with more folly to have courteous pardon. For although a poet soaring in the high region of his fancies with his garland and singing robes about him might without apology speak more of himself then I mean to do, yet for me sitting here below in the cool element of prose, a mortal thing among many readers of no Empyrean conceit, to venture and divulge untruths of my selfe, I shall petition to the gentle sort, it may not be easy to me. I must say therefore that after I had from my first yeares... his exercises... to the tongues... it was found that... [whether] in English, or other tongue, prasing or versing, but chiefly this latter, the stile by certain vital signes it had, was likely to live. (YP 1:808-9)

Although Milton acknowledges the oddity of focusing so much of his writing upon himself, he exudes with the vague assertion that "wiser men" have done the same. Unusually for Milton, he does not name any of these men, although he does suggest that he surpasses them by divulging yet more autobiography than they; a moment later he claims that he is still not going as far as he might if he were writing verse. This first part of the passage shows the same uncertain back-and-forth motion as the previous one, but it soon disappears in the second half. Once Milton begins his account of his early years, his narrative suddenly has a shape, with all its events tending toward one end: the emergence of Milton as a great poet. It is precisely because he is a poet—though he has shown few signs of it to the outside world—that Milton claims indulgence for his prose autobiography.

Milton now gets to what most readers would regard as the neat of his autobiography, what Louis Martz has called "that surprising and rather embarrassing revelation of Milton's poetical hopes and dreams." Fueled equally by the encouragement of his friends and his own "inward prompting," Milton came to believe that, "by labour and intent study... joy'd with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written after times, as they should not willingly let it die" (YP 1:810). Skipping over
the uncertainty of the present, Milton imagines his future as a linear continuation of his past—or at least the version of his past that he gives here; as John Shawcross and Richard Helgerson note, there is little evidence that Milton envisioned a poetic future for himself until he was nearly twenty, and he here conveniently omits any mention of his early intention to enter the ministry. For all Milton's confident, prophetic language, what he actually predicts is quite vague; at some undetermined point in the future his literary talent will manifest itself in some undetermined way. He asserts that he will write in his native tongue for “God's glory by the honour and instruction of my country” (YP 1.810–12), but otherwise he does not know what form his great work will take; instead (and despite his protestation that “time servs not now” to discuss the specifics of his literary ambitions), Milton devotes several dozen lines to considering, by turns, suitable subjects for an epic, tragic, or lyric celebration of his nation and its God.

After this discussion Milton apologizes again for coming before the public eye before he can do justice to his talent: “The thing which I had to say, and those intentions which have liv’d within me ever since I could conceive my self any thing worth to my Countrie, I return to crave excuse that urgent reason hath pluckt from me by an abortive and foreclosed discovery” (YP 1.820). This time Milton is excusing himself not simply for coming forward as a writer before being ready, or even for doing so in a format that he believes to be inferior, but rather for having been forced to tell his audience of his long term literary ambitions before he is able to deliver on them. With this Milton sets aside the matter of church government: no longer is he simply providing evidence of his reluctance to enter the polemic fray; now he makes plain what seems really to have been bothering him: his lack of poetic progress. He continues,

the accomplishment of [these ambitions] lies not but in a power above mans to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavourd, and with more uneaerie spirit that none shall, that I dare almost averre of my self. . . . Neither doe I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few yeares yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be rayd from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine . . . but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge . . . to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affaires, till which in some measure he compact, at mine own peril and cost I refuse not to sustain this expectation from as many as are not hath to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them. (YP 1.820–21)

While early Milton criticism regarded Milton's “covenant” as proof of the poet's unswerving sense of his life's mission (if not an outright demonstration of his prophetic powers), more contemporary scholarship has tended to doubt this. However, although recent critics are correct in pointing out that Milton could not possibly have known what he would do in twenty-five years, and that, moreover, the audience for his polemics probably could not have cared less about his poetic ambitions, they have not arrived at a satisfactory answer as to why Milton makes this contract with his reader. One suggestion, advanced in different ways by John Guillery and Kevin Dunn, has been that Milton is not so much promising to deliver a specific work as he is demonstrating that he possesses sufficient literary and moral authority for his anti-prelatical arguments to be taken seriously: not only does Milton, as a poet, have the right to act as a spokesman for his party, but by sacrificing something of great personal value he has proven his fitness to serve that party. Whatever the merits of this argument, it seems inadequate in light of the sheer volume of information that Milton provides about his literary plans. Even if his audience does not care about his poetic dreams, Milton does, very much—to the point that they are almost all he can talk about.

More than his readers, Milton seems to be trying to convince himself. He claims that his literary talent is God-given, "a power above mens to promise," and elsewhere he equates the power of poetry with that of the priesthood (YP 1.820, 817). Despite his years of study, his abilities have borne only occasional fruit, and now that he feels compelled to serve God in polemic warfare Milton may be doubting whether he will ever have the opportunity to return to his poetic studies; more cruelly, Milton may be doubting whether God even wants him to continue these studies, and whether God values the offering Milton vaguely hopes someday to make. In Milton's impassioned defense of poets and poetry, one can hear him trying to justify the value of a literary life (to himself? to God?) in much the same way that he once attempted to justify it to his father in Ad Patres. The covenant with his readers, then, is really a covenant with himself, made in the public eye to give it more weight and make it that much harder to renge on.

Milton's final antiprelatical tract appeared two or three months later. As its title suggests, An Apology against a Pamphlet Call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Sneckymuns in is a direct response to the pamphlets of Joseph Hall and the Sneckymuns (as well as a participant in their tradition of unwieldy titles), but it is also a defense of Milton himself. In an earlier tract, Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defense against Sneckymuns, Milton had mocked Bishop Hall for everything from his opinions on church government to his writing style; moreover, Milton strongly implied that there was a relationship between Hall's pre-prelatical position and his weak transitions, ineffectual metaphors, and faulty logic. Such taunts, in turn, provoked a new work from an
unknown pen: A Modest Confutation of a Slanderous and Scurrilous Libell, Entituled, Animadversions. Although most of the Modest Confutation is devoted to vindicating Hall and advancing his episcopal arguments, its author also rebukes the anonymous Milton for his unsoundly and allegedly equally unsound behavior. Milton's Apology is thus a response to a response, and as such does not cover a great deal of new ground with its ecclesiastical arguments. However, in its refutation of the Confuter's personal attacks and the autobiography that this refutation seems to have inspired, Milton's work reveals his developing sense of himself as a writer and outlines the relationship he believes to exist between an author and his work.

Even taking into account the Modest Confuter's attacks upon Milton, An Apology contains an astonishing amount of self-disclosure: the first twenty pages of the original fifty-nine-page tract may be regarded as autobiography of a greater or lesser degree. Although there are no records of what Milton's original audience thought of this extraordinary feat of self-contemplation, it certainly is not typical of writers of the period. Among the hundreds of other tracts on the subject of church government published from 1640 to 1642, virtually none contains more than an autobiographical sentence or two. By the mid-1650s, when Milton writes his Latin Defences, his opponents return autobiography for autobiography and one personal defense for one personal attack, but in the antiprelatical debates this does not happen: when maligning by Milton, neither Joseph Hall nor the Modest Confuter speaks up in his own defense.

Despite the personal nature of so many of the tract's pages, Milton left the work anonymous. It would not have been unusually difficult to track him down as its author—and Milton provides so much information about himself that he can hardly be so concerned with keeping his identity secret—but in leaving his name off the title page, Milton appears reluctant to take the same kind of credit for it as he did for The Reason of Church-Government. Perhaps Milton felt it unwise to go on the record maligning a bishop as prominent as Hall, or perhaps he was faintly embarrassed by the nastiness of some of his own rhetoric. I suspect, however, that part of the explanation may lie in Milton's uneasiness that his belief in the close relationship between a work and its author may not reflect entirely well upon him. As Milton attacks the Modest Confuter and his writing, he becomes direct correspondence between a writer and his work, insisting that he knows everything he needs to know about the Confuter (not to mention Joseph Hall) based upon his book. However, not only has the Confuter painted a very unflattering portrait of Milton based—on what he has found in the Animadversions; but, in the immensely long autobiographical portion of An Apology, Milton proves that he is far from willing to let his works speak entirely for themselves.

Although Milton's autobiographical passage in An Apology comes at the very beginning of the work rather than in the middle, as it does in The Reason of Church-Government, the two sections begin in much the same manner: after a general statement about the burden of knowledge and the difficulty of acting morally upon that knowledge, Milton enters into his autobiography by way of discussing the duty he feels toward God and his church—a duty that requires him to take on the somewhat uncomfortable task of writing in his own defense. "Now against the rumor of an evil tongue...I must be for't to proceed from the unfain ded and diligent inquiry of mine own conscience at home {(for better way I know not, Readers) to give a more true account of my self abroad then this modest Confuter, as he calls himselfe, hath given of me" (YP 1869–70). Even though Milton has already freely given an account of himself in The Reason of Church-Government, he now depicts the task as one to which he has been driven only reluctantly, and only in self-defense. As in Church-Government, however, Milton again seems less interested in external reality—vindicating himself with proofs of his virtuous deeds and lifestyle—than with the internal: the results of an "unfain ded and diligent inquiry of [his] owne conscience." In his earlier pamphlet Milton focused on the future rather than the present, the speculative or desired rather than the verifiable, and a similar pattern is evident here: Milton privileges what he thinks and feels over whatever actions his antagonist may have alleged him to have taken—without first bothering to prove those allegations false.

Milton acknowledges that he might have followed the examples of many illustrious men by suffering in silence, but when I discern'd [the Confuter's] intent was not so much to snite at me, as through me to render odious the truth which I had written, and to staine with ignominy that Evangelick doctrine which opposes the tradition of Prelaty, I conceav'd my selfe to be now not as mine owne person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was perswaided, and whereof I had declard openly to be a partaker. Whereupon I thought it my duty, if not to my selfe, yet to the religious cause I had in hand, not to leave on my garment the least spot, or blemish in good name. (YP 1871)

Milton's argument is that his self-defense is not really a self-defense since the Modest Confuter's target is not really Milton, but the antiprelatical faction as a whole. This is a reasonable enough claim, but it is one the Modest Confutation does not quite bear out. In the letter to the reader that prefaces the work, the Confuter writes:

If thou hast any general or particular concernment in the affairs of these times, or but natural curiosity, thou art acquainted with the late and hot bickering between the Prelates and Socrifegymns. To make up the breaches of whose solemn Scence, (it were too ominous to say Tragicall) there is thrust forth upon the Stage, as also to take
the care of the lesse intelligent, a scurrilous Mime, a personated, and (as himself thinks) a grim, lowring, bitter fool. 29

Although Milton is attacked as a scurrilous fool, it is the style and method of Milton's writing, not the substance of his views, that the Confuter decryes. Indeed, he gives the opinions of the Sincroynomials exactly as much respect as those of the prelatical faction, using the same images for the works of both sides: they are (somewhat simultaneously) "hot bickerings" and "solemn scenes." Later, the Confuter will say that Milton's greatest concern in Animadversions is not the proper form of church government, but rather private and personal spleen: "the other businesse being handled but by the by, or not at all: and where it is, in such a wretched, loathsom manner, as once I did almost doubt me, whether or no you did not jeer at both sides, at Religion, and God, and all." 27 While the Confuter makes no bones about his own political and religious sympathies and will spend the last third of the work arguing for episcopacy and a set liturgy, his personal attacks on Milton occur only in the first part of his tract, and only have to do with Milton's lack of decorum (and perceived related lack of virtue). He does not malign the other Presbyterians, and while he may indeed intend for his readers to extrapolate from Milton's character to the validity of his cause, it is Milton, not the Confuter, who appears to hold most tenaciously to the belief that the character of an individual man—as evidenced in his writing—tells the observer everything he needs to know about the cause he champions: these are the very grounds for his vitriol against both John Hall and the Confuter.

Given his belief in the strong correlation between a man's character and his literary ability—"how he should be truly eloquent who is not with all a good man, I see not" (YP 1:874)—Milton spends the next several pages alternating defending his earlier work and disparaging the Moeast Conftuation by focusing upon the method and style of both. He devotes a full page to considering his opponent's title page, ridiculing nearly every word for its inappropriateness. A representative example is his treatment of the title's first word, "modest": "Whereas a modest title should only informe the buyer what the book containes," Milton writes, "this officious epithet so hastily assuming the modesty which others are to judge of by reading, not the author to anticipate to himselfe by forestalling, is a strong presumption that his modesty set there to sale in the frontispiece, is not much addicted to blush" (YP 1:876). But although Milton subjects this and other parts of the Confuter's work to what might be considered an extremely close reading (and manages to mock, along the way, a number of unrelated works by Bishop Hall on the grounds that they show his ignorance of both literary and moral decorum), the Confuter's comments on Milton himself are what really preoccupy Mil-

ton. 29 The Confuter's attacks are an apparent combination of conjecture and falsehood based upon a few scattered and unilluminating passages in Animadversions (typical is the accusation that, because Milton uses a few theatrical metaphors, he must haunt playhouses), but, as nasty and haphazard as these attacks are, they amount to only a few charges, most of them recognizable as speculation rather than promoted as documented fact. At first Milton jumps on this weakness, noting that the Confuter "confesses, he has no further notice of mee then his owne conjecture," adding smugly, "it had been honest to have inquir'd, before he utter'd such infamous words" (YP 1:882). A moment later, however, Milton reverses himself, saying, "I am credibly informed he did inquire, and finding small comfort from the intelligence which he receiv'd, whereon to ground the falsities which he had provided, thought it his likeliest course under a pretended ignorance to let drive at randome" (1:882). The Confuter may or may not have known Milton's identity or made inquiries into his history and habits, but even if he had—and even if Milton somehow knew as much—it is curious that Milton should announce this fact. 29 If Milton's aim were only to vindicate himself of his opponent's charges, the easiest way would surely be to point to the Confuter's statement that he knows nothing of Milton apart from his writing, and thereby dismiss his attacks as groundless.

There seem to be two likely reasons that Milton emphasizes the Confuter's inquiries: first, to assert that he has some kind of a public reputation, and that it is a positive one; otherwise, the Confuter's statement that he "has no notice" of Milton might be taken as evidence of Milton's obscurity, which is one of the things that Milton's autobiographies seem meant to dispel. Second, if Milton were to argue too vehemently that the portrait the Confuter has assembled from reading Milton's text is flawed, Milton would have to revise his own notions about the relationship between authors and their works. So Milton harps on the supposed duplicity of the Confuter, with the perhaps inadvertent consequence that his antagonist appears fiendishly clever. Where some writers might be content with slandering their enemy with whatever weapons came to hand, the Confuter, in Milton's analysis, "burden[s] me with these vices, whereof, among whom my conversation hath been, I have been ever least suspected; perhaps not without some subtility to cast me into envy, by bringing on me a necessity to enter into mine owne praises" (YP 1:883). That is, the Confuter has purposely made the picture so bad that he intends for Milton to embarrass himself by making an immodest self-defense—but Milton is not about to fall into his trap:

I know every wise man is more unwillingly drawne to speake [of himself], then the most oppining care can be averse to heare. Nevertheless since I dare not wish to passe
this life unpersecd of slanderous tongues, for God hath told us that to be generally prais'd is woffull, I shall rely on his promise to free the innocent from curious aspersions: whereof nothing sooner can assure me, then if I shall see him now assisting me in the just vindication of my selfe, which yet I could deferre, it being more meet that to those other matters of publick debate in this book I should give attendance first, but that I fear it would but harms the truth, for me to reason in her behalf, so long as I should suffer my honest estimation to be impur'd from these insolent suspicions. (YP 1:893)

Milton's conclusion in the second part of this passage—that God wishes for him to defend himself—does not seem to follow from the preceding statements that (1) wise men are reluctant to speak of themselves, and (2) being slandered is not uncommon, and being praised by all men would be worse. If Milton is alluding to the passage in the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus says "blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake," he ought certainly to remember that the passage concludes, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12). Milton, however, seems unwilling to wait for vindication in the next world—he seems, in fact, to be challenging God to prove that he aids the innocent by doing so, right now, by helping Milton to vindicate himself. But as in The Reason of Church-Government, Milton again hesitates: even with God's promise, he could still put off this self-defense and get to the important matter of reforming church government—except that no one would heed what he had to say if they thought the Confiniter's portrait of him were true.

As he has done earlier, Milton registers anxiety about being unknown, as well as an almost equal anxiety about not being able to control how he is known or how his works are read. In his essay on The Reason of Church-Government, Stanley Fish has argued that there is, in effect, no "reason" in Church-Government—that the point of Milton's work is to show the inadequacy of human reason when it comes to a matter of religious faith: either one gets it, or one does not. A similar attitude appears to be at work in An Apology, where Milton's excuse for his otherwise outrageous self-focus seems to be that what he is is more important than what he has done—-or even what he has written. According to what he writes elsewhere, most notably in his statement that "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in landable things, ought him selfe to be a true Poem, that is, a composition, and pattern of the best and honnourable things" (YP 1:890), Milton claims that writer and work should correspond perfectly, but his convulsive, overly explanatory autobiographies suggest that the Confiniter's attacks on Milton's manner and method of writing have struck deeply at these beliefs.

Taking the Confiniter's taunts as a starting point, Milton now enters into his autobiography proper. He summarizes his university career and the esteem in which he was held to counter the claim that he was "vomitt out thecne" (YP 1:884), and to his antagonist's depiction of Milton's present life—"Where his morning hauntes are I wis not; but he that would find him after dinner, must search the Play-Houses, or the Bordeli, for there I have traced him."—Milton responds with an account of the early hours of his typical day:

Those morning hauntes are where they should be, at home, not sleeping, or concocting the surfeits of an irreguler feast, but up, and stirring, in winter often ere the sound of any bell awake men to labour, or to devotion; in Summer as oft with the Bird that first roases, or not much tardier, to reade good Authors, or cause them to be read, till the attention be weary; or memory have his full fraught. Then with useful and generous labours preserving the bodies health, and hardinesse; to reader lightsome, clear, and not humplish obedience to the linde, to the cause of religion, and our Countries liberty, when it shall require firme hearts in sound bodies to stand and cover their stations, rather then to see the ruine of our Protestant, and the infraction of a slavish life. (YP 1:885-86)

As Hugh Richmont notes, Milton's detailed description of his morning is actually deeply indebted to a passage from Pierre de Ronsard's long poem, Reply to the insults and calumnies of various unrecognizable preachers and ministers of Geneva (1563). Richmont's prose translation follows.

You complain moreover that my life is licentious, ever-hurdened with luxury, sport, and vice. You maliciously: if you had followed me for two months you would know well the state of my life and how I intend to spell it out for you so that everyone will know you are a fair. When I wake each morning before I do anything I say a prayer to the Eternal Father of all Good. . . When I get out of bed and am clothed I devote myself to study and learn virtue, writing and reading as my vocation requires since I have been inclined to the Muses since my childhood. I stay clothed for four or five hours; then when too much reading wearies my spirit I drop my book and go to church. Returning I devote an hour to recreation; then dine soberly; saying grace. In alluding to a great poet of the French Renaissance—and one who was also engaged in public polemic warfare—Milton surely intends to emphasize his own literary aspirations and to remind his audience (and himself) that poetry is not necessarily incompatible with political and religious engagement. However, in omitting Ronsard's name and in transforming his scenario into prose, Milton may be registering his discomfort with this autobiographical exemplar, whose own pious devotions were Catholic and whose poetic fury was directed at Protestants.

Milton's description of his morning, whether or not it is precisely accu-
rate or precisely original, is nevertheless nearly the only part of his autobiography that he places in the potentially verifiable present. The Conferter's charge that Milton haunts playhouses provokes a discussion of Milton's reluctant theater-going at Cambridge (as well as the counteraccusation that the Conferter himself must know the inside of a playhouse in order to have recognized Milton's theatrical allusions), but Milton neither denies the accusation nor admits to it; he simply talks about something else. And when the Conferter charges that Milton frequents bordellos, Milton leaves the realm of facts entirely behind. Since, he writes, the Conferter

would seem privily to point me out to his Readers, as one whose custome of life were not honest, but licentious; I shall intreat to be born with though I digresse; & in a way not often trod acquaint ye with the summe of my thoughts in this matter through the course of my yeares and studies. Although I am not ignorant how hazardous it will be to do this under the nose of the envious, as it were in skirmish to change the compact order, and instead of outward actions to bring inmost thoughts into front. (YP 1:888)

Where most men might deny their opponent's accusations or provide testimonial to their abstemious behavior, Milton declines to do so. Instead, he declares that he will let the reader into his thoughts on the subject of sexual morality and their development over the years. He continues:

With me it fares now, as with him whose outward garment hath bin injurd & ill beclouded; for having no other shift, what helpe but to turn the inside outwards, especially if the lining be of the same, or, as it is sometimes, much better. So if my name and outward demeanour be not evident enough to defend me, I must make tryall, if the discovery of my inmost thoughts can. Wherein of two purposes both honest, and both sincere, the one perhaps I shall not misse, although I fail to gainsay belief with others of being such as my perpetuall thoughts shall hereby disclose me, I may yet fail of successe in persuading some, to be such really themselves, as they cannot believe me to be more then what I fain. (YP 1:888–89)

Milton continues to be preoccupied with what is internal and unseen. Indeed, beyond simply asserting the value of the internal, Milton's language hints at some actual dissatisfaction with his "outer garment," whose lining is so "much better." This, coupled with the strange negative construction in the last part of the passage, where Milton appears to be presuming failure from the start—no one will believe him, and his only hope is not to fail in persuading some of his readers to be what they cannot believe that he is—makes him sound like a man with something to hide.

Even when Milton goes out of his way to show how above-board he is being with his audience, he still comes across as protesting too much. At the end of his digression on chastity, he gives a new reason for having expanded on the subject at such length:

Thus large I have purposely bin, that if I have bin justly tatt with this crime, it may come upon me after all this my confession, with a tenne-fold shame. But if I have hithero deserv'd no such opprobrious word, or suspicion, I may hereby ingage my selfe now openly to the faithful observation of what I have protest. I go on to shew you the unbridl'd impudence of this loose rayer . . . who from the single notice of the animadversions, as he protests, will undertake to tell ye the very cloaths I wearre, though he be much mistaken in my wardrobe. (YP 1:889)

After again denying that the "single notice" of his previous text is sufficient to show the character of its author, Milton invites a public investigation of his prepared statements on matters of virtue, as well as public scrutiny of his actions—from this time forward (an "observation," anyway, which can hardly be made by those who do not know the anonymous author's identity). Milton seems to be asking for a second chance, saying, in effect, "judge me not on that work, but on my others; not on what you think my words say about my morals, but on what I tell you about my morals." As in The Reason of Church-Government, here he also offers his audience a deal, and the contractual language in both passages is notable for its combination of boldness and anxiety: "Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader; "it may come upon me with a tenne-fold shame": "I may hereby ingage my selfe now openly." Just as in the previous passage we examined, Milton is acting quite as though he has a guilty conscience. There is no reason to think that this is the case when it comes to Milton's sexual morality, although at the time of writing this tract he does appear to have been contemplating marriage and may have worried about how this ambition reflected upon his earlier ideals.

More likely, Milton's literary career is concerning him. We know from The Reason of Church-Government that Milton felt anxious about presenting himself to the public before he believed himself ready to do so, and in a mode that he considered second best. Milton does not explicitly voice this concern in his Apology, but it seems to be not far below the surface, provoked by the Conferter's criticism of the Animadversions. There is no evidence that Milton regrets or is ashamed of the earlier tract, but he seems vexed that his opponent should have loaded it with so much significance that he proposed deducing Milton's character from it. If Milton hardly felt ready to go public as a writer in The Reason of Church-Government—despite controlling every aspect of his self-presentation—he must have felt that, in the Animadversions, the Conferter had caught him practically defenseless. Whatever satisfaction Milton may have derived from his early apologetic tracts, he appears not to have taken them quite seriously as literature; for the Conferter to derive one of these immature efforts, then, is to strike too close to Milton's own feelings of literary uncertainty.

It is essential to emphasize, however, that Milton's toucheness on the
subject is not just the thin skin of a would-be literary luminary. His intellect and his facility with language are, he believes, gifts from God that demand some return—and, so far, he is not quite sure that he has made one. Moreover, as he repeatedly insists in An Apology, an author's poetic and prosaic styles are direct reflections on his moral character (and, it may be, his salvational status). I believe that Milton's fierce defenses of himself and his writing and his equally fierce attacks upon his opponents are impelled by a fundamental insecurity about how well he is measuring up in God's eyes. The Confuter's specific claims about Milton's loose morals may be ridiculous, but his sneering dismissal of Milton's writing and his assertion that Milton has done an injustice to the gravity of his subject seem harder for Milton to reject. If Milton were an inept or merely mediocre writer, how could he possibly be an upright person? According to his own arguments, he could not be. Milton's early autobiographies thus show him struggling to reconcile his belief in his literary-spiritual promise with the fact that this conviction has yet to manifest itself in a work with which Milton himself is satisfied—much less his Creator.

The Defences, 1651–1655

There is a gap of twelve years between Milton's antiprelatical tracts and his next prose autobiographies, which appear in Pro Populo Anglico Defensio Secunda (A Second Defence of the English People) and Pro Se Defensio (A Defence of Himself). In the intervening years the English church had been disestablished, the civil war fought and won, and Charles executed. By 1654 Milton was famous (or in some quarters infamous) for his defenses of the republican cause and his attacks on tyranny in general and Charles in particular. This fame was a long time coming; although Milton produced numerous prose works during the civil war, it was not until 1649, after Charles's execution, that he took up the subject of divine right, and not until the 1651 publication of Pro Populo Anglico Defensio (the first Defence of the English People) that he truly achieved a name for himself. With the exception of his four divorce tracts, which brought plenty of attention of exactly the wrong sort, none of Milton's polemics appears to have received much notice, and the publication of a volume of his verse went equally unremarked. In virtually every one of these works Milton expends considerable effort on his self-presentation, and scholarly analyses of these efforts have greatly assisted biographical readings of Milton. Nevertheless, not one of these publications contains anything like the autobiographical passages to be found in The Reason of Church-Government or An Apology against a Pamphlet, and this is true even when, as in the responses to The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Milton was personally attacked for his views.

Although Milton's prose works from the 1640s may not have made him a household name, apparently they attracted the notice of a sufficient number of leading parliamentarians to get him appointed as the Commonwealth's Latin secretary, a job that entailed composing the state's official papers and correspondence. Upon satisfactory service in this position, and probably because of his earlier spirited defenses of the revolutionaries in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates and Eikonoklastes, Milton appears to have been asked to vindicate the regicides against some of the recently published accusations and expressions of horror from abroad. He obliged with the Defence of the English People, writing in Latin to reach an international audience and following the format of the work he was most immediately refuting: Defensio Regia pro Carole I (1649), by the famous French Protestant Salmansius. Among its many other features and techniques, the First Defence employs the same sort of personal attack familiar from Milton's earlier controversial works, and it seems in part to have been these ad hominem attacks that inspired a new champion to enter the fray—Salmansius died before composing a response. The anonymous Regii Sanguinis Clamor ad Coelum adversus Particidas Anglicos (1652), which Milton mistakenly attributed to Alexander More, vigorously defended Salmansius while denouncing Milton; this work, in turn, provoked Milton's Second Defence (1654).

Although the immediate circumstances surrounding the autobiography in the Second Defence seem similar to those attending An Apology—Milton had been personally attacked and his party had been implicated in that attack—some differences are readily apparent. In the later work, Milton focuses much more upon the past than the future, and there are virtually none of the invitations to his innermost thoughts (on a poetic career, on chastity) that periodically punctuated the antiprelatical tracts. Another striking difference is the placement of Milton's autobiography. In The Reason of Church-Government and An Apology his autobiographical passages form a discrete unit, while in the Second Defence such material is scattered throughout. However, while many of these passages may seem individually to be confident and controlled, when taken together the picture changes. Milton will end one passage abruptly only to resume in an autobiographical vein several pages later, and the portraits he paints of himself in different places are often remarkably dissimilar. Thus, despite some superficial differences between Milton's late autobiographies and his earlier ones, their effect—and, I believe, their impetus—is quite similar. As in the antiprelatical tracts, Milton is again wrestling with feelings of extreme doubt, trying to convince
himself that he has made the right decisions and that God and the world will remember him with satisfaction. The difference is that here the blind Milton is anxious not about the future, but about the past, believing his career to be over, Milton is desperate for a sign that what he has done has been worthwhile, and that it has been enough.

Milton begins his tract by proclaiming the favors God has shown him. He celebrates the threefold blessing of having been alive "when [England's] citizens, with pre-eminent virtue and a nobility and steadfastness surpassing all the glory of their ancestors ... accomplish[ed] the most heroic and exemplary achievements since the foundation of the world"; of his having been selected "spontaneously with universal consent [for] the task of publicly defending ... the cause of the English people"; and, finally, of having done so in a way that "satisf[ied] a host of foreigners ... [and] so routed my audacious foe that he fled, broken in spirit and reputation" (YP 4:548–49). However, only a few pages later Milton loses this confident tone and grows defensive:

Although I claim for myself no share in [England's] glory, yet it is easy to defend myself from the charge of timidity or cowardice, should such a charge be leveled. For I did not avoid the toils and dangers of military service without rendering to my fellow citizens another kind of service that was much more useful and no less perilous. (YP 4:552)

Not only has Milton spent the opening pages of the tract doing just what he here disavows—claiming his right to a share in England's glory—but there is no evidence that anyone has accused him of cowardice. No such accusation appears in the Clamor, and, as Milton was a middle-aged man with failing eyesight for much of the civil war, it is unlikely that anyone would have looked upon him as capable for not having fought. On the other hand, his claim that his pamphleteering was as dangerous as battlefield service might well have resulted in some raised eyebrows; not only did all of Milton's pamphlets prior to the First Defence have relatively low circulation, but, by the time the more inflammatory of these were published, Charles had already been executed. Nevertheless, despite the perilousness that Milton claims for his service, he assures his reader,

In time of trial I was neither cast down in spirit nor unduly fearful of envy or death itself. Having from early youth been especially devoted to the liberal arts, with greater strength of mind than of body, I exchanged the toils of war, in which any stout trooper might outdo me, for those labors which I better understood, that with such wisdom as I owned I might add as much weight as possible to the counsels of my country and to this excellent cause, using not my lower but my higher and stronger powers. And so I concluded that if God wished those men to achieve such noble deeds, He also wished that there be other men by whom those deeds, once done, might be worthily praised and extolled, and that truth defended by arms be also defended by reason—the only defence truly appropriate to man. Hence it is that while I admire the heroes victorious in battle, I nevertheless do not complain about my own role. Indeed I congratulate myself and once again offer most fervent thanks to the heavenly bestower of gifts that such a lot has befallen me—a lot that seems much more a source of envy to others than of regret to myself. (YP 4:552–53)

Milton's description of the service he has rendered his country provides at least one hint as to why he might be too social about his lack of military participation: his contribution to the war effort was praising "those deeds, once done." As he acknowledges through his choice of tense, Milton was not publishing works championing the parliamentarians or challenging divine right while the civil war was actually raging; indeed, in 1646–1648 he published nothing at all. Just as he did with the antiprelatical fiction, Milton publicly sided with the regicides only rather belatedly. He may well believe that he has since made up for his initial inaction, but surely part of Milton's grandiose claims for himself and his penchant for military metaphors (of his dispute with Salmasius he says, "I met him in single combat and ... I bore off the spoils of honor" [YP 4:556])—can be attributed to an uneasy awareness that he had no good answer to the question, "What did you do in the war, daddy?"

Milton's next autobiographical passage is provoked by the description of him given in the Clamor's dedicatory epistle, which is addressed to the exiled Charles II. Toward the end of this letter the author takes Virgil's characterization of Polyphemus as a starting point: "A monster horrible, deformed, huge, and sightless. Though to be sure, [Milton] is not huge; nothing is more weak, more bloodless, more shrivelled than little animals such as he, who the harder they fight, the less harmful they are." Although Milton has already paid back the author of those lines with a long, nasty, and frequently hilarious biographical account of Alexander More's escapades, he seems unable to overlook this passing insult and replies,

Although it ill befits a man to speak of his own appearance, yet speak I shall, since here too there is reason for me to thank God and repute liars, lest anyone think me to be perhaps a dog-headed ape or a rhinoceros, as the rabble in Spain, too credulous of their priests, believe to be true of heretics, as they call them. Ugly I have never been thought by anyone, to my knowledge, who has laid eyes on me. Whether I am handsome or not, I am less concerned. I admit that I am not tall, but my stature is closer to the medium than to the small. But neither am I especially feeble, having indeed such spirit and such strength that when my age and manner of life required it, I was not ignorant of how to handle or unsheathe a sword, nor unpractised in using it each day. Girled with my sword, as I generally was, I thought myself equal to anyone, though he was far more sturdy, and I was fearless of any injury that one man could inflict on another. (YP 4:592–85)
Milton does not precisely contradict the earlier explanation he has given for avoiding military service—that his physical condition makes him less useful on the field than in the study—but the two self-portraits certainly differ. Whereas here Milton describes himself as having been a fearless swordsman in his youth, and claims that he is still spirited and strong, in his earlier passage excusing his absence on the field of battle he protests that “any stout trooper might outsow [him],” since, “from early youth,” he has had “greater strength of mind than of body” (YP 4:553). These previous lines imply a physical delicacy that is repudiated by the passage above, in which Milton asserts that he is neither small nor feeble; indeed, in the next line he adds, “Today I possess the same spirit, the same strength, but not the same eyes” (YP 4:583). Of course, the context of Milton’s self-description has changed—he is no longer defending himself from (possibly imaginary) charges of avoiding military service, but rather attempting to ensure that his audience does not dismiss him as a useless, frail, blind old man. All the same, his concern with his physical appearance has struck many as curious. Some of it may be simple vanity on Milton’s part, but as his aside about the supposed deformities of heretics suggests, to Milton calling someone a monstrosity is more than a hyperbolic way of saying that he is ugly. To Milton, for whom outsiders and insides have such a fraught relationship, we may well suppose that physical defects strongly imply moral ones.

Milton’s eyes soon become the locus for his anxieties about both kinds of defects. He maintains that his eyes “have as much the appearance of being uninjured … as the eyes of men who see most keenly,” and this feature—which he mentions also in his sonnet to Cyriack Skinner—appears to have great significance for Milton (YP 4:583). In the context of the ensuing discussion of his blindness and God’s role in that affliction, Milton may be suggesting that his unclouded eyes are a sign that he is not hateful to God. The Clamor has not raised the possibility that God has blinded Milton for defending regicide, but Milton seems deeply afraid that something he has done might have precipitated his blindness. To preempt such an argument from anyone else, he calls God himself as a witness:

For my part, I call upon Thee, my God, who knowest my inmost mind and all my thoughts, to witness that (although I have repeatedly examined myself on this point as earnestly as I could, and have searched all the corners of my life) I am conscious of nothing, or of no deed, either recent or remote, whose wickedness could justly occasion or invite upon me this supreme misfortune. (YP 4:587)

In fact, God appears not so much to be a character witness as Milton’s most important audience, and in Milton’s direct address of the deity there is a note of apprehension: “this is so—isn’t it?” These are the lines that Alexander More will describe as “really too anxious,” and, although Milton does not permit his reader very far inside his head (he does not, for example, reproduce the voices that he hears, as he does in The Reason of Church-Government), his obsessive return to the subjects of his blindness, his appearance, and his service to the state strongly supports More’s reading—and suggests, moreover, the precise source of that anxiety:

Some pages pass before Milton abandons the subject of his blindness. Far from being blinded as a punishment, he maintains, he chose blindness rather than reject God’s demands:

As for what I have at any time written (since the royalists think that I am now undergoing this suffering as a pittance, and they accordingly rejoice), I likewise call God to witness that I have written nothing of such kind that I was not then and am not now convinced that it was right and true and pleasing to God. And I swear that my conduct was not influenced by ambition, gain, or glory, but solely by considerations of duty, honor, and devotion to my country. I did my utmost not only to free my country, but also to free the church. Hence, when the business of replying to the royal defense had been officially assigned to me, and at that same time I was afflicted at once by ill health and the virtual loss of my remaining eye, and the doctors were making learned predictions that if I should undertake this task, I would shortly lose both eyes, I was not on the least deterred by the warning. I seemed to hear, not the voice of the doctor … but the sound of a certain more divine monitor within. And I thought that two lots had now been set before me by a certain command of fate: the one, blindness, the other, duty. Either I must necessarily endure the loss of my eyes, or I must abandon my most solemn duty. (YP 4:587–88)

In this version of events, God has designed the writing of the First Defence as a test of Milton’s obedience—but Milton, unlike Abraham with Isaac, actually loses what he has agreed to sacrifice. Although Milton has switched from directly addressing God to talking about him in the third person, this account of his actions and motives reads as much like a petition as the previous lines. Milton seems to be seeking reassurance from God, as well as trying to convince himself that this version of events is accurate. God may have allowed Milton to go blind, but Milton insists that God has not deserted him, and never will:

Then let those who slander the judgments of God cease to speak evil and invent empty tales about me. Let them be sure that I feel neither regret nor shame for my lot, that I stand unmoved and steady in my resolution, that I neither discern nor endure the anger of God, that in fact I know and recognize in the most momentous affairs his fatherly mercy and kindness towards me, and especially in this fact, that with his consolation strengthening my spirit I bow to his divine will, dwelling more often on what he has bestowed on me than on what he has denied. (YP 4:589)
Over the course of these lines Milton moves from a more tentative to a more confident position, from feeling and discerning to knowing and recognizing God's will, taking strength from his own continued strength in the belief that, if God were punishing him, he would not be bearing up as well as he is. He concludes,

So long as I find in God and man such consolation for my blindness, let no one mourn for my eyes, which were lost in the cause of honor. Far be it from me either to mourn, or to have so little spirit that I cannot easily despite the reviles of my blindness, or so little charity that I cannot even more easily pardon them. (VP. 4:599)

Even more than the earlier parts of this passage on Milton's blindness, these last lines read like a prayer; Milton appears to be talking to himself—and to God—more than to his readers. (It is also worth bearing in mind that, blinded as he was, Milton would have had to compose his tracts orally, a process necessarily closer to prayer than writing.) As far as we know, Milton did not keep a diary, and the account of his blindness that occupies these many pages may well be the first time that he has written out his thoughts about the darkness that befell him a few years earlier. In this tract, Milton appears to be working through and laying to rest some of the more distressing fears surrounding his blindness, hoping to find, in the process, strength enough to endure.

Milton's next autobiographical section is prompted by the biography that his antagonist supplies for him. After filling more than five quarto pages with a refutation of the version of his life given in the Clamor, Milton suddenly decides to start over and tell the story of his life from the very beginning—ancestry, boyhood, and all, for a total of thirteen additional pages—as if unwilling to limit his autobiography to the issues raised by his opponent. He describes his decision to enter the field of political polemic in much the same way that he described it in The Reason of Church-Government, but he now makes his antirelatical tracts and all his subsequent writings out to be part of a single, coherent strategy:

I . . . ask[ed] myself whether I could in any way advance the cause of true and substantial liberty, which must be sought, not without, but within, and which is best achieved, not by the sword, but by a life rightly undertaken and rightly conducted. Since, then, I observed that there are, in all, three varieties of liberty without which civilized life is scarcely possible, namely ecclesiastical liberty, domestic or personal liberty, and civil liberty, and since I had already written about the first, while I saw that the magistrates were vigorously attending to the third, I took as my province the remaining one, the second or domestic kind. (VP. 4:624)

Milton then summarizes his arguments in the divorse tracts, Of Education, and Areopagitica, moves on to the regicide treatises, and brings himself up to the present with the Defences. He excuses the great length of this autobiographical account on the grounds that, as he tells More, he had "to stop your mouth . . . and refute your lies, chiefly for the sake of those good men who otherwise would know me not" (VP. 4:629). This is a familiar argument, a version of which appeared in The Reason of Church-Government. However, while Milton is now well known enough that some readers might actually care about the details of his life, the person with the most to gain from such a narrative is now, as it always has been, Milton himself. These seamless, teleological life narratives seem to appear whenever Milton is facing his most serious crises of faith and self-confidence, as if his ability to project such a shape upon his life means that his life actually has a coherent design—and that that design, moreover, is a function of God's providence.

After concluding this longest autobiographical section, Milton devotes considerable ink to the biographies of various parliamentarian heroes. He does so, most immediately, to counter the aspersions cast upon these figures by his opponent, but in doing so he focuses not only on his subjects' external lives, but also on the presumed events of their inner lives. These speculations seem to be a continuation of his autobiography, for they reveal more about Milton than they do about their ostensible subjects. As Milton describes Cromwell,

he soon surpassed well-nigh the greatest generals both in the magnitude of his accomplishments and in the speed with which he achieved them. Nor was this remarkable, for he was a soldier well-versed in self-knowledge, and whatever enemy lay within—van hopes, fears, desires—he had either previously destroyed within himself or had long since reduced to subjection. Commander first over himself, victor over himself, he had learned to achieve over himself the most effective triumph, and so, on the very first day that he took service against an external foe, he entered camp a veteran and past-master in all that concerned the soldier's life. (VP. 4:687–88)

Milton does not go so far as to speculate on the details of this self-mastery—what Cromwell's specific fears and desires may have been and how and when he overcame them—but he takes it for granted that this would have been as much a part of the narrative of Cromwell's life as it is of his own. In The Reason of Church-Government, Milton had to struggle against his desire for delay and development, and in the Second Defence he has to struggle against the fear that God has blinded him out of displeasure. In his account of Cromwell's victory over his "enemy within," one may read both the story of Milton's own life, as he would like it to be told, and its hoped-for outcome: true self-mastery.

Later, in apostrophizing Cromwell, Milton pauses to give him advice that likewise emphasizes the importance of inner strength for effective leadership:
You have taken upon yourself by far the heaviest burden, one that will put to the test your inmost capacities, that will search you out wholly and intimately, and reveal what spirit, what strength, what authority are in you, whether there truly live in you that piety, faith, justice, and moderation of soul which convince us that you have been raised by the power of God beyond all other men to this most exalted rank. . . . These trials will buffet you and shake you; they require a man supported by divine help, advised and instructed by all-but-divine inspiration.

Such matters and still others I have no doubt that you consider and reflect upon, times without number. (YP 4:673–74)

Milton’s advice has come under fire for its presumptuous tone by critics beginning with Alexander More, and more than one reader has found veiled criticisms of Cromwell’s policies in these lines and those that follow. What no one seems to have noticed is the striking applicability of this advice to Milton’s own circumstances, or the similarity of the description of Cromwell and his deeds to Milton’s self-descriptions: compare, for example, the above passage with the opening paragraphs of the Second Defence and the Defence of Himself. Milton surely has both advice and criticism for Cromwell, which he hopes very much will be heeded, but at the same time he seems to be thinking of his own situation and hoping that his writings have indeed “revel[ed] what spirit, what strength, what authority are in” him.

After Cromwell, Milton administers advice to his fellow citizens, but he seems to have, at least, only a passing interest in them. “If the most recent deeds of my fellow countrymen should not correspond sufficiently to their earliest,” he writes, “let them look to it themselves” (YP 4:685). For his part,

I have borne witness, I might almost say, I have erected a monument that will not soon pass away, to those deeds that were illustrious, that were glorious, that were almost beyond any praise, and if I have done nothing else, I have surely redeemed my pledge. Moreover, just as the epic poet, if he is scrupulous and disinclined to break the rules, undertakes to extalt, not the whole life of the hero whom he proposes to celebrate in his verse, but usually one event of his life . . . and passes over the rest, so let it suffice me too, as my duty or my excuse, to have celebrated at least one heroic achievement of my countrymen. (YP 4:685)

The pledge that Milton speaks of having redeemed appears to be the obligation he has long felt to use his literary and intellectual talents in the service of God and England. Moreover, the fact that he compares his tracts to the epic poems of Homer and Virgil strongly suggests that Milton is remembering, specifically, the pledge he made in The Reason of Church-Government to produce a poem “so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die” (YP 1:810). However, there is sadness in the comparison: Milton’s literary monument is not the work of epic or lyric or tragic verse that he once envisioned, but a succession of prose pamphlets on events already receding into the past; deeds that were illustrious, that were glorious, that were almost beyond any praise. As good a face as Milton puts on his achievements, he himself seems to believe that he has “done nothing else” —where “else” represents whatever other ambitions he once held. Perhaps as vexing as the sense of things left undone is Milton’s awareness that the success of his current work depends, in part, on the success of others in maintaining their new society. He concludes the work by addressing his fellow citizens:

If after such brave deeds you ignobly fail, if you do ought unworthy of yourselves, be sure that posterity will speak out and pass judgment. The foundations were soundly laid, the beginnings, in fact more than the beginnings, were splendid, but posterity will look in vain, not without a certain distress, for those who were to complete the work. . . . It will seem to posterity that a mighty harvest of glory was at hand, together with the opportunity for doing the greatest deeds, but that to this opportunity men were wanting. Yet there was not wanting one who could rightly counsel, encourage, and inspire, who could honor both the noble deeds and those who had done them, and make both deeds and doers illustrious with praises that will never die. (YP 4:685–86)

Although Milton is still projecting his narratives into the future, this particular future is one in which he plays no active role; it is up to others to carry on the work begun by the revolutionaries, and he can only hope that they will. These are the words of a man who sees his life as essentially over, and whose seemingly arrogant assessments of his past importance only barely disguise a deep sense of loss.

Milton’s final lines in the Second Defence sound like a valedictory to this particular debate—if not to his entire career as a public writer—but Alexander More’s 1654 response, Fides Publica, provoked yet another pamphlet, Milton’s Pro Se Defensio (Defence of Himself). Despite its title, the Defence of Himself is the least directly autobiographical of the four tracts considered in this essay, being devoted primarily to defending and justifying Milton’s identification of Alexander More as the author of the Clamor. Since More had not, in fact, written that work (although he does appear to have written its dedicatory epistle and to have conveyed the work to the printer), he reacted with indignation to Milton’s ad hominem attacks and to the airing of his religious and sexual dirty laundry. In the Fides More both returns Milton’s personal attacks, making particular fun of his adversary’s autobiographical excesses in the Second Defence, and attempts to defend his own honor with a great show of piety and false humility. By way of response, Milton provides an angry mishmash of a work that first refuses to admit that he could have been wrong about More’s authorship, and then finally declares that More’s delivering the work to his printer constitutes authorship every bit as much as
actually writing it. He provides yet more evidence of More's unsavory life, attacks More's self-defense, and—to a surprisingly limited degree—defends himself against More's accusations. Milton does rebut More's specific charges one by one, but he rarely elaborates and he includes no extended autobiographical passages of the sort his readers have grown accustomed to.

The abrupt change in both the quality of Milton's writing and the nature of his self-presentation has been noted by several critics, who identify Alexander More as the reason for this shift. Annabel Patterson has suggested that when Milton finally faced his error in assigning More the authorship of the Clamor, he began to lose faith in his own moral uprightness, and thus his voice of unswerving self-confidence; more recently Stephen Fallon has argued that More's expert reading of Milton's Second Defence, and the skilled way his tract skewed Milton for his self-importance, provoked the incoherent and contradictory claims Milton makes for himself in this final Defence. As we have seen, anxiety, contradiction, and even incoherence are not new features of Milton's autobiographies, but Patterson and Fallon are correct in noting that something in Milton's self-presentation has changed, and they are surely also right that a sense of shame is at the root of it. I would point out, however, that the most notable feature of the Fides is not its attacks on Milton, but rather its own extraordinary passages of autobiography.

Milton's detailed accounts of his life and habits, which are interspersed with letters from others testifying to his virtue, represent the first time that one of Milton's opponents has attempted an autobiographical defense similar to Milton's. (In fact, the Fides contains two such autobiographies, including one by the printer, who, having likewise felt smeared by Milton, gives a surprisingly detailed account of his own life in the work's prefatory letter.) Milton repeatedly takes issue with More's testimonial letters, accusing him of hiding behind the words of others and not giving the full story, but he seems to have a more difficult time criticizing More's autobiographical passages. Rather than denounce the personal account as inherently untrustworthy, Milton generally prefers to give his own account of More's inner state, as though he has unlimited access to More's thoughts: "as soon as [More] learned . . . that I had published a reply to his City of the Royal Blood, the man's guilty conscience began to rage and his mind to thrash about in every direction" (YP 4:719). More's supposedly guilty conscience makes several more appearances in Milton's pamphlet, with Milton often telling More just what he is feeling: "Your dissertation with yourself has long been most grave. Nothing is more offensive to you than to live with yourself, to be in your own company; no one do you avoid more willingly than yourself" (YP 4:776). Later, of More's laudatory letters, Milton asks,
sense of mission, and dearness to God. One can certainly hope that the last time he felt this way was in the 1650s, while writing the Defences, but there is no reason to be sure of it.

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NOTES

1. Under the misapprehension that Alexander More had authored an attack on his Defence of the English People, Milton spent large parts of the Second Defence of the English People accusing More of everything from iniquity to the seduction of his friends' serving women. While the substance of Milton's charges appears to have been true, the amount of time and venom he spends on his attacks against More is surprising, and the details of his often elaborate accounts of More's misdeeds would have been unlikely to stand up to scrutiny.


The contrary view is taken by many of the critics cited in note 4 above, although most do not dismiss the autobiographical component of Milton's prose as too highly as Thomas Creech, John Milton: The Prose Works (New York, 1981), who claims that Milton's autobiographies serve only "some immediate exigency of his polemic," and that, moreover, Milton seems to have been drawn to literary works that "generally preceded the personal, confessional mode" (1).


While the Confessions was well known in Latin (and later in the two English translations of 1620 and 1831), before the second half of the seventeenth century it seems to have had little influence as a literary model in England; its Continental progeny, such as the self-consciously Augustinian Life of Teresa of Avila (published in Spanish in 1588 and translated into English in 1611) arrived much earlier. In England the earliest autobiographical religious works are transcripts of first-person examinations and confessions; the most famous of which are surely the Examinations of Anne Askew (1545 and 1546), which were burned at the stake for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation.

7. Lliburne's first autobiographical accounts were A Work of the Beast (1638) and The Poor Mans Cry (1639). Many more followed over the next two decades, especially after Lliburne took up the Leveller cause.

Poetic autobiography is a tricky subject during this period. Although one would expect lyric poetry to contain some degree of autobiography, the subject of a lyric poem and the persona adopted (for example, the seconded lover) are often quite conventional, in the absence of detailed biographical information, it can thus be extremely difficult to determine the true autobiographical context of a given work. In any case, as poetic autobiography is of an entirely different genre and line of descent from Puritan or other prose autobiographies, my subsequent references to "autobiography" should be understood to refer to prose works in that mode.


9. Likewise, the secular autobiographies that appeared in manuscript in this period—usually in the context of a family history written by a noblemen for posterity—tended to be written relatively late in the author's life, or at least after he had accomplished something of note. See Delany, British Autobiography, 1-2. 109, 112-13. For the same reason, Milton's autobiographies have little in common with the autobiographical writings that began to appear on the Continent in the late sixteenth century.


11. The divorce pamphlets—which inspired attacks both in Parliament and the press—are the most obvious case, but Eikonoklastes and A Defence of the English People also provoked attacks of a more or less personal nature. For published criticisms of the divorce tracts and of Milton himself, see An Answer to a Book, Initiated, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.
(1644), 15–18, 31–32, 33, 42–43. Herbert Palmer, The Glasse of Gods Piencedeece towards His Faithfull Ones (1644), 57; Robert Baillie, A Dissertaffe from the Errores Of the Time (1645), 116; and Joseph Hall, Resolutions and Decisions of Divers Practicall Cases of Conscience (1643), 398–99. In Anarchy Anglicana the pseudonymous Theobald Verax, like many other royalists, managed to combine an attack on Milton's views on marriage with an attack on his independence; see 159–200. All the above works are cited in William Bilyer Parker, Milton's Contemporary Reputation (Cambridge, O.U., 1940). The personal attacks in these works are, by and large, incidental, but when added up they amount to a condemnation that is certainly more considerable than that in a single work such as Molten Confutation.

12. Lydidas is sometimes considered Milton's first published "autobiographical" work, but that description is obviously problematic. Among Milton's Latin Prologues are a few short, scattered autobiographical passages, but although written during his years at Cambridge, none of these were published until 1674.

13. See An Appeal to the Parliament; or, Stand Men Against the Prelate (Holland, 1628), 11: "As a knob, a wen, or any superuous branch of flesh, being no member doth not over burthen the body, but also doth the feature, yet killith the body at length except it be cut off, so these Bishops be the knobs & wens & humtie popish flesh which hearteth down, deformeth & decadeth the body of the Church, that there is no cure (as we conceive) but cutting off."

14. Dictionary of National Biography (DNB). For a brief summary of Leighton's career, see also Vol. 3, p. 124. Laud also assigned similar punishments to radicals such as William Prynne and John Lilburne.


18. This is not to say that Milton is indifferent to the state of the church, but in the great scheme of things it does not matter whether the church is saved or destroyed, since whatever transpires will be as God wills it. What matters is that Milton gives God his all by acting in the church's behalf. It is undeniable that Milton periodically casts himself in a prophetic role, both after the fact and before the headnote appended to Lydidas for its publication in Milton's 1645 Poems—claiming that the (1652) work the author "foresees" the corruption of the bishops—is a perfect example of the former), and I would not disagree that elements of this role are present in the narrator of The Reason of Church-Government; however, Milton does not adopt the role wholeheartedly and neither does he have the sense of conviction that scholars advancing this argument tend to attribute to him.


and Helgerson, Self-Crowned Laureates, 246, 274. Milton does, of course, mention his ministerial ambitions in his later declaration that he was "destined a child" to the ministry, until he was "Church-ordained by the Prelates" (VP 1:222, 282), but this admission is deferred for many pages, until he has concluded his discussion of his poetic training and abilities.


22. Both Milton and Hall, in fact, appear to have felt that there was a strong connection between good style and good morals, but Milton's attacks are the fiercer and more constant. For specific instances of Milton's objections to Hall's word choices, see, for example, VP 1:596, 599, 592, 634, 647. In his footnote to two of these passages, Don M. Wolfe writes, "Milton objects to Hall's use of language. He implies that bad language is an outward sign of bad thinking, even of error, and "both Milton and Hall blooked upon a good style as an outward manifestation of virtue and wisdom. The objection to bad style was therefore a serious objection and not mere carping" (VP 1:596 n. 41, 647 n. 2). Later, in An Apology, explaining the reasons of his outrage at Hall and the reasons for the style he chose in Anvimations, Milton writes, "I took it at my part the lesse to endure that my respected friends through their own unnecessary patience should thus lie at the mercy of a cy flunting stile, to be girdled with frumps and curtail gistes, by one who makes sentences by the Statute, as if all above three inches long were enuifacted" (VP 1:597–598). For a more detailed consideration of Milton's and Hall's stylistic differences, and the possible moral valences that these differences may have suggested to Milton, see Henry S. Lounes, "Joseph Hall and the Prose Style of John Milton," in Milton Studies 15, ed. James D. Simmons (Pittsburgh, 1981), 11, 12–24.

23. Although Milton sometimes implies that this work was written by Hall, most scholars believe that his role was, at most, only a minor collaborative one. Milton's second candidate for authorship, Hall's son, seems much more likely. See Parker, Contemporary Reputation, 15, 16; Lewalski, Life of John Milton, 156.}

24. See Corns, Unloved Virtue, 33. The dedicatory epistle to Thomas Edwarrs's Gangrana (London, 1649) provides a representative example of both the length and degree of personal detail found in other controversial works of the period. Addressing Parliament, Edwards writes, "I am one who out of choice and judgement have imbraked my selfe with wife, children, estate and all that doth bear to me in the same ship with you to sinke and perish, or to cruse safe to land with vous" (A2v). Neither Hall nor the Smectymnuus become even this personal in their tracts, although both do use the first person periodically.

25. John Guillery, Poetic Authority, 95–96, suggests that Milton's anonymity in this tract is simply a practical acknowledgment of the fact that his name lacked sufficient reputation or recognition to advance his argument. Although Guillery provides a convincing reading of Milton's unwilling suppression of his name at various points throughout An Apology, I do not find his argument for the absence of Milton's name from the work's title page persuasive, as the counterexample of The Reason of Church-Government demonstrates, the presence or absence of Milton's name on the title page of his early pamphlets is extremely inconsistent.


27. Ibid., 5, 5–6.

28. Milton objects, among other works, to Hall's The Passion Sermon Preached at Paules on Good Friday, Apr. 14, 1609, which Hall dedicates "in great letters to our Saviour. Although I knowe that all we do ought to begin and end to his praise and glory; yet to inscribe to him in a vaine place with flourishes, as a man in complement uses to trip up the name of some Empire, Gentleman, or Lord Paramount at Common Law, to be hit book patron with the appendant form of a ceremonious presentment, will ever appeare among the judgements to he but an
33. According to Parker, Contemporary Reputation, 23, copies of the first printing of Milton’s 1645 Poems were still available twelve years later.


37. Milton was attacked both in Parliament and in print for The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce. Admittedly, however, the “personal” attacks in, for example, An Answer to the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce (1644) are less vicious than those in the Modern Confinement of Clamer. See 15–16, 31–32, 33, and 42–43 of An Answer. As Parker suggests, Milton’s attacks appear to have been unaware of his marital circumstances, for no contemporary criticism of the divorce tracts contains any reference to them.

38. This is, at any rate, the version of events given by Milton himself and his early biographers. See the Second Defense, YP 4, 48–49, and “An Anonymous Life of Milton” (possibly by John Philips or Cuthbert Skene), reproduced in John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), 1641–42. Unfortunately, there is no other evidence either way: 39. Unless otherwise indicated, the English translation used for both Defences is from YP. For the Latin I have consulted the bilingual Columbia University Press edition of the work, located in volume 8 of The Works of John Milton, 18 vols., ed. Frank Allen Patterson et al. (New York, 1931–39), hereafter designated CM.

40. Indeed, he even asks, rhetorically, “who does not consider the glorious achievements of his country as his own?” (YP 4, 536).

41. The exception is The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, which went through four editions in three years. None of Milton’s other works from the 1640s received more than a single printing in that decade, and some lack even unsold copies that were reprinted for sale in the 1650s, after Milton had achieved notoriety. See Parker, Milton’s Contemporary Reputation, 18, 15–16. The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates was not published until February 1649, while Charles was executed on January 30. Eikonoklastes was published in October of that same year. Although Eikonoklastes later gained some renown, according to Parker it did not do so until after the First Defence made its author famous (30–31).

42. The full sentence reads, “Sic itaque censiminius, si illius Deus res gerere tam pracules voluit, esse itidem aliquis quibus gestas dicas pro dignitate atque omni, & defensam armis, verum, ratione, clausum, (quod unicum est praecidere ac proprium humanum) defendi voluerit” (CM 8:10).

43. Blackford translation, excerpted in YP 4, 4105. To confuse an already vexed issue, the epistle is believed to have been written by Alexander More and prefixed to Du Moulin’s work. The quotation from the Aenid comes from Book Three.

44. In his 1625 sonnet Milton writes, “Clytie, this three years’ day, these eyes, though clear / To outward view of blushing or of spot, / Bereft of light thir seeing have forgot.” Hughes, Complete Poems and Major Prose, 170.
Milton’s Art of Logic and the Force of Conviction

John T. Connor

Introduction

Milton’s Art of Logic has often been overlooked by Miltonists. While various attempts have been made to associate the logician and the poet, these studies have not gone far enough to explain what I believe to be the intimate connection between the poet’s logic and his structures of pure and practical reason. Milton was preoccupied with the nature of logic, especially in the years following the Restoration, and I will seek to link his concern for logical method to notions of religious and political conviction that resonate in his later work. Central to my argument is that one should not read the Art of Logic with regard to its probable composition date (the 1640s), but, rather, that one should understand it in the context of the 1660s and 1670s when Milton revised and published the Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio in its 1672 and 1673 editions. Thus situated, I will read the Art of Logic as basic to Milton’s account of Creation in the Christian Doctrine and to his understanding of subjectivity as modeled in Paradise Regained.

In his biography of Milton, William Riley Parker provides an example of the kind of critical reception that the Art of Logic seems often to have encountered when he dismisses it as “dull” and “derivative.” “When Milton was not in the mood for poetry, he was sometimes capable of the most arid pedantry. Perhaps, for scholar-poets, if not for others, heights necessitate depths.” Scratching his head to explain why Milton should ever have thought to acknowledge a work so “exceptionally pedestrian,” Parker sees its publication as the product of a regrettable compromise between economic necessity and commonplace vanity—the desire to present “to the world the labours of a lifetime.” Strapped for cash, Milton is forced to exploit his poetic notoriety, publishing unworthy castoffs and hand-me-downs, mixing “mundane observations with volumes of highly distinctive verse.”

In privileging Milton’s poetic commitment over the pedestrian pedagogies of a trivial textbook, Parker’s treatment of the Art of Logic is perfectly consistent with Milton’s own early opinion on the matter. When, in June